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Title: "CBLRP: Review of 'Signature Killers'"

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Purpose & Rationale

The purpose of the Criminal Behavior Literature Review Project is to examine and critically review in a deliberate and consistent fashion any widely referenced and/ or seminal work published in the areas related to criminal profiling, criminal behavior, and criminal investigation. It is the short-term goal of this project to provide objective and informed reviews of published works to the professional community. It is the long-term goal of this project that the result will be a database of reviews from which conclusions about the overall quality of the published literature on a given subject may be drawn.

This project is being undertaken by the Journal of Behavioral Profiling due to the apparent lack of consistent, detailed peer review of published work within other venues in the professional community, and the widespread publication and referencing of unreviewed material by students and professionals alike. The benefits of this project include the provision for an informed readership and a mechanism for critical feedback into the professional community.

Procedure

Each review will include an assessment of the work being reviewed utilizing a uniform criteria, in order that potential biases and influences may be blunted. While not bound to any particular structure, each review includes consideration of the following issues:

Is the nature of the work made clear by the author(s) (opinion piece, editorial, original research, validation study, literature review, technical note, etc.)?

Is the training, education, and/ or experience of the author(s) related to the subject matter of the work?

Is the work written in clear, understandable language?

How does the author(s) establish any behavior that is being studied or

discussed?

What is the reliability of the data used by the author(s)?

Does the author(s) clearly operationalize their terms of study or discussion?

To what extent does the author rely upon media accounts or works of true crime for data?

Are the appropriate controls utilized?

Are the appropriate citations utilized?

Does the author(s) present inductive hypotheses as deductive conclusions, or do conclusions flow clearly from the facts presented?

Are the conclusions reached by the author(s) clear?

To what extent does the author(s) rely upon their own education, training, and experience for interpretations given in the work, in place of articulable scientific fact?

Is the training, education, and/ or experience of the author(s) commensurate to the nature of conclusions or opinions rendered?

Overall assessment of the relevance and utility of the work to the professional community.

Commentary

Recommendations

Title: Signature Killers: Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer

Authors: William J. Birnes & Robert D. Keppel, PhD

Reference: Birnes, W.J., & Keppel, R.D. (1997), Signature Killers: Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer, New York: Pocket Books

Ordinarily, I would be reluctant to review a mass-market paperback with no endnotes, no bibliography, and no index, published for public rather than professional consumption. However, this book has caught my attention because it is frequently referenced in the professional literature related to criminal profiling, and has been recommended as serious reading on the subject of signature and serial crimes by members within the profiling community.

Review

The authors make it very clear that they are presenting a work on signature killers. The fact that the book is a mass market paperback with no index, bibliography or footnotes leads one to believe that this is more of a true crime type book than anything else.

One of the authors, William Birnes, is a professional literary agent with no apparent experience investigating crime.

Robert Keppel, on the other hand, has a Ph.D. in criminal justice and has apparently worked as a homicide detective. In Chapter 1 on page 2, Dr. Keppel writes, "I have come to recognize individual calling cards from the thousands of crime scenes I've investigated of the hundreds of serial killers whose paths I've crossed. So my life and work as a homicide

detective have taught me to look for the unusual - what is rare - that makes one murder so very different from another." This statement seems a bit incredulous, and leaves one with perhaps an exaggerated understanding of Dr. Keppel's actual case experience. It is also curious since in this book and his other published works combined, Dr. Keppel only refers to two cases that he investigated himself: the Ted Bundy case and the Morris Frampton case.

The book is written in a clear and easy to read manner, although the conflicted nature of the content (elucidated in the Discussion section of this review) may certainly confuse the reader.

The authors do not clearly operationalize the terms that they use and make errors when defining, as well as classifying, those terms. For example, the term signature killers is not clearly defined in the entire work. This is a crucial omission.

The authors clearly describe the behavior they are discussing but will often classify that behavior incorrectly by their own standards. The conclusions the authors reach are also unclear due to the misclassification of behaviors and incorrect definitions of terms used, as will be elucidated in the Discussion section of this review.

The reliability of the data used in this book is unknown since there are no footnotes or bibliography directing the reader to the source of their information.

It is unclear if the authors relied on any true crime accounts for the material presented since they provide no references, footnotes or Bibliography.

The authors have apparently relied upon their own education, training and experience for the interpretations given in this work. The authors' training in the forensic sciences is not described; therefore, it is unclear whether their experience is commensurate to the nature of conclusions and opinions rendered.

Discussion

A major concern that I have with this work is its internally conflicted content. After reading it through several times, I have found that the authors have made some very basic and fundamental mistakes throughout which could certainly confuse someone doing research on offender behavior. In Chapter 1, "The Calling Card of a Signature Killer", the authors present a case study involving two victims - Rosemary Stuart and Iantha Buchanan, and one offender named Morris Frampton. The authors classified Frampton as a sadistic serial killer (see page 7). Referring to the Rosemary Stuart homicide the authors write, "Her face was still etched with the pain and injuries from what was surely an horrendous beating, a reality later attested to by an autopsy report that methodically listed her eighty-one injuries."

The authors note "most of her injuries had been inflicted before death." They go on to write, "The victim we found at the marina had been tortured by the constant beating of a sadistic maniac." With regards to her injuries the authors note, "The inner portions of her thighs were bruised by the blunt instrument used to rape her. Her left arm was obviously

broken since it bent into the shape of an "S". The back of her head was savagely beaten in, and the weapons mark was indelibly etched across her back." Apparently she had been beaten with a piece of rebar found nearby. According to the authors, "In the frenzy of the attack, the killer had forgotten to take it with him."

Explaining the Buchanan case the authors write, "Like Stuart, Buchanan has suffered a terrible beating with multiple blows so devastating it was clear that the killer was out not only to kill her, but to destroy her. She died of multiple blunt impact injuries to the head. She had fractures of the vault and base of the skull, extensive cerebral cortical contusions, and extensive fractures of the facial bones. She also received blunt impact injuries to the neck and trunk and suffered from a broken right clavicle."

The authors then examine the offender signature in both cases (a concept which, despite the title of the book, is never truly operationalized) and conclude, "To my mind, both the Stuart and Buchanan cases display the classical signature of the sexually sadistic serial killer." (2) They later comment "The killer in the Buchanan and Stuart cases used the very intimate method of choice for many sexually sadistic killers: a frantic, hands-on, extreme bludgeoning."

When discussing overkill and the continuum of violence the authors state, "For example, the number of intimate injuries - actual blows administered by the killer's hand to the victim - increased from the Buchanan murder to the Stuart murder, indicating to me that the escalation itself of overkill injuries-wounds inflicted beyond those necessary to cause death - was the killer's true gratification, not the inflicting of injuries upon any specific victim."

The above descriptions suggest evidence of an anger retaliatory killer rather than a sadist. In fact, the authors describe the attack as frantic and frenzied. Is this what we see with sadistic killers? Many, if not all, victims suffer during assaults of all kinds but we do not classify all of these as sadistic. Sadism requires an offender who is sexually stimulated through victim suffering.

The authors also assert that some of these offenders get their sexual gratification at a later time instead of at the crime scene. This may be so, but unless there is evidence of a behavior (sexual gratification from victim suffering) at the scene, it cannot be legitimately assumed for the purpose of analysis.

In Chapter 1 ("The Calling Card of a Signature Killer") on page 26 the authors write "Whatever the specific signature or signatures we determine from the crime scene, they all fall into one or more of the basic traits of sexual sadism-control, humiliation, progression, posing, torture, overkill, necrophilia, and cannibalism - that we see in the succeeding chapters."

I would agree that some of these traits could present themselves at a sadistically motivated crime scene. However, these are not really the essential traits of sadism. Necrophilia, for example, may be observed at a

sadistically motivated crime scene. But it is certainly not evidence of sadism. A living victim that is alive and suffering in the crime scene is requisite before evidence of sadism can even be considered. The dead cannot suffer.

In Chapter 4 - "The Anger Retaliation Signature," on page 92, the authors talk about the anger Retaliation killer and make the following statement: "Accordingly, they don't spend time binding and torturing the victim the way predators do who get sexually excited by the victim's pain." (2) What follows is a description of four separate killings committed by the South Side Rapist - Timothy Spencer. I am confused as to how Timothy Spencer wound up as the example for a retaliatory killer, given this statement. Each of his four victims was bound.

In regard to the Davis case, the authors write, "In addition to the hand ligatures controlling the amount of pressure put on the throat, the vacuum cleaner pipe in the Davis case was a tool of refinement by which he could play and provide varying amounts of leverage on her neck.

Therefore, while having sexual intercourse with his victims, he could regulate his tools of compression by twisting or pulling on the cords attached to their necks. Undoubtedly, the effect of this behavior probably caused the victims to gasp, pant, and rebel ineffectively against his assault. This reaction to the killer's taunts was sexually exciting for him, and because he was an ejaculator, Spencer became easy to identify once he left fluids for the crime labs to process for DNA and blood type. The consistent finding throughout all four murder scenes of the evidence of ejaculation demonstrated a truly rare signature in a series of murder cases."

The authors offer no support for their description of Spencer as an anger retaliation killer. They also do not provide any evidence to validate the incredible assertion that ejaculation at every crime scene in a series of murder cases is rare.

In Chapter 6, titled "The Psychological Imprint of a Sadist," pages 153-185, the authors choose to use Nathaniel Code as a model of the sadistic killer. After reviewing the Code case examples it became evident that most of Code's victims were stabbed with great force numerous times as well as brutally beaten about the head.

On page 171, the authors write, "There was also a shift from an ultimately unsatisfying assault in the primary sexual continuum - the killer ejaculated at the first homicide - to the concentrated use of secondary sexual mechanisms to produce a pathological sense of power - the killer's anger was the focus of the assault, and not sexual satisfaction."

On page 174, the authors comment (regarding the Ford case) "... but the torture she received was the signature of an anger-driven killer who thought about raping his victim but couldn't complete it because the fury got in the way of his sexual drive and short-circuited it."

In regard to the Culbert, Robinson and Williams murders Keppel explains, "Of note, all cut and stab wounds were above the victims' waists. In addition, going well beyond the level of violence necessary to kill his

victims, Code wounded them, cut their flesh to make them bleed, stimulated blood flow with body movement, and then cut their throats. Also, the excessive amount of stabbing and cutting of deep-muscle structure went far beyond what was necessary and sufficient to cause death."

The authors also make a point of claiming that sadism is evident when someone else is present to watch another's death. Surely this can be sadistic, but not by itself. More evidence is required in order to determine that sadism exists in the crime scene.

When writing about Ted Bundy on page 218, the authors note, "He wanted to attack only those who didn't know him and to make sure they were unconscious or dead as soon after he met them as was possible. He was a necrophile who carried his victims over the threshold of death where he could exercise complete control over their corpses. That was the only relationship his fantasy allowed him."

On page 328 they go on to write, "We know from the way Ted liked to bludgeon his victims that breaking into a domicile at night when the victim was asleep and bludgeoning her into unconsciousness or death was his method of attack in the Chi Omega murders in Florida. But we know from the Lynda Healy murder that the killer spent quite a bit of time with her at the actual murder scene.

He undressed her, hung her bloody nightgown in her closet, and made her bed in his own unique style. There were signs of a struggle in Lynda's bed, but it was probably over very quickly, because no one heard Lynda scream. Ted's intention was to spend his time with dead victims, not put himself in jeopardy by dealing with live ones. That's why he knocked his victims out almost immediately, transported them to a dump site, and murdered them so that he could experience sexual gratification through necrophilia."

After reading the above I became confused by the authors statements on page 296 under the heading "The Anger Driven Prototype." They write, "Although no two signature criminals are identical, in reviewing the lives of Bundy, Dahmer, Russell, and other sadistic sexual signature killers..."

Here the authors apparently classify Bundy as a sadistic killer. There is nothing in the above statements to suggest that Bundy was a sadist. A quick review of Dr. Keppel's first book, *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*, revealed no mention of sadistic behavior by Bundy. The above statements by the authors about Bundy seem to point to a reassurance offender re: necrophilic acts. On page 223, in *Signature Killers: Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer*, the authors write, "In the Pohlreich case, it seemed the killer derived an especially great satisfaction from his postmortem sexually sadistic activities." They are referring to one of the murders in the Russell series.

It appears that the authors are confused. They classify Bundy, Russell, Frampton and Code as sadistic killers but do not support this with any examples of sadistic behavior. They classify Spencer as anger-retaliatory

but give examples of sadistic behavior.

On page 187, they write "The difference between retaliatory and excitation is in the way the killer converts his homicidal anger. The retaliatory killer converts his anger to retaliation upon a symbolic victim who represents the ultimate target. The excitation converts his anger into sexual excitation and kills for the sexual thrill, not merely to execute revenge on the victim."

They also ask "How can a novice tell whether the crime scene belongs to an anger-retaliation or an anger-excitation killer? Usually, you can tell by what seems to have turned the killer on. If the killer turned the front of the body toward a wall so as to look away from him as he left the crime scene, then the killer was probably retaliatory. If the crime scene looks as though the killer spent time sexually manipulating the victim after death, then he was probably an excitation killer."

In the above passage the authors claim that they can advise the novice about the difference between an anger-retaliation and an anger-excitation killer. They have clearly demonstrated in this work that they are not capable of this very delineation, or at least supporting their arguments with the relevant case facts.

Recommendation

Given the shortcomings of this book noted above, I do not recommend this book, as I believe it would only serve to confuse its readers about signature and the offender typologies. Due to the many basic, fundamental mistakes contained within it, this book is investigatively irrelevant. Although entertaining at times, this book is not recommended for use by professionals in the field of sex crimes investigation.

References

Birnes, W.J., & Keppel, RD (1995), *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*, New York: Pocket Books

Birnes, W.J., & Keppel, RD (1997), *Signature Killers: Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer*, New York: Pocket Books