

LIFE / SOCIETY & CULTURE / SOCIAL ISSUES

Intellectual thievery in the business of serial murder

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Before there was intellectual thievery of words and thoughts, there was copyright infringement of the entire work. Your concept of copyright infringement may be the huge company going after an individual offender, perhaps a college student, who did not pay for music or movies he or she downloaded, or perhaps distributed. In the author's case, the situation is quite different. If this were a court case, I would be the plaintiff and the company that published my doctoral dissertation, UMI/ProQuest, the defendant. I own the copyright. UMI bought no rights. Nevertheless, they made money by publishing **Multiple murderers: The characteristics of the persons and the nature of their crimes (Ritter, 1988)**. This work was written before serial

murder was an academic topic, much less a business, and before the internet and digital rights made most works more accessible.

The first year the dissertation sold quite well, and I received royalties. The contract stipulated that, in exchange for tracking and providing copies for sale, and maintaining an archive where the work could be permanently found, the publisher would keep 90 percent of the royalties. But as serial murder became increasingly popular, the dissertation became increasingly difficult to find. I never again earned royalties. When I called them about this, I was never told why my work could not be found in any key word search (e.g. serial or multiple murder). It could only be found if a search was done for “author,” listing my last name first. The real problem, I was told, was that no one was interested “*in your work*.” This occurred despite their own claim that “graduate students customarily consult the database to make sure their proposed thesis or dissertation topics have not already been written about. Students, faculty and other researchers search it for titles related to their scholarly interests” (**ProQuest, pg. 1, 5/4/12**). It is the first place a scholar looks and when read, the author is credited under either References Cited or References Consulted.

UMI’s stinging words covered up the truth: they were selling “subject segments,” and then the rights to use the entire dissertation database in a way that precluded public access and allowed only universities and research centers to find it, on the Internet. Without my knowledge or permission, they were allowing students and faculty to download my work for free, to view it or print it out. They gave faculty access to dissertations which they often used to plan their courses or write books. What all this freedom of access has not produced is an appreciation for others’ ideas. Within **UMI** and my university, **USIU, now Alliant**, there has been a tendency to give students (and others) access to my work without teaching them to **cite me**. Copyright infringement is not a “victimless” crime.

The dissertation is the second copyright registered under the name of Barrie Ritter. The first was a collection of materials on serial murder submitted in 1979. Briefly, I had been invited that year by Robert Burkhart, research director and later Director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ, 1983) to submit my work on serial murder as a grant proposal to the Department of Justice. I submitted 3 proposals. The first was “Perspectives and procedures for serial murders” (Ritter, 1979). The three 20-page proposals had multiple attachments of copyrighted works which substantiated the proposed research. The proposals were not funded, but copies of these proposals were circulated around NIJ. Ultimately, when serial murder did become a topic of interest, many of the ideas were used in the very first works published by others. The ideas appeared in arguments urging support of VICAP in the 1983 **Senate Hearings on Serial Murder**. Still later, when increased interest in ideas such as “calling cards” (or “signatures”) and “souvenirs” (or “trophies”) began, those who used the ideas neither cited an original author, nor

demonstrated they had done their own research.

To be continued. . . .

SUGGESTED LINKS

- Intellectual thievery in the field of serial murder
- The study of murder to help police: Expanded MO analysis
- The study of murder to help police
- Serial killers' methods of operation, Part 18
- The serial killers' crimes: Assumptions about Modus Operandi (Part 17)



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