

LIFE / SOCIETY & CULTURE / SOCIAL ISSUES

Intellectual thievery in the business of serial murder, Part 3

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Hereford England January 24. 2012. Chained Library.

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In explaining plagiarism, the **Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association** (APA, 2001, pg. 349) offers the following examples: “If the rationale for a study was suggested in the Discussion section of someone else’s article, that person should be given credit.” It is hard to imagine a better illustration of this type of theft than the implementation of someone else’s suggestion for future research, without giving credit. At the end of the author’s discussion section (Ritter, 1988, pg. 370-371),* a phenomenological approach to the study of serial murder was suggested for further research. Some of the characteristics of such a project were specified, including: “Here, the cooperation of convicted multiple murderers would have to be secured. In an interview setting, each subject would be asked, ‘Tell me your experiences,’ and each would be encouraged to add his own meaning. The interview would preferably be taped and then transcribed.”

Almost ten years later, **Candice Scrapec**, in **dissertation (1997)** and article (Scrapec, 2001) described her use of a phenomenological approach to the study of serial murderers. She used five convicted serial killers, and described how she secured their cooperation and that of the prison authorities. Each was interviewed in depth, about their experiences in the murders that they found meaningful. She taped and then transcribed

her interviews. And, just as the author's dissertation covered the lives, personalities/world views and crimes of each of the killers, Scrapec's interviews covered "the aspects of their lives, their world views, and their crimes that they experienced as meaningful" (Scrapac, 1997, pg. iv).

All of the following categories were first used by the author in her "Life History Instrument" (Ritter, 1988, Appendix A, pg. 393): All of Scrapec's categories are among those that appeared in Ritter first. Ritter's list includes demographics, family life, early childhood, (education categories), social history, sexual history, (role models, aspirations/occupation) marital status, early criminality, and medical/psychiatric history. The parenthetical items were not in Scrapec's list, which is limited to the following: Family/childhood, sexual history, marital history, criminal history, psychiatric and medical history.

A major part of the findings in the Ritter's dissertation were the 27 Life History Tables, containing these and the additional categories. These one-page Life History Tables summarized the findings for each of the 27 subjects. Other tables in the Findings concerned individual categories and gave the relevant details for each of the 27 cases. In other words, the categories were a highly visible part of the dissertation and the reasons for the inclusion of each category was explained therein. (The personality characteristics were described separately and they included the killers' world views. The crimes were described last, and that is how the Examiner articles have been laid out.)

Five procedures were suggested for use with the transcribed text (Ritter, 1988, pg. 371). Two of them were: "(2). Next, a single-word/phrase would be noted in the margins to indicate the meaning the subject has attached to what was said," and "(3). Ideas would be threaded into themes to get at higher meanings." Scrapec (1997) also talks of the search for higher meanings and about themes in the material, but her procedures are less specific.

Ritter (1988, pg. 371) wrote that a phenomenological study could be effective with multiple murderers because "such persons are usually very articulate and philosophical. They enjoy discussing themselves, and what they have done; and they rarely need encouragement to seek philosophical justification for their actions." This seems like a powerful reason for conducting a phenomenological study of serial killers, but curiously, Scrapec (1997) does not give us the reason for her study, which makes one think she used Ritter's rationale. This is consistent with the feeling of entitlement, one of Scrapec's main findings. The feeling of entitlement is also similar to this author's findings on personality characteristics as described in the dissertation (beginning pg. 265) and in these Examiner articles on this topic: [Ritter, January 20 2012](#); [Ritter, January 28, 2012](#); [Ritter, February 3, 2012](#); [Ritter, February 29, 2012](#); and [Ritter, April 12, 2012](#).

[George Barrett](#) (1990), who wrote one of the earliest theses on serial murder, appears to be describing Ritter's (1988) dissertation, which was the first to be published, by someone trained in psychology, and it did cover most aspects of the growth of motiveless violence, which the last paragraph of Barrett's Abstract refers to. Barrett's Abstract reads, in part:

A review of the historical development of the serial murderer. Serial murder has been documented for the



past 500 years. From the early descriptions of men who murdered large numbers of victims to current accounts of serial killers who roam with apparent impunity, the growth of serial murder is outlined.

The growth of psychology suggested the possibility for experts to offer insight into the serial killer. His childhood development, family relationships, early criminal behavior, and drives would be revealed in a psychological portrait or profile.

Ritter's (1988, pg. vi) Table of Contents includes (under Chapter 2) a "Chronology of Multiple Murderers in History" which begins with cases that go back 500 years (pg. 30). This is followed (pg. 35) by the "Increase in Numbers of Multiple Murderers," which is consistent with Barrett's discussion of "the growth of serial murder." The next section is "Relevant Criminological Work" which begins with "Life History" (on pg. 64). Here I do describe the childhood development, family relationships, and early criminal behavior, as discussed above.

Barrett concluded his Abstract with the complimentary comment that this "psychological profile would offer communities the opportunity to prevent the growth of violent criminals, particularly serial killers, and thereby prevent the motiveless deaths of thousands." Thanks, George.

To be continued. . .

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