

Ways to curtail serial murder: Considering normal human beings who kill

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New DNA evidence points to serial killer active in LA for 2 decades

Photo by David McNew/Getty Images

As promised in the [last article](#), this article explores just a few of the many ways that serial [murder](#) might be curtailed. However, there are so many possibilities for curtailing serial murder that a framework is needed that fits this article into the literature review already presented. Consequently, we are following the three areas first identified in "[The Bundy letter, 1979: Suggestions for the investigation of serial murder](#)" ([Ritter, June 26, 2013](#)). First, police were urged to seriously consider conceptions of the normal potential offender, rather than preconceptions of him or her as mentally defective deviants, or mutilatory monsters, cannibals and necrophiles. Since this issue is intimately related to the validity of psychological or criminal profiling (CP), we will take up the second issue, the expansion of M.O. analyses, and the third, development of regional databanks to share information on new cases with a national center for serial murder research, in subsequent articles.

It continues to be the case that, the more normal-appearing the killer, the more likely he or she is to go under the radar. If they were the obvious-looking deviants or psychotics that Freudians would have us believe, they would be much easier to catch. Their crimes would be easier to link as a series. They would *look* the part. But they don't. Because they aren't.

The psychopath or antisocial personality is never insane and has no mental illness, is often glib, with superficial intelligence and charm, a lack of neurosis, psychosis, or nervousness, an absence of guilt, and, because of both the psychopathic personality and high dominance-feeling that characterizes most serial killers (see e.g. [Ritter, January 20, 2012](#)), they are more apt to appear confident, rather than timid, ashamed or embarrassed. The high-dominance psychopath may run a company, or kill your daughter. He could do both. He may do neither.

When a person's background, development and mental status falls into the descriptive category we would call

"normal," that person's history provides no way to predict an eventual career in serial murder. This is one reason why study of individual killers does not tell us much that will help with an investigation. What the study of serial murderers *per se* can provide is a means for evaluating theories of "why." Were such persons abused? Were they dropped on their heads? Do they possess genetic abnormalities? To answer such questions requires a systematic study of cases, covering all the relevant areas of each person's life history. We would have to specify how the trauma or disability would be manifested and in what areas of life, then describe the harm done and the problem(s) manifested. We could not rely on either the theories of those who work with a few subjects whose violence may or may not be similar or the advocates for those who experienced traumas or possess the abnormalities in question. Nothing like this has been done by those who offer theories based on deficiency motives. Serial murder is not a drive or a biological instinct that anyone is compelled to commit because they were once embarrassed or traumatized.

Human beings and primates do not have many instinctive (biologically-based) motives. While criminologists continue to believe that all motivation springs from a disturbance or imbalance of the 'normal' physiological or psychological equilibrium," (Krech, Crutchfield & Livson, 1969, pg. 492), psychologists have long recognized that we are motivated to act by more than deficits in tissue needs (or biological deficiencies). Biological needs are delimited to hunger, thirst, security and safety (freedom from danger). After these basic needs are met, man is likely to be in a state of homeostasis.

But does that mean he just sits, wanting for nothing, having no desire to act? No. Buhler observed as long ago as 1928 that children play and play is, biologically speaking, "unnecessary." Similarly, animals leave the security of home for no other reason than to explore or satisfy their curiosity. Whatever the ostensible motive for murder, whether sexual desire or profit, for instance, killing often comes from something other than failures, deficits or frustrations. The type of killing involved in serial or stranger homicides falls into the category of "abundance motives," where, instead of the push of adversity, there is the pull of "satisfaction and stimulation. . ." (Krech et al, pg. 497).

Murder without apparent motive is murder that is chosen by a person who, almost by definition, has no conceivable reason to do so. This may run counter to what we want to believe, but are our beliefs more important than protecting human lives?

To curtail an ongoing serial murder case, it is essential for police to have faith in what they themselves observe, rather than to put faith in some outsider's writings or advice. The latter are little more than psychodynamic (i.e. internal, symbolic) assumptions rather than empirical knowledge about "typical profiles."

This is something that both Eric Hickey and former FBI agent, Robert Ressler, failed to mention when giving their opinions on whether Robert Yates, a married man with five children, could be the Spokane serial killer. What they say clearly demonstrates how unwise it is for police to listen to profiling-type pseudo-expertise.

“ Spokane, Wash. {AP} Could a generous, loving father be the cold-blooded killer of a dozen or more women?

It's a question giving pause to homicide experts looking at the case of Robert L. Yates, a seemingly solid family

man and good neighbor who is suspected of shooting to death prostitutes and drug addicts.

'This man doesn't appear to be the typical case, but then every one has their own individual characteristics that make them stand out,' said Eric Hickey. . . .

. . .

Yates' stable family life. . . in an upper middle-class neighborhood. . . would be 'very, very unusual' for a serial killer, said Robert Ressler, a criminologist, former FBI profiling expert and author of five books on homicide and serial killers.

'On occasion you'll find a married killer, but usually from highly dysfunctional families,' he said.

. . .

The Spokane killings themselves also vary from the norm in that all of the victims were shot. Most victims of serial killers are strangled, stabbed or beaten to death.

"Rarely do serial killers use firearms to kill. They use them to intimidate and control their victims," Ressler said.

Their ultimate deaths by gunfire were 'not the payoff,' Hickey said.

(http://lubbockonline.com/stories/042800/nat_042800024.shtml).

Yet, on April 21, 2000, the Associated Press had already reported that definitive (DNA) evidence tied Robert L. Yates to the slayings of nine women. This may be one reason that Captain Dave Reagan of the Spokane Homicide Task Force said that investigators 'never really put much stock in the profiling. It seems to me that without knowing when this behavior started, it would be premature to say whether or not he fits a profile.'

(http://lubbockonline.com/stories/042800/nat_042800024.shtml).

The **2005 FBI Symposium (2008)** warned against becoming "talking heads" for the media in unsolved cases.

“ *When individuals appear in the media and discuss ongoing cases, they have an enormous potential to negatively influence investigations and may even cause irreversible damage. They often speculate on the motive for the murders and the possible characteristics of the offender. Such statements can misinform the public and may heighten fears in a community. They may contribute to mistrust and a lack of confidence in law enforcement and, more importantly, may taint potential jury pools (2008, p. 43).*

Worst of all, they may affect the behavior of the serial killer who if angered by the negative comments made about him in the media, "may destroy evidence, or more tragically, react violently" (FBI, 2008, p. 43)

Is it possible that Hickey and Ressler care more about having their names in the press than they care about causing this damage?

SUGGESTED LINKS

- [The Bundy letter, 1979: Suggestions for the investigation of serial murder](#)
- [The study of murder to help police: Expanded MO analysis](#)
- [The study of murder to help police](#)
- [The serial killers' crimes: Assumptions about Modus Operandi \(Part 17\)](#)
- [Part 7. What are the causes of serial murder? Major personality characteristics](#)



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