

Revising the Holmesian model of serial murder classification

# A KILLER THEORY

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# Disclaimer

- ⦿ This presentation contains discussion of graphic acts of serial murder, as well as images of convicted serial murderers. If such discussion is at all upsetting to any presenters or attendees, you are welcome to step outside. The speaker will take no offense at this perfectly reasonable discomfort.



# Serial Killer?

- ◎ Distinct type of multicide
- ◎ **Mass Killer**
  - 3+ victims, one location, no cooling-off
  - Ex. Campus shootings such as Columbine
- ◎ **Spree Killer**
  - 3+ victims, multiple locations, other crimes
  - Ex. Moham med & Malvo, D.C. Snipers
- ◎ **Serial Killer**
  - 3+ victims, multiple locations, significant cooling-off period
  - Ex. Jack the Ripper, Ted Bundy

# Methodologies of Study

- FBI's Organized/Disorganized (1986)
- Holmes & Holmes Classifications of Serial Murder (Revised 2010)
  - The topic of this presentation
  - Much more in-depth than the FBI's classification system



# The Holmes & Holmes Model

- ◎ This model is found in the Stephen and Ronald Holmes text *Serial Murder, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*
- ◎ The text explores specific dynamics such as foreign and female serial killers
  - I explored the core theory

# Core Classifications

- ◎ Visionary Serial Killer
- ◎ Mission Serial Killer
- ◎ Power/Control Killer
- ◎ Hedonistic Typologies
  - Lust Killers
  - Thrill Killers
  - Comfort Killers

# The Visionary Killer

- This killer experiences what Holmes & Holmes call a “Severe disconnect with social reality”
- This killer may hear voices, or experience visual hallucinations
- Ex. “Son of Sam” David Berkowitz
- A.K.A. The “.44-Caliber Killer”

# David Berkowitz

- Aliases
- Terrorized New York City
- Murdered victims with .44 revolver
- Claimed to hear the voice of his neighbor's dog ordering him to kill





# The Mission Killer

- This killer targets a specific type of victim, sometimes because he was victimized by that type of victim in his childhood
- This killer is usually (but not always) organized, and has an Ideal Victim Type
- Ex. Jack the Ripper, Dexter

# Jack the Ripper/Dexter

- Jack the Ripper is arguably the most notorious serial killer in history
- Murdered prostitutes in Whitechapel
- Dexter, while fictional, bears mention as an archetypal serial killer.



# The Power/Control Killer

- While the primary motive for the Visionary & Mission killers is sex, and for the comfort killer property, this killer enjoys control over another's life.
- Holmes & Holmes classify this killer as unique from the other types due to lack of sex motivation. I disagree.
- Ex. Ted Bundy

# Ted Bundy

- One of the most infamous serial killers
- Targeted prostitutes, college girls
- A clever killer, highly educated
- Used ruses such as false injuries



# The Hedonist – Lust Type

- The Lust-driven hedonistic serial killer is driven by sex even more than other serialists, needing sexual contact, often even postmortem
- Whereas the Thrill hedonist enjoys the struggle victim, the Lust type enjoys purely the sexual contact.
- Ex. Gary Ridgway, “Green River Killer”

# Gary Ridgway

- Most prolific serial killer in U.S. history
- ~49 confirmed kills, ~12 suspected
- Almost entirely prostitute victims
- Kept pictures of his child to calm victims
- Engaged in postmortem sexual contact

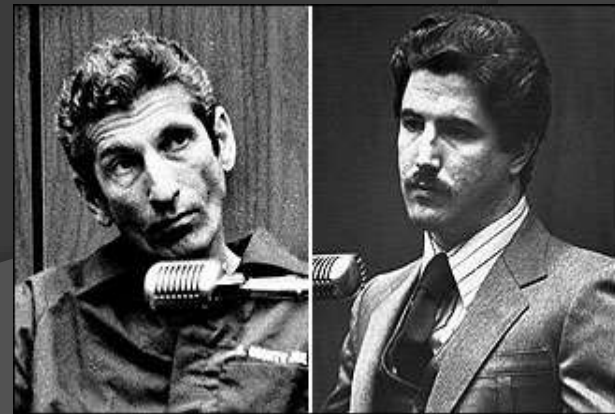
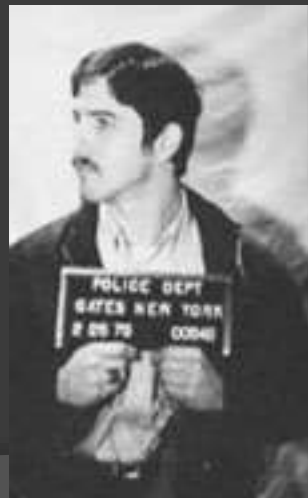


# The Hedonist – Thrill Type

- The Thrill-type Hedonist, like the Lust-type Hedonist, primarily kills for the physical, immediate sexual thrill
- This killer does not engaged in postmortem sexual contact. The sexual thrill for this killer is the struggle of the victim
- Not to be confused with Power/Control
- Ex. The Hillside Stranglers

# The Hillside Stranglers

- Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono
- Cousins who raped and tortured girls aged 12-28 in Los Angeles
- Enjoyed the total domination and terror of the victim





# The Hedonist – Comfort Type

- A rarer serial killer typology
- This killer doesn't kill for enjoyment
- The pleasure of creature comforts is the ultimate goal of this killer
- Common in the 1800s United States
- The only typology to commonly include women.
- Ex. Richard Kuklinski, "The Iceman"

# Richard Kuklinski

- Employed by the Gambino crime family
- A hit man who killed over 100 people
- Kept a stable home life, was married
- Killed impersonally for profit, property



# Criticisms of Holmes & Holmes

- The Holmesian classification system is an excellent working model backed with solid empirical data sets
- Scholars have noted several logical inconsistencies
- My research heavily involved David Canter and Alison Wentink's criticisms paired with my own extended observations

# Canter & Wentink's Criticism

- ① Five Central Critiques
- ① 1 – Unclear sorting criteria
- ① 2 – Criteria objectivity issues
- ① 3 – **Lack of multiple-typology**
- ① 4 – Assumption of categories
- ① 5 – Generalizability of sample

# Discarded Criticisms

- ① Two Canter & Wentink criticisms I believe off-base in a serial killing theory
- ② 1 – Assumption of categories
  - Modern psychology suggests there are no truly “random” or “impossible to know” brain patterns. Science needs to catch up.
- ③ 2 – Generalizability of sample
  - Serial killers are rare, always have been

# My Primary Criticisms

- ① 1 – Lack of multiple typology killer
- ② 2 – Research transparency
- ③ 3 – Confounded objective/subjective
- ④ 4 – General typology inaccuracies
  - Power/Control now a Hedonist subtype
  - Comfort now a distinct type
  - Minor typology adjustments

# Why Multi-Typology?

- The key reason it is critical to address a multi-typology killer lies in investigative strategies used by police departments.



# Why Transparency?

- As most of you are familiar with, transparency is a critical aspect of scholarly research
- Without transparency, a model lacks falsifiability, and therefore validity

● Good theory!

A hand holding a magnifying glass over the text 'Good theory!'. The magnifying glass is positioned over the text, making it larger and more prominent. The hand is visible at the bottom right, holding the handle of the magnifying glass.



# Why Objectivity Correction?

- For the same reason as transparency! Scholarly research cannot progress if the improved-upon model uses subjective language
- Supposition about motive, past history, etc. is irrelevant if it does not aid in the apprehension of the killer

# Why Change Typologies?

- Most changes made to remove subjective language
- Other changes made to improve the logic of the model

# The Revised Holmes & Holmes Model

- ◎ Visionary Serial Killer (Revised)
- ◎ Mission Serial Killer (Revised)
- ◎ Comfort Serial Killer (New Type)
- ◎ Multi-Typology Killer (New Type)
- ◎ Hedonistic
  - Lust Killers
  - Thrill Killers
  - Power/Control Killers

# How Does Multi-Typology Work?

- ① The multi-typology killer is **not a distinct type of killer**
- ① No killer classified “multi-typology”
- ① Rather, this killer type is a way of thinking that prevents police departments and media from dangerous myopia

# Power/Control Hedonist?

- Holmes & Holmes said this type was unique due to the lack of a sex motivation
- However, the primary motivation remains pleasure
- Lust, Thrill, and Power/Control are all primarily pleasure-seeking typologies

# Distinct Comfort Type?

- The Comfort Type does not match any other type of killer simply because they do not seek the act of killing for its own sake – every other typology does!
- A means to an end



# What Changes, Specifically?

- General typology changes were almost always to remove absolute language
- Avoidance of absolute language helps investigators keep a clear mind
  - A killer is usually organized
  - This type of killer seldom revisits the scene

# Conclusion - Clarity

- My revisions to the Holmes & Holmes theory were minor, but critical
- Base theory solid and powerful
- These revisions allow investigators to keep an open mind and more accurately classify serial killers
- Better understanding = better capture



# Selected References/Questions

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