Serial Murder in America: Case Studies of Seven Offenders

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This article summarizes and compares information on seven interviewed serial killers in an ongoing project designed to study similarities and differences among these individuals. The aim of this article is to increase our collective knowledge of the dynamics of serial murder by examining the perpetrators' backgrounds, as well as the unique ways in which they view themselves and the world around them. Although qualitative interview research alone is not sufficient to fully understand such behavior, it is useful in many ways. Some of the information discussed based on the seven offenders interviewed is compared with broader epidemiological studies, and the strengths and limitations of each type of research are discussed. Published in 2004 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

The initial FBI study on sexual homicide and crime scene analysis, which included interviews with 25 serial murderers by the Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, was published nearly 20 years ago (The Men Who Murdered, 1985). Since then, the phenomenon of serial murder has been mythologized in popular culture, sensationalized by the media, and increasingly scrutinized by academia. The results have been confounding, with fiction blurring with fact, and assumptions and guesses often treated as certainty. Many of these misperceptions are associated with the technique of profiling, which involves assessment of crime scenes to construct a set of behavioral traits likely to be found in a particular offender. Even today there is a common belief that profiling is an almost mystical experience, and that it is always accurate and clear cut. However, violent criminal behavior is extremely variable, making precise predictions problematic. Some researchers have addressed the issue of predictability, among them Farrington (1982); Goldberg (2000); Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990); and Malmquist (1996).

Notwithstanding some acceptance of the notion of past violent behaviors being predictive of future such behaviors (Samenow, 1998; Widom & Toch, 2000), there exists an abundance of psychological theories about criminal behavior that are varied and sometimes conflicting (Hall, 1999; Widom & Toch, 2000). As Fox and Levin (2001) have warned, "correlation does not imply causation," and

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"correlation also does not guarantee predictability" (pp. 26–28). Based partly on these predictability issues, some academics have raised concerns over the validity of profiling, and have called for more empirical research (Homant & Kennedy, 1998; Kocsis, Hayes, & Irwin, 2002). Some have gone further, criticizing perceived shortcomings of early profiling research findings and resulting procedures (Egger, 1998), including some done by the FBI (Godwin, 2000). Others (Holmes & Holmes, 2002) have noted the failure of FBI researchers to disclose their methodology regarding interviews of some of the prominent killers in their studies.

That serial murder and profiling have become so fixed within our national psyche suggests that these subjects serve, even when true, as more than unique criminal behaviors and an associated investigative tool; they have entered the realm of entertainment (Tithecott, 1997). Narratives and descriptions of these crimes and those who commit them seem to horrify, to challenge, and to satisfy our morbid curiosity. Commentary about these individuals often includes large doses of melodrama. Tithecott (1997) quotes the lawyer for serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who referred to Dahmer as "a steamrolling killing machine," and "a runaway train on a track of madness" (p. 96).

The original findings of the FBI's BSU were based on a small sample size—36 subjects, of whom 25 were classified as serial killers. To this day, early insights into the behavior of those sexual murderers provide a basis for behavioral profiles of unknown offenders. They remain a key element of the expanded criminal investigative analysis services offered by the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC), the unit responsible for operational analytical assistance within the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG). These services go beyond profiling, and include consultations on investigative procedures, interview techniques, forensic considerations, media relations, behavioral analysis regarding victims and offenders, trial strategies, expert testimony, and data collection and analysis. Regarding profiles, the NCAVC has recognized a need for more current research, as well as caution in the use of these products. In concert with the NCAVC, Witte (unpublished doctoral dissertation) studied serial murder in general, while Dudek focused on serial versus single homicides among prostitute victims.

Profiling has encountered other challenges as researchers have sought to provide support for its procedures and document its successes and failures (Pinizzotto & Finkel, 1990). A recent study has suggested that investigative experience does not necessarily confer an enhanced ability to profile serial murderers (Kocsis et al., 2002). Other inquiries into the efficacy of profiling have been made by Alison, Bennell, Mokros, and Ormerod (2002), Homant and Kennedy (1998) and Wilson, Lincoln, and Kocsis (1997).

The NCAVC's Child Abduction and Serial Murder Investigative Resources Center (CASMIRC) was formed in early 2000 based on a Congressional mandate (Protection of Children From Sexual Predators Act, 1998). Ongoing CASMIRC research in the NCAVC includes epidemiological studies on child abduction (Boudreaux, Lord, & Dutra, 1999) and child homicide (Boudreaux, Lord, & Jarvis, 2001), interviews of convicted child abductors who killed their victims (Beyer & Beasley, 2003), and detailed review of investigative files. In order to update the data on serial murder, a related project is underway that includes interviews of offenders, along with reviews of case files. In this study, interviews have been conducted with 20 serial killers in five states.

This interview-based, qualitative research aims to deepen our knowledge of the dynamics of serial murder by examining first-hand the unique ways in which these offenders view themselves and the world. Admittedly, offender interviews alone do not result in a complete understanding of serial homicide. Still, individual case studies provide a valuable way to learn about unusual populations such as this. Voluntary interviews do have some drawbacks. Among these are subject acquisition criteria that rely on self-selection, reliability of information based on self-report, and the amount of time required collecting and verifying data. It is believed by this author, however, that a comprehensive expertise and understanding of the serial homicide phenomenon can best be obtained through extensive, systematic, and direct contact with persons who exhibit these behaviors, coupled with empirical data derived from larger populations.

Skrapec (2001), for one, has stressed the need to explore serial murder though in-depth, one-on-one interviews with offenders. This type of qualitative research, though time consuming, is valuable in that it provides personal, detailed knowledge and a descriptive element not found in quantitative research. Still, it has its place alongside epidemiological studies that have larger populations but may not provide as much in-depth information. One of the strengths of these epidemiological studies is that they have examined factors that have some predictive value (Witte, 2000). Together, interview research and epidemiological research, each with its unique strengths and limitations, provide a more complete picture of offenders and the dynamics of their behaviors.

The purpose of this article is to review and compare information obtained on seven offenders interviewed and studied to date. These killers individually revealed some rather distinct variations, and a few similarities in their offenses. The facts of their crimes and their commentaries are not meant to broadly categorize, but rather serve a more descriptive purpose, and to demonstrate their unique backgrounds and behaviors. Because this is a small sample, the generalizability of what they reported, even when verified through comparison to case records, is problematic. It is intended, however, that these findings will ultimately provide support and further consideration for some of the assistance that the NCAVC offers in ongoing, unsolved cases.

Most of this author's NCAVC colleagues who are involved in assessing offenders in pending cases will readily acknowledge that while qualitative interview research focused on case studies is helpful, each new case that is analyzed must be examined individually and carefully, and that making judgments based on comparison with small populations is risky. Furthermore, reaching conclusions and affixing labels to individuals and situations without thorough and detailed examination of the facts can easily result in unhelpful, misleading, or erroneous outcomes. This note of caution should apply in any study of a limited number of subjects. In this article, the cases chosen are intended to demonstrate the wide variances in behaviors that often present difficult challenges for those who attempt to analyze such behaviors in unsolved crimes.

SELECTION PROCESS

The seven offenders selected for this review were identified from the 20 interviewed to date. These seven were chosen for two significant reasons. First, detailed case

materials were available for review, and second, the information gleaned from the interviews is believed to be representative of the variations observed in the larger pool of offenders interviewed to date. These seven all demonstrated some degree of sexual behavior in relation to some or all of their murders. This criterion was used because of prior studies that suggest sexual sadism is a common feature among serial killers (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988; Warren, Hazelwood, & Dietz, 1996). These offenders have several additional features in common: (i) all are male, (ii) all had at least three homicide victims, (iii) all of their offenses occurred within the past 30 years, (iv) all of the offenders were voluntary research participants and were guaranteed confidentiality, and (v) all were interviewed by this author along with other CASMIRC Supervisory Special Agents (SSAs) over periods ranging from one to five days, utilizing a standardized protocol, developed by NCAVC personnel, of just over 400 questions. This protocol addresses various characteristics of victim selection, as well as offender relationships, educational and employment history, military service, family structure, and criminal history, among other factors. Certain of these features were selected for discussion based on issues that frequently merit consideration in unsolved cases.

As already mentioned, self-selection and self-report are among the chief concerns of this type of research. Given that serial murderers are often deemed to be psychopaths who have repeatedly lied in the past, falsification of answers is an issue that must be considered. A thorough and systematic review of case records helps to address this problem. The degree to which each of the seven interviewees cooperated varied considerably, and in instances wherein omissions or misrepresentations were noted, case materials provided a means of obtaining more accurate answers to certain questions.

Some issues, though, can only be addressed through the interview process. These include responses to questions concerning an offender's state of mind during the commission of his murders, his motivation(s), and his recall concerning events of which only he had knowledge. To the extent possible, motive was considered, based on interview responses and case information. Other factors examined included post-offense behaviors such as movement of the victims' remains.

Psychopathy was another factor considered. Based on the pioneering work of Cleckley (1982) and Hare (1993), psychopathy has been found to be a significant factor in the behavior of violent criminals. The Hare Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R), a 20-factor instrument, was utilized, due to its widespread acceptance within the academic community, its relative ease of use, and its high levels of reliability and validity in assessing psychopaths (Hare & Hart, 1997). Assessments were based on observations of offenders during interviews, later review of their responses and case records, and consultations with an NCAVC staff psychologist who is trained in the use of this tool.

Interviews were audio- and/or videotaped whenever feasible, per the approval of each individual institution and the consent of each interviewee. In most instances, this was not possible. In all cases, however, the interviewers took extensive notes. Following each interview, the interviewers reviewed their notes, along with any video and/or audio recordings, and all available collateral records (at a minimum, these included inmate files and investigative reports). Then, through collaboration with an NCAVC clinical psychologist who is certified in the use of the PCL-R instrument, an individual checklist was completed for each interviewed offender.

Individuals included in this study were identified through several means. Three of the offenders had been previously examined by the NCAVC. Two were subjects of behavioral assessments during the operational phases of criminal investigations into their murders and prior to their apprehension and conviction. A third was included in a study by Safarik, Jarvis, and Nussbaum (2000) on sexual homicide of the elderly. The remaining four came to the attention of this researcher through previously compiled lists in the NCAVC of individuals fitting the research criteria, through data obtained from the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP), and through contacts developed in various state correctional systems assisting in the study. The murders the offenders are known to have committed occurred in various periods between 1969 and 1998.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

Narrative accounts of each offender and his murders are important to consider in comparing the offenders with each other, and in comparing and discussing the murders of individual offenders. Highlights of these are provided below.

Offender Number One

This offender was a White male who at the age of 30 began killing female prostitutes, most of them White. He was adopted and grew up in a large urban area. He had a limited history of dating females his age and had no lasting romantic relationships, though he did have a few social friends of both sexes. He had no record of treatment for psychological disorders. As an adult, he took some college courses, but dropped out and later resumed living in his family home. He had a few sporadic and low-paying jobs and failed in several business ventures.

He had grown accustomed to using prostitutes to satisfy his sexual urges, having done so routinely for several years. He met them primarily on inner-city streets, paid for their services, and carried out his sexual interactions with them while inside his personal vehicle. Occasionally, though, he would bring a prostitute back to his mother's home, where he also lived, for a longer liaison. (These limited situations occurred when his mother was away.) During these years of frequenting prostitutes, he was arrested once for solicitation, but was never charged with any violent crimes.

The women he killed ranged in age from 21 to 41. He strangled all 17. He varied his methods of disposing of the victims' bodies. He buried them; placed them under discarded items (e.g. a mattress); placed them in bodies of water; and hid them in wooded areas. He dismembered three, then scattered their remains in locations in and around the metropolitan area where he lived. No patterns or discernable changes over time were noted in these disposals. He stated he simply took advantage of opportunities that arose which allowed him to avoid or delay detection. He sometimes kept personal belongings of his victims; many of these, including jewelry and photo identification, were found when his home was searched following his arrest.

He felt his actions were influenced by several factors, among them family instability, the death of his father two years prior to the first murder, social isolation, and a deep resentment toward young women. He claimed to have had consensual

sexual intercourse with all the victims before killing them. He could not articulate any specific reasons for the murders, but did profess an intense interest in watching some of them die. He had a look of detachment during the interview, and the researchers noted an apparent lack of remorse as he described his actions. At one point the offender admitted, unabashedly, that his killings had become "a very problematic hobby for me."

His murders spanned a period of just over four years. The time between murders varied considerably, from 1 to 18 months. During his interview he attempted in vain to explain why he chose certain victims over other potential ones. He sometimes left home knowing that he would kill later that day. At other times, however, he did not know he would kill until just before the opportunity presented itself. (This assessment of opportunity included his evaluation as to the remoteness of the location, the absence of other people in the area, his emotional state, and his general "desire" to kill.) This self-reported variation in his thought processes highlights a tremendous challenge in projecting or tracking a serial killer's activities and progress over a course of time. For this offender, for example, his relative degree of stealth, his selection of vulnerable victims with a transient lifestyle, and the variations in his methods of body disposal allowed him to remain undetected for many months.

When arrested, he readily confessed to the murders, expressing little feeling. During his interview, he displayed some traits of psychopathy. These included irresponsibility, impulsivity, poor behavioral controls, promiscuous sexual behavior, a parasitic lifestyle, callousness, and lack of empathy. However, with a score of 24 (out of a possible 40) on the PCL-R, he did not reach the higher level historically noted for psychopaths.

He described having an extremely high degree of mobility, in that he drove extensively throughout the area where he lived. It was the impression of the interviewers that driving in this seemingly aimless and restless fashion was perhaps in fact more purposeful, allowing him to evaluate and mentally map the area, so that he could later strategize as to how he would obtain and/or dispose of future victims.

Offender Number Two

This inmate was also a White male, adopted and raised as the only child in a middle class home. His early childhood was unremarkable, but in adolescence he began abusing drugs. He reached adulthood, though, without a criminal record. He committed two assaults against women just prior to his murders, and following one of these he began receiving psychological treatment. He attended several semesters of college, but his heavy use of cocaine and marijuana caused him to drop out before obtaining a degree. This substance abuse seems to also have factored heavily in the murders he committed.

He had been married for two years, but was unhappy in the relationship. He maintained a stable job, though he stole from his employer to obtain money for drugs. At the age of 25, he killed three White females during a two-week period. He later claimed he had felt intense anger and rage toward women for some time prior to the murders. There are some indications that this may have stemmed from difficulties in his marriage.

The first victim was a 20-year-old woman who lived in his neighborhood, but who was unknown to him. He gained entry to her residence through a ruse, then raped her. He shot her twice in the head with a handgun, and then consumed a beer he had found in her refrigerator. He left her nude, face up on her bed. Before departing, he placed a bottle of hot sauce in her vagina, and positioned a stuffed animal next to her body.

His second victim was a relative, 43 years of age, who lived a few miles from him. She had come to his residence one evening while his wife was away, to return a borrowed item. He raped her, and shot her once in the head with the same handgun he had used before. He tried, unsuccessfully, to clean up a large amount of the victim's blood. He also left a note at the scene, which stated, "I kill your sister, now I kill your husband." He placed her corpse in her vehicle and drove less than a mile away, disposing the body by the side of a well-traveled road. The victim was found nude, face up, with one of her shoes placed between her legs. Regarding both of these encounters, the offender detailed his sexual interactions with the victims before he killed them. He stated he forced each to masturbate and then perform fellatio on him. He also masturbated, and raped each victim anally and vaginally. While he denied that these two events were specifically scripted, the similarities, at least in terms of his sexual behaviors, are striking.

Immediately following the second homicide, the offender drove in the victim's car, through several states. The next evening he shot and killed another stranger, a 25-year-old woman who was working as a motel desk clerk at the time of the encounter. Though there was evidence of sexual assault, he denied this. He did, however, admit that this was what he had intended. He stated that he later returned to the murder scene and, prior to the arrival of police, stole money from the motel's cash drawer. He was arrested without further violence a few hours later, in a nearby town.

This offender's personal history reflected pathological lying, manipulative behavior, shallow affect, and lack of guilt. However, in his general lifestyle he did not demonstrate as many psychopathic traits (he scored 15 on the PCL-R) as most of the other serial killers studied.

Offender Number Three

This subject was a 32-year-old White male, never married, who was highly transient. His early life was extremely unstable, as a result of his mother's multiple marriages, two of which were during the offender's childhood while he lived with her. His mother was an alcoholic. He had little interaction with her; he described her as cold and distant. He fought with his stepfather, who beat him often. He was often truant from school, and managed to complete the seventh grade before running away from home at age 13. Following that, he had contact with his mother just three times.

By the age of seven he was torturing animals by "putting firecrackers up cats' butts," which he dismissed as "nothing major." At age nine, he was taken from his mother's home and placed for several months with a foster family. At 10, he was arrested for burglary and housed in a juvenile detention center for nine months. He admitted to at least ten burglaries as a juvenile. After leaving home he lived off and on for several years with an older homosexual male and engaged in sexual

relations with him. He used a variety of illicit drugs and frequently abused alcohol. His adult criminal history included arrests for aggravated battery, robbery, sodomy, grand larceny, drug possession, disorderly conduct, and alcohol-related offenses.

During the eight-month period of his homicides, he traveled across six states, killing at least six men in three of those states. All his victims were White, and five were known to be homosexuals. He met some at nightclubs, leaving the establishments after they propositioned him and he agreed to have sexual relations with them. He killed all these men during his apparently random travels, using public transportation or stolen vehicles (some belonging to his murder victims).

With a score of 38 on the PCL-R, he scored in the "very high" range on the psychopathy scale. He expressed no remorse, commenting that after the second or third murder, he was beginning to "enjoy" what he was doing. He exhibited grandiose behavior, seeming to relish the attention he garnered from his murders. He conceded, though, that he continued to kill not to further this infamy, but because he simply had no feeling for those he killed. He said he did not care if he was caught, since he assumed his arrest was inevitable. In discussing one aspect of his complex motivations for murdering, he acknowledged a need to exact revenge on "all the people who ruined my life." He was quite versatile as a criminal, and had had probationary terms revoked while under supervision. He was sexually promiscuous, extremely manipulative, and exercised few controls over his behavior.

Indications of this individual's lack of empathy toward his victims, his impulsivity, grandiosity, and lack of remorse—all of which are among the indicators of psychopathy—are evident in comments he made concerning three victims:

"And I just seen that lamp sitting there and it was just on the spur of the moment. I reached over and grabbed that lamp and smacked him right across the head with it. And he fell across the little table by the couch there and I went around over there and strangled him and stuck that rag down his throat . . . "

"Yeah, I was going to, well, I wanted to fuck him up. [He] just pissed me off. I guess, well, I don't want to say I was gonna plan to kill him, but I guess maybe in the back of my head I was thinking it . . . "

" . . . when I was downstairs and I looked at the knives was when I decided I'm gonna kill the bastard, you know . . . . So I grabbed the other knife and I stabbed him right through the heart with it. I guess it was probably right through the heart because I put it in his chest and he didn't even move . . . So, I just pushed him off the bed, and, uh, got me a couple pillows and just propped them up and sat there and drank my drink and watched a baseball game [on television]. It was probably like sixth or seventh inning."

Of note is that this offender varied his killing methods, using blunt objects to strike some victims, while stabbing, strangling, and shooting others. He tended to use weapons that were close at hand, and he exercised little planning in these attacks.

He professed to be mostly interested in what he could obtain of monetary value from his victims, but his stated motives also included anger, retaliation, and revenge. He insisted that his sexual interactions with some of the victims were not factors in his reasons to kill. He even emphasized that he did not consider himself a homosexual, because he was engaging in this activity simply to make money from these men, who paid him for the purpose of them performing oral sex acts on him. He felt that his repulsion to performing sex acts on other men precluded him from

being a homosexual. His statements as to his sexual orientation and his financial desires notwithstanding, sexual motives seem likely to have been present at the time of some of the murders, and appear almost certainly to have figured prominently in his victim selection. In addition, while he seemed to have some preference for homosexual victims, this offender could not explain why he killed some men he met and not others. It seems clear that his selection of male sexual partners was consistent with his desire to earn and/or steal money from them, because they came from a vulnerable population, which made these activities possible. However, his stated motives at the times of the murders included profit, generalized anger, and rage toward some of the victims who refused to pay him or who were too rough with him during their sexual activities.

One specific aspect in some of his crimes was that he forcibly shoved objects and debris into some victims' mouths after death. These included dirt, leaves, cloth, and, in one instance, a dildo. Though he did not express a reason for these actions, perhaps they served to degrade the victims, and may have been intended to cover or conceal evidence of the sexual activity that had occurred. Such behavior can sometimes be considered to be so rare as to provide a link between certain cases, especially in those wherein sufficiently detailed data are available for review and comparison. (In NCAVC consultations, these factors can take two forms: focusing on a particular feature that provides linkage possibilities based on its very uniqueness, versus multiple but less distinctive factors that, taken together, can still make a compelling case for linkage of certain cases.) While noted as a possible linkage feature in this offender's murders, it appears unlikely that this element alone would have been essential to the solution of these cases, since he had already been identified and was being aggressively sought as a fugitive early in this series of homicides. Further, his willingness to travel great distances, coupled with his preference for male homosexual victims, had already been noted by authorities.

Offender Number Four

This subject was a White male with a highly unstable upbringing wherein his father frequently verbally and physically abused him. In elementary school, he demonstrated belligerent behavior and low self-esteem after learning that he would have to repeat the third grade. He had no history of juvenile arrests. At 16 he dropped out of high school to join the military. Though he earned his G.E.D., his service lasted only 19 months, due to an "underlying immature personality." As a result, he was recommended for a general discharge, but upon reconsideration he ultimately received an honorable discharge. His three-year marriage was stormy and included at least one incident wherein he threatened his wife by putting a shotgun to her head. The marriage ended in a bitter divorce, leaving him with an intense hatred of women.

Over the next nine years he committed armed robberies in multiple states. He served several prison sentences and probations. He was sporadically employed and frequently used illicit drugs. He was arrested once for possession of marijuana.

Starting at the age of 35, he killed eight White victims (three males and five females). Their ages ranged from eight to 55. Five of the eight were college students. These murders occurred in four separate incidents over a nine-month period. This offender also scored in the "very high" range on the PCL-R psychopathy measure,

with a score of 36. He committed a variety of crimes including assault, rape, burglary, grand larceny, armed robbery, auto theft, and trespassing. He led an irresponsible and nomadic lifestyle. Though some planning went into his murders, he was exceedingly impulsive. He had a shallow affect, and was extremely conning and manipulative. He lacked the ability or desire to set or maintain long-term goals. His attempts at displaying charm were superficial, and he was in continuous need of stimulation. He told interviewers that he prowled around frequently at night, sometimes for hours at a time, and said that peering into windows was exciting to him. This voyeuristic behavior may have led to the methods he employed when he began to commit these murders, which involved breaking into victims' homes at night.

Following the murders of his last two victims, he fled the area and survived financially by committing property crimes, including automobile thefts and burglaries. He later confessed to some of the murders, but demonstrated little convincing remorse. His limited efforts to express shame and regret were superficial and largely directed outward, indicating that his repentance was more for having been caught than for any feeling of empathy for his victims.

He raped four of his female victims and mutilated their bodies through cutting, stabbing, biting, and evisceration. He attempted to remove evidence through unique means, by using household cleaning agents found in their homes. He also posed some of the female victims in ways that indicated his desire to taunt, shock, and offend those who found them. For example, he left them nude on beds or on the floors of their residences, with their legs spread apart. He decapitated one and left her head positioned prominently in her home. Because these unusual behavioral features were repeated in some of the murders, a possibility existed for the killings to be linked to one offender. However, it is noted that in these murders, there were more outwardly discernable common features present, including location, timing, and victim characteristics, such as age and gender.

His preferred weapon was a large knife, which he felt enabled him to become a more efficient "killing machine." He reported that his choice of this weapon was derived from his desire to exact revenge for the pain and suffering he had endured throughout his life, at the hands of his ex-wife, his parents, and law enforcement and correctional personnel. As an example, he stated that he had suffered immensely during one period of incarceration for robbery, when the prison cell he occupied flooded frequently with raw sewage, as he put it, "... day [in], day out for months. I went nuts. I went stir crazy ... I was very angry." It is noteworthy that he used this perceived maltreatment as one of the justifications for his later crimes, again failing to accept responsibility for his behavior.

He believed he was successful as a killer because he could assimilate easily into society, while embracing his own unique, rage-filled view of the world, without others suspecting he could commit such crimes. He stated, "People like me are ... right on the fringe of society. They blend right in just like you, like me. They're like everybody."

Finally, he related that he was influenced by a "force," in the form of an imaginary person, who identified specific residences for him to enter, and then instructed him to kill at those locations. It is significant that he used this invented individual as a partial explanation for his crimes, though it falls short of acceptance of responsibility for them and allowed him to dissociate himself from his actions. It is also another factor indicative of his high degree of psychopathy.

Offender Number Five

This inmate was a Black male whose formative years were marked by family instability, including his mother's divorce and remarriage. He found some measure of adult supervision in his grandmother, but when she died everything went, according to the offender, "downhill after that." He became involved with youth street gangs that engaged in numerous property crimes and assaultive behaviors. He incurred numerous juvenile arrests for criminal acts including burglary, assault, shoplifting, auto theft, trespassing, sex crimes, vandalism, disorderly conduct, and robbery.

His first murder was as a teenager, when he and three accomplices suffocated an elderly White woman in her home. He was charged as an adult and convicted of this murder, serving 25 years in prison before being paroled. Almost immediately upon release he began killing again, beginning with another elderly White woman who was walking home at night. He bound her wrists and ankles with duct tape, sexually assaulted her with a stick, and left her for dead. Upon returning several minutes later and realizing that she was still alive, he "finished her" by stabbing her with a ball point pen six times, then beating and choking her. She died from manual and ligature strangulation, and suffered fractures to her skull and several vertebrae. Several days later, he beat and killed a White male. Also during this period, he repeatedly raped and beat another White woman. She survived and later testified against him at his trial.

During his interview, this offender indicated that he liked to jog at night, sometimes looking into the homes of various people. While this statement could be his rationalization for his voyeuristic behavior, he insisted that this window peeping was not to fulfill any sexual purpose, but to satisfy his general curiosity about how others lived. This behavior could also be viewed as preparation—a sort of surveillance, or reconnaissance—for some of his crimes, especially the rape he committed.

He admitted to powerful feelings of isolation. When he felt frustrated as a child he would often go off by himself to release his pent-up feelings, brooding silently and avoiding interaction with others. He reported that as he grew older, he realized that he could not experience sexual gratification unless his sexual activities were accompanied by violence and pain inflicted on others. He could even be sexually aroused through violence alone, with or without any overt sexual aspects to an event. He stated that following the second and third murders, he experienced spontaneous orgasms, hours later, while recalling the details of the violence he had committed. His sexual fantasies prior to these two homicides had a violent component, in which torture and foreign object insertion into genital orifices were paramount. Based in part on his criminal history and violent behavior, he scored 33 on the PCL-R, surpassing the diagnostic criteria for psychopathy. He led a parasitic lifestyle, lacked remorse for his violent acts, and was enormously manipulative. He failed to accept responsibility for his actions, and exhibited few behavioral controls.

Offender Number Six

This offender was also a Black male with a highly unstable home life while growing up. He claimed to have been verbally abused by his father. While there are no

indications of any psychological problems, he attended special education classes due to learning difficulties. He had a speech impediment and an IQ of 68 (mentally deficient). These developmental problems may have contributed to his unacceptable behaviors; they certainly did not deter him from becoming immersed in criminal activity. In early adolescence, he was extremely isolated and stole frequently from others. He was also involved in fire-setting and animal cruelty. As he entered adulthood, he continued stealing, abused illegal drugs, and became assaultive against adults. He served time in a state penitentiary for a burglary. It was there that he claimed to have learned ways to improve his chances of success as a criminal.

Starting at the age of 33, he killed three women (two White and one Hispanic) and two men (one Black and one White) over an 18-month period. Though reported in prison records to be of low intellect, he possessed, in some limited respects, a remarkable level of criminal sophistication, which contributed to his being rated a psychopath. For example, although he used the same handgun for all five offenses, he altered it after each murder so that the cases could not be forensically linked through ballistic comparisons.

He demonstrated a considerable range of motives, from profit (a failed burglary, during which the victim woke up and was shot); to revenge (a burglary he planned with a male cohort, whom he killed during the burglary in retaliation for a joke the partner had previously played on him); to a situation wherein a male relative of two teenage girls the offender had just raped confronted him unexpectedly, at which time the offender shot the man to death. Of note is that, in a separate incident during this period, he also exacted revenge against a woman who had, he reported, played a joke on him. He achieved his vengeance by raping her ten-year-old daughter, and professed no remorse for this crime.

This offender's choice of victims seems to have been indiscriminate; they ranged in age from 38 to 87. Three were women and two were men, and they were of various races, including White, Black, and Hispanic. It appears that rather than meticulously planning each murder, he killed simply because of circumstances that arose at the times he was engaged in committing burglaries, robberies, and rapes. The murders, then, went beyond his initial profit and/or sexual motives. These conditions included burglaries in which homeowners awoke and confronted him, and one situation wherein he attacked a woman outside her home with a quickly formed plan to rob her, but killed her instead. While these actions could be symptomatic of his lack of self-control, more likely they were simply indicative of impulsive self-preservation. Only in one situation did he set out specifically to kill the victim, and in that case his motive was revenge.

His low IQ seems to have precluded him from developing a sense of insight and self-examination. This can be seen in the reason he gave for stealing a woman's scarf during a burglary and homicide: ''I thought it was pretty and would look good with a gold suit I've got.'' On the other hand, he had the foresight to hide his murder weapon in the attic of his father's home after the homicides (though he later admitted where it was). This offender scored in the ''high'' range (33) on the PCL-R psychopathy scale, due to numerous early behavioral problems, juvenile delinquency, criminal versatility, impulsivity, proneness to boredom, chronic lying, and other factors.

Offender Number Seven

This subject was a White male with an early home life marked by many personal problems. He claimed to have been verbally and physically abused by his father. He was of average intelligence, and completed the eleventh grade. He served two and a half years in the military, receiving a dishonorable discharge due to his conduct and willful absences, caused, he said, by his excessive use of alcohol and drugs (including marijuana, barbiturates, LSD, and PCP, which he began using at the age of 13). He became addicted to heroin and amphetamines at the age of 21. He was treated twice for drug dependence. He exhibited other problem behaviors during late adolescence and early adulthood, including extreme isolation, self-mutilation, and chronic lying. He claimed to have suffered from depression and twice received psychological treatment. He attempted suicide twice, once at age 19 and again at age 26. He accumulated five adult arrests for thefts and drug charges, and was confined once for lying to a police officer.

Over 17 months he killed five women, all White and ranging in age from 20 to 25. Sexual assault was a primary motive, and he killed them in several ways, including strangulation, stabbing, suffocation, and beating. He claimed that another prominent factor was his rage toward women, stemming from a broken marriage and fueled by heavy use of drugs and alcohol. He said he felt that his victims all ''looked like my wife.''

He knew two of the victims, and used this familiarity to gain access to them. He befriended one victim in a bar, later becoming enraged when she rebuffed his sexual advances. He found another victim at the home of one of her friends, where she was spending the night. He approached the front door, pushed his way inside and immediately assaulted her. He came upon another victim in her car in a parking lot.

He moved only one of the bodies after the murder. Of the remaining four victims, he left two in their homes and two (whom he had abducted) in remote fields. He sexually assaulted all the women vaginally and anally prior to killing them.

He claimed that he was using large quantities of methamphetamine and heroin at the time of some of the murders; he felt these lowered his inhibitions, making the crimes easier for him to commit. He reported that following the first four murders, he was able to convince himself that he was not the perpetrator and therefore felt no remorse. After the fifth and last known homicide, he turned himself in and confessed, but only to that murder. When the other murders were linked to him years later through DNA matches, he ultimately made a full admission.

With a score of 26, within the ''high'' range on the PCL-R psychopathy scale, this offender had fewer psychopathic traits than others in this group. He displayed pathological lying, manipulative behavior, lack of remorse, shallow affect, lack of empathy, and impulsivity.

DISCUSSION

These seven case descriptions are informative and provide some insight into the thought processes of the murderers. As previously mentioned, wide variations exist in their backgrounds and their crimes. Comparisons of the offenders and their murders are addressed in the tables and comments below. Table 1 shows variations

Table 1. Offender data

Offender No.	Offender age at 1st murder	Psychopath	Primary motive	Drugs/alcohol	Criminal history
1	30	No	Sex	No	Minimal
2	25	No	Sex/emotion	Yes	Minimal
3	32	Yes	Profit/emotion	Yes	Extensive
4	35	Yes	Sex	No	Extensive
5	16	Yes	Profit	No	Extensive
6	26	Yes	Profit/emotion	Yes	Extensive
7	25	No	Sex	Yes	Minimal

among the offenders on several factors, including age at time of first murder, psychopathy, motives, drug and alcohol use at the time of the murders, and criminal history.

Not surprisingly, motives dominated by sexual desires were present (in four cases), but profit motives and emotions (e.g. anger, revenge) were also found, at times in combination. Elements of sexual motivation were found in at least some of the murders of all seven offenders. However, in some cases this did not appear to be the sole, or even primary, motivation. For example, offender No. 3 was adamant that his exclusive motivation was profit and/or anger, notwithstanding his use of sex with homosexual men as part of the lure to get them into positions of greater vulnerability. Offender No. 5 was likewise insistent that his chief motive was profit, but there were indications of intense sexual arousal (per his report) immediately following some of his murders. This suggests the possibility of sexual motivation even when there are no obvious signs of such at the crime scene itself.

Offender No. 6 was judged to have profit and/or revenge motives, but he was also motivated by sex to some degree. In his last murder, while the murder victim was not sexually assaulted (he was the uncle of two teenage girls the offender had just raped), there was still a sexual motive inherent in the offender's presence at the location where the homicide occurred.

These varied circumstances demonstrate the difficulty of identifying a precise motive, considering the combinations of influences on a given offender at a particular time. Such is the nature of human behavior in general, and criminal behavior in particular. Unfortunately, even with extensive interviews, determining a single motive is highly problematic.

Table 2 shows variations in the numbers of victims overall and victim selection (by race and sex), as well as causes of death and postmortem movement of bodies.

Table 2. Victim data

Offender No.	Victims	Races of victims	Causes of death	Bodies moved
1	17 females	Varied	All strangled	All
2	3 females	White	All gunshot	1
3	6 males	White	Varied	0
4	3 males/5 females	White	All stabbed	0
5	1 male/2 females	White	Varied	1
6	3 males/2 females	Varied	All gunshot	0
7	5 females	White	Varied	1

In some respects, the seven offenders and their 47 victims were diverse. Five offenders were White and two were Black. Their murders occurred in at least seven states; only three offended solely within one state. The victims were males (28%) and females (72%) whose ethnicity usually matched that of the offenders (this was true in 33 of the 47 murders (70%). Of the three offenders who killed outside their race, one was White and two were Black. The number of victims per offender ranged from 3 to 17.

The victims' backgrounds were diverse as well: Some were prostitutes (36%), some were elderly (15%), and some were students (19%). They were predominantly White, but one was Black, two were Hispanic, and one was Asian. The methods used by the killers to perpetrate their murders were varied and included shooting, stabbing, strangulation, and blunt force with instruments and/or hands.

Table 3 shows variations in post-offense behaviors, transportation used, items taken/kept, and media awareness. As can be seen, even murders committed by the same individual may be dissimilar. For example, method of murder, victim characteristics, and disposal of bodies vary both within and among the killers' victim groups.

Some problems are apparent when moving beyond these individual descriptions and into comparisons. Within this small group, it is possible that the observed diversity and variability indicate a lack of adequate representation of these traits in larger populations. Again, larger samples (Dudek, unpublished doctoral dissertation; Witte, unpublished doctoral dissertation) have produced support for more precise comparisons. This qualitative study instead focuses on the descriptive nature of information derived directly from individual perpetrators.

Of specific interest, for instance, is the movement of bodies following the murders. Dudek (unpublished doctoral dissertation), in his study of 123 murdered prostitutes, suggested that such activity is more common among serial killers than single homicide offenders. This finding can be seen to a degree in the information derived from these seven cases, wherein movement of bodies was sometimes noted, though again with some variation, even among the homicides of individual offenders.

Table 3. Offender behavior

Offender No.	Post-offense behaviors	Transportation	Items taken	Items kept	Media awareness/ impact
1	3 bodies dismembered	Car/truck	Jewelry, ID	Jewelry, ID (for souvenirs)	Yes/minimal
2	Item placed in victim; note left at one scene; left area	Car	Beer can, vehicle (escape)	Vehicle	Yes/none
3	Items placed in mouths, throats of victims	Car/foot	Money, jewelry	Money	Yes/great
4	Cleaned vaginal areas of victims	Foot/bicycle	Body parts (discarded)	None	Yes/minimal
5	Item placed in victim's vagina	Foot/car/train	Victims' vehicles (escape)	Vehicle, ATM card	Yes/none
6	Remained in area	Foot/bicycle	Jewelry, money, clothing	Clothing	Yes/minimal
7	Remained in area	Foot/car	None	None	Yes/minimal

Witte (unpublished doctoral dissertation) has reviewed studies into the locations of the murders of serial offenders; some of these have disputed the concept of the wide-ranging, nomadic type of serial killer. Nevertheless, in these seven offenders, restlessness and mobility were found to be common, even if only within a limited geographic area.

Four of seven offenders reported heightened use of alcohol or drugs associated with some or all of their murders. This activity may contribute to the commission of murder by lowering inhibitions, allowing offenders to dissociate, or repressing emotions. Four of seven (not the same combination) were deemed psychopaths, based on PCL-R data and applying a cut-off score of 30. Interestingly, offenders with the more extensive criminal histories also were the ones judged to be psychopaths. This should perhaps not be surprising, since criminal versatility is one of the factors assessed by the PCL-R, and a lack of conscience would certainly facilitate this type of criminal behavior. Also noted was that four of seven subjects used only one method to kill all their victims; the other three used a variety of methods. This versatility suggests a lack of planning on the part of some offenders, who seemed able to kill without employing the same means each time.

Four offenders had extensive criminal records, with arrests for multiple crimes prior to their murders. The other three, though, had minimal arrest histories. With this group, it is uncertain how directly these histories are related to their serial crimes; they could be indicative of more generalized conditions, such as their antisocial nature, low self-esteem, self-destructive behaviors, and lack of self-concern. Their ages at the time of their first murders ranged from 16 to 35. However, if one offender's first murder is excluded, the range of ages is 25 to 35, which is more comparable to data in prior studies.

Emphasis was also placed on other facets of serial killers' backgrounds. These include the notion that they have been victims of child abuse. Among the seven offenders discussed herein, family problems were common, but the frequency of physical and/or sexual abuse was found to be less than one might assume. Only two reported physical abuse by a parent during childhood. Further confounding this issue is that most victims of child abuse do not become serial killers. Animal torture was not pervasive among these offenders; only three reported having engaged in this activity. Regarding the question as to whether serial killers escalate in their violence as they continue killing, this did not appear to be common among these seven offenders. Likewise, these offenders displayed little evolution or improvement in their methods of killing. Even when noted to some degree, an offender's changes in strategies are not always consistent or predictable, and present great difficulty to those attempting to quantify them.

The races of those killed were consistent for four offenders, who had all White victims. However, two of the offenders (one White, one Black) had victims of varied races. The White offender had victims of White, Hispanic, and Asian descent. The Black offender's victims were Black, White, and Hispanic.

Only one offender moved the bodies of his victims in all of his murders. Of the remaining six offenders, three moved one body each, and three did not move any bodies.

It was found that these offenders used mixed modes of transportation in connection with their murders (see Table 3). Five used a motor vehicle at least some of the time, but also used bicycles, trains, and walking as means of transport. Two

traveled exclusively by bicycle or on foot. Two used motor vehicles for all their murders. Further noted was the issue of mobility and associated feelings of rest-lessness. This suggests proneness to boredom, attention deficit problems, and perhaps a greater likelihood of predisposition for some of these offenders to commit repeated acts of murder. Six of the offenders stated that they felt compelled to drive and/or walk extensively, either as a means of relieving boredom or to prepare for murders and/or disposal of bodies, or both. The remaining offender, though less widely traveled, was an experienced burglar who himself roamed frequently on foot at night in search of targets, and so even his wanderings were important to him in his criminal behaviors.

All the offenders were questioned about their awareness of media attention being focused on their murders. All reported knowing of such coverage, through radio, television, or newspaper accounts, or a combination of those. Of more direct interest, however, was determining whether news coverage of their crimes affected their behavior with regard to future murders. Only one offender reported being greatly affected by news coverage of his murders, and he was admittedly more interested because he enjoyed reading about what he had done and feeling superior to the law enforcement agencies that were attempting to apprehend him. Of the remaining six offenders, four reported feeling minimal impact, and two reported feeling none. Absent data to the contrary, it appears that offender behavior was minimally affected by knowledge of media coverage of specific crimes. This raises the question as to whether the media would have been a logical or effective means of communication with these offenders.

Among items taken by these offenders from the scenes of their murders or the persons of their victims were vehicles (for escape), jewelry, cash, ATM cards, and clothing. In one instance an offender reported taking a can of beer he had opened at a victim's residence, due to his concern that his fingerprints could be found on it if he had left it at the victim's home. One offender excised some body parts (e.g. nipples he had cut from one of his victims) when he left the murder scenes, but he claimed that he discarded them soon afterward. Another offender dismembered three of his victims and discarded the body parts in various locations miles away from the murder scenes. This served to delay discovery and identification of bodies. This same offender kept numerous items of personal identification and jewelry he had taken from some of his victims. He stated that these personal belongings had special meaning for him; they therefore appear to have been taken as ''souvenirs'' or ''trophies.''

In only one other case did an offender keep items he took from a murder scene. These were garments that he thought he could use; it therefore is more difficult to justify the classification of these articles as souvenirs. In the remaining instances of items taken, the thefts seem more related to exigencies the offenders encountered in escaping (hence the taking of vehicles) or the monetary value of the items when sold at later times.

Among other behaviors exhibited by these seven offenders were dismemberment of some victims (e.g. for body disposal), cleaning of vaginal areas of some victims, placement of items in the orifices of some victims (e.g. vagina, mouth), and display of bodies in gruesome and offensive ways (e.g. to shock and offend those who were likely to find the victims). These behaviors can be viewed in some instances as unique enough to support case linkages, but this appears to be a rather uncommon feature.

COMMENT

Although these descriptions of murders and those who commit them may be interesting, they have limitations. Generalization remains problematic, and of further concern is the possibility that the individual narratives may unduly highlight unique factors and lead to excessive attention to the bizarre at the expense of more mundane but also more common features identified by other studies. However, these cases do emphasize the need for great diligence in their application to criminal investigative analysis.

The systematic analysis of behaviors exhibited at crime scenes, particularly those related to homicides, can provide valuable investigative considerations. It must be stressed, though, that such analysis is only a tool, to be considered in concert with other investigative techniques. Behavioral analysis of serial killers, therefore, should not be held to unreasonably high expectations, since it involves the assessment of violent human behaviors that are relatively rare and subject to much variation. With recent advances in forensic technology, more concrete connections can now be established between cases in a shorter time. Such links may even be established before behavioral comparisons are considered. Forensic analysis, however, is not instantaneous, and is dependent on the presence and successful recovery of physical evidence. Behavioral-based analysis, when conducted in a timely manner, may prove useful to investigators, particularly in cases wherein physical evidence is lacking or scientific examination is delayed.

As can be seen in the discussion of these seven subjects, the idea that serial killers evolve and improve their ''techniques'' over time is a subjective one. While some may become stealthier, more ''evidence conscious,'' and/or more efficient as they continue to kill, this is hardly a trend upon which, at present, much reliability can be placed.

Furthermore, profiles, even when they can be based on more empirical data, are not ends unto themselves, to be judged only in terms of accuracy when an offender is identified, arrested, and convicted. For those truly interested in improving their knowledge for future assessments, the conclusion of a case is very often the point at which the most attention should be focused, for it is only at that time that the majority of facts become known. A solved case, then, becomes an important addition to what should be an ever-growing collection of data for behavioral assessments in serial murder cases.

Today a more relevant addition to the concept of profiling is criminal investigative analysis (discussed above), which includes the provision of strategies and techniques to assist investigators, based on what is being learned about the backgrounds of serial murderers. With knowledge of their criminal and psychological histories, better advice can be given regarding types of behavioral traits that might characterize suspects who come under scrutiny as an investigation progresses. Certainly, the results of previous studies, beyond those already cited, merit consideration. These include work by, for example, Hickey (1997), Holmes and Holmes (2002), and Warren et al. (1996).

With these cautionary notes in mind, what remains clear is that continued, thorough examination of serial murder is an important pursuit. One recommendation for further empirical study would be the relationship between offender psychopathy and other variables, as determined through analysis of case records

for a larger population of offenders. Overall the study of serial murder should be objective and standardized, should include as many cases and subjects as possible, and should be undertaken with a sincere devotion to the highest of professional and academic principles.

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