

CHAPTER 1

How to Gain Understanding

HOW TO APPROACH THE TOPIC

Why would an apparently devoted husband, son and father rape and kill a series of innocent strangers? He risks family, reputation, liberty, sometimes even life itself, in what is often described as a 'senseless act'. Why leave a sexually enthusiastic wife for the dangers of the night? Even putting considerations of conscience and empathy aside, why are such killers not deterred by the prospect of capture? These actions can involve careful planning over long periods, directed by a conscious intention and goal.

This book suggests answers to such questions. Sexual violence is our broad theme with a focus upon sexual serial killing, as this is where most biographical material exists. However, not all sexual killers kill more than once, and serial killers represent a small percentage of all sexual killers (Kerr et al., 2013). Sexual ('lust') killing is where violence has the goal of achieving sexual pleasure, often enhanced by the suffering of a victim (such killing is sometimes called 'compulsive'). It appears that a desire for dominance expressed as aggression merges with sexual desire to produce violent sexual fantasy and behaviour (Hickey, 2002). There are other forms of lust-linked killing that will be delineated shortly.

To understand lust killing, we need to look to various sources of information, such as the childhood years of killers and what happened following sexual maturity. There is an abundance of biographical material. A few autobiographical accounts from such killers exist,¹ and they

¹ In the jargon of psychology, the book uses some qualitative methods.

can provide valuable insights into their motivation (Rhodes, 1999). To try to put ourselves into the mind of the killer can be valuable, though, of course, profoundly unsettling.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SERIAL KILLER

What qualifies someone as a *serial* killer, with or without the added term 'sexual' or 'lust'? Some claim the inventor of the expression is the profiler Robert Ressler, though others find earlier uses (Skrapec, 2001). Based at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, Ressler noted that, up to then, the favoured term was 'stranger killer'. This can be misleading: although the targets of most sexual serial killers are strangers, this is not always the case. By general agreement, 'serial' is applied where there are at least three killings² separated by a substantial time of days or weeks (a 'cooling-off period') (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). Most of the killers described in Part II unambiguously fit this criterion. A few don't, but they are included if they have two known victims. Additionally, it could be argued that they would surely have continued if they had not been captured.

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Some serial killings are not motivated by sexual desire. For example, a contract killer is presumably motivated mainly, if not only, by money and possibly status. Some killers are motivated by seeking attention, albeit anonymously with no apparent sexual element. Others are motivated to take revenge on society for perceived injustices that they have suffered. So, each motivation, attention or revenge, is *sufficient* for some people to kill. Attention-seeking and an attempt to right an injustice also form part of many killings where sexual desire is *fundamental*. So, when either or both of them combine with a sexual motive, one shudders upon considering the strength of the combination.

Occasionally the motivation behind killings is linked to sex, but not in the sense pursued here. For example, some are motivated by the distress caused by their earlier sexual victimization.

² Some authorities designate a minimum of two as the criterion for 'serial'.

John Bunting ('The Snowtown Killers')

John Bunting led a gang in Australia (Howard, 2013). Bunting hated pedophiles because he had been abused as a child. He wrongly associated all homosexuals with pedophilia and gathered a group of misfits to cleanse society of such so-called undesirables. The victims were subject to extreme torture before being killed. This is testimony to the potential power of sexual abuse to trigger lasting resentment and also illustrates collective guilt attached to a group. There is no evidence that Bunting fused his hatred of homosexuals with sexual desire towards them.

Being a victim of abuse can contribute powerfully to the strength and direction of sexual desire. Some homosexual killers feel a strong sexual attraction to gay sex, which appears paradoxically to fuse with hatred towards gay men.

Dean Corll

In Houston, Dean Corll showed unspeakable brutality to a series of young men (Berry-Dee & Morris, 2009), becoming the most prolific serial killer in American history by 1973. The genitals and rectum were his favourite targets for torture. Corll hated himself for the sexual desire that he felt towards his victims. He illustrates merging between sexual desire and dominance expressed as aggression. Detailed examples of this are discussed in Part II.

SOURCES OF INSIGHT: LIVES UNDER SCRUTINY

The life of a lust killer can involve more than just an occasional killing. Any so-called cooling-off period between kills is often only relatively cool, being filled with fantasy, use of souvenirs and planning for future killing. In some cases, there would appear to be no cool period (Skrapek, 2001). For example, Ted Bundy killed two women within hours of each other.

Serial killing can become an occupation and devotion, a kind of bizarre and perfectionist combination of professional pride and hobby (Williams, 2017a). The time between kills might involve a low mood, even despair, but this can be lifted by killing. The next best thing to actual killing might be reliving the experience with the help of fetish objects taken from the victim or photographs of her, accompanied by masturbation.

Some killers even brag about their actions, which is obviously risky, particularly since their cellmate in jail might be a ‘grass’ or undercover police officer. Yet it points to how integral killing can be to the individual, giving absorption and ‘flow’ to his mind, shaping identity and boosting self-esteem (Williams, 2017a, b). With repeated ‘success’ at killing, an initially low self-esteem might become transformed briefly to a dangerously high self-esteem (Rhodes, 1999). Some killers appear to take delight in the publicity that surrounds their capture (Part II).

In day-to-day activities, such as driving, the killer can maintain a look-out for potential victims. Reconnaissance trips to promising locations, for example a red-light district, can be made. After a murder, visits can be made to be near the killing site (e.g. the Moors Murderers, Chapter 30) or the funeral or grave of a victim. Some serial killers associate themselves with the investigation, trying to form friendships with the police (e.g. Edmund Kemper, Chapter 18) (Miller, 2014a). Some make a study of the subject, reading the professional literature and biographies of earlier killers, as in taking a master class (Williams, 2017a). A few acquire celebrity status in their own minds, if not in the national media.

Joseph Fisher

John Douglas of the FBI interviewed serial killer Joseph Fisher, who drew a comparison between the followers of serial killers and those of sports such as baseball:

guys like me, we got our games. I didn’t grow up wanting to hit home runs. I grew up wanting to kill people. And I used to soak up every bit of information I could find on the guys who were good at playing my kind of game. (Douglas & Dodd, 2007, p. 89)

Researchers look inside the brains of killers but also at the environments in which they exist. Why are there so few serial lust killers compared to the total number of murderers? Chapter 2 considers some of the characteristics of individual killers.

SENSELESS: MAD OR BAD?

Such crimes are so heinous that the assumption often is that they are the work of madmen. Surely, no one in control of his mind could even entertain such thoughts. However, Chapter 3 argues that, generally, such killings are not the work of madmen.

Dictionary definitions of 'senseless' include such terms as stupid, silly, meaningless, purposeless and foolish. In the present context, perhaps most commonly 'senseless' means utterly irrational and morally degenerate. This stands in contrast to the rational consensus of unfairness, shock and disgust. Thereby, sympathy is drawn to the suffering of the victims, their families and their friends. Attempts to explain such perversion with the theories employed to explain, say, normal sexual desire or even harmless aberrations of desire can appear to be condoning it.

If 'senseless' is used to mean 'without motive' and 'beyond all understanding', this is misleading. Rather, serial killers can sometimes give convincing accounts of why they did it (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). We can combine such insights with knowledge of sociology, psychology and an understanding of brain and environment. Thereby, in many cases we can gain understanding of the killer's motives. They often appear to be the outcome of a sequence of events, starting at birth or even before, through childhood to the emergence of sexual desire and then its consolidation paired with violence.

THE SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSION

Why do some cultures produce relatively many lust killers and others appear to produce almost none? Chapter 4 considers sociocultural determinants. Also discussed is who the victims most commonly are. Killers appear to make what are in part 'rational choices' in their

selection of victims, and this gives powerful insights into their desire (Rhodes, 1999).

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A misunderstanding still exists in the media: the suggestion that the causes of behaviour can be understood as *either* social *or* biological.³ Pointing to the social factors involved in crime in no way places them in opposition to biological factors. Rather, these factors intermesh (Allely et al., 2014). For example, investigators can identify how sociocultural factors interact with the brain.

Considering the combination of individual characteristics and the sociocultural context, Chapter 5 reviews existing explanations of serial lust killing.

INSIGHTS FROM THE STUDY OF MOTIVATION

It is specifically the *motivation* behind serial lust killings that distinguishes them from other types of killing, such as those done for financial gain. Chapter 6 considers how such motivation arises in the killer's brain/mind.

The theme of this book is that lust killing often has a clear conscious purpose and often shows evidence of intelligence and considerable planning. Phases of stalking and/or voyeurism to find a match with an ideal arising from fantasy sometimes precede any attack (Chan et al., 2011). Mental maps of a neighbourhood can be constructed with promising sites for attack labelled and escape routes identified. Cost–benefit analyses of each situation might typically enter the decision-making process. The skilled killer learns by mistakes and attempts to do ‘better’ next time.

To understand what is aberrant, it is useful to understand first how things normally work. This is so obvious that we often take it for granted. For example, doctors need to know first how healthy bodies work in order to understand disease.

³ Even in parts of academia, too!

So, a principal foundation of the book is the assumption that, as with harmless behaviour, lust killing is *motivated*. To *motivate* is to *move* into action. Behaviour is directed and pulled towards a future goal: the sexual pleasure of dominance and killing.

The argument is still heard in the media that some killings appear to be without motive. However, surely something must have moved the killer into action, even though it might be hard to find it. In such cases, a sexual motive can sometimes be suspected. Modern psychology assumes that all human activity is motivated, whether to eat, seek shelter, have sex, explore or whatever. An animal without motivation is chronically depressed and immobile, if not dead.

The opposite side of the same coin is: What might normally be expected to *restrain* lust killing, and how does it fail? Why are so few people lust killers? This is addressed in Chapter 7.

An organizing theme of this book is that lust killing has similarities to other motivated activities, such as consensual sex. This is in terms of what excites and restrains it. There is a wealth of evidence in psychology, which will be tapped here, on what normally motivates people.

SEVERAL MOTIVES CAN COMBINE THEIR EFFECTS

An important principal of motivation is that more than one motive can act simultaneously to underlie a given action (Toates, 2014). Meston and Buss (2009) discovered 237 reasons why women have sex. For example, a desire for sexual pleasure might combine with a wish to feel desirable.

In lust killing, there are typically several underlying factors that motivate in addition to the goal of sexual pleasure (Hickey, 2002). First, some killers view it as a personal mission, ridding the world of those perceived to be undesirable, such as sex workers or women as a whole ('virtuous violence') (Fiske & Rai, 2015).

An important element in motivation and the associated action is the notion of *control*. We all desire to exert control over the events in our lives. Sometimes those who commit sexual violence have little over which they feel any sense of control. Sexual violence both in reality and in fantasy is where they can feel in control and experience dominance (Hickey, 2016). Richard Ramirez, the 'Night Stalker', claimed that the

ultimate aphrodisiac is the possession of power over another's life (Carlo, 2010; Sharma, 2018). Similarly, serial lust killer Richard Cottingham stated: 'The power of holding someone's fate in your hand is a very powerful aphrodisiac' (Fezzani, 2015, p. 200).

Killers sometimes try to exert a form of control by associating with the police. For example, they acquire police badges and flashing blue lights for their cars, or they try to mingle with off-duty police in their watering holes (Sears, 1991). So, it is not a question of the relative weights of *either* dominance/control *or* sexual desire, but the potency of the combination.

An Anonymous Rapist and Killer

A rapist/killer reported that he wished to rape and murder a stranger in order to feel in control:

... I felt used and abused. I was killing my girlfriend. During the rapes and murders, I would think about my girlfriend. I hated the victims because they probably messed men over. I hated women because they were deceitful and I was getting revenge for what happened to me. (Scully & Marolla, 1985, p. 257)

Lust killers are sometimes characterized by intense class awareness (Leyton, 2001), feeling that they to have been dealt a bad hand. A good example is Ian Brady (Chapter 30), who was seething with anger towards what he saw as a privileged elite to which he did not belong. So, the expression of sexual desire in killing was a way of hitting back at society. From being nobody and achieving very little, overnight lust killers become headline news and even acquire a unique moniker, such as the 'Hillside Strangler'.

Gary Heidnik

In Philadelphia in the late 1980s, Gary Heidnik held women captive while they were subjected to rape and torture, and in some cases ultimately death (Englade, 1988). Heidnik had a mix of motives: clearly sexual pleasure was one, but he also wished to produce babies. He used a

series of rewards but mainly punishments in an attempt to exert total control. Following Heidnik's capture, psychiatrists argued over whether he was sane. The 'sane' faction won, and Heidnik was executed.

Lester (1995) writes: 'On the surface, they appear to be killing for sexual pleasure, but there is also a burning grudge resulting from their failed ambition' (p. 35). Leyton (2001) similarly rejects the idea that they kill for sex or conquest, instead arguing: 'the truth is they do it to relieve a burning grudge engendered by their failed ambition' (p. 287). We suggest that this dichotomy is misleading, in that it carves the world along unnatural joints. All three factors of sexual excitement, intoxication of conquest and relieving a burning grudge can combine their effects.

Certain attempts have been made to categorize serial lust killers (Reid, 2017). However, these can appear to be overly simple (Canter & Wentink, 2004). Thus, one system has three categories: hedonistic, mission-oriented and power/control-oriented.⁴ However, some sex-linked killers fall into all three categories, for example by having sex with a victim while enjoying the control exerted and killing a morally undesirable person at the same time (examples include Gary Ridgeway, Chapter 13).⁵ Indeed, within the power/control-oriented category, Holmes and Holmes (1998) note that while stabbing a victim, the killer known as the Red Demon reached orgasm.

Many lust killers have frustrated ambitions, reporting that women look down on them (e.g. David Berkowitz, Chapter 16). Killing can be partly motivated by a desire to correct such an injustice. However, if such killing were *simply* to relieve a grievance, there would surely be much safer ways of doing so than searching for particular targets that correspond to the killer's sexual attraction.⁶

Lust killers do not all fit a standard model. Rather than having failed ambitions, occasionally a killer will appear to be at the pinnacle of

⁴ Plus another called a 'vision killer', which is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁵ Randy Kraft would also exemplify this (Chapter 20).

⁶ A similar argument applies to rape and whether this is dominance motivated; this is discussed in Chapter 11.

success, exemplified by admired family doctor Harold Shipman⁷ and successful Colonel Russell Williams. John Wayne Gacy was a local Chicago celebrity, having been photographed in the company of US First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

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It seems that curiosity might occasionally form an important motive in lust killing, in combination with some level of sexual desire.

Robert Black

Born illegitimate, the Scottish serial killer of young girls Robert Black claimed to have been abused regularly by a male staff member when living in a children's home. From the age of eight years old, he was in the habit of inserting objects into his own anus. When Robert was sixteen years old, he strangled short of death a seven-year-old girl. He inserted a finger into her vagina and then masturbated, which consolidated images of the girl in his mind, images that popped back repeatedly over the years (exemplifying a general process of association, examined later in Chapter 8). The assault formed a kind of template for images to accompany masturbation and for subsequent offending. Wyre and Tate (2018) note Black's obsession with bodily orifices, especially girl's vaginas. They explain this in terms of curiosity as much as sexual desire. What could the orifice accommodate? It appears that Black did not attempt penile insertion. The vaginal area was the target for inflicting damage on his child murder victims (Giles & Clark, 2017). After an offence, Black claimed to have experienced a revulsion.

BORN BAD OR MADE BAD?

The dichotomy of 'born *or* made' reflects that of 'biology *or* society' and is equally confused in its suggestion of simple answers. Nature rarely

⁷ Some might dispute that Shipman was sexually motivated. We discuss his case in Chapter 22.

yields to such neat dichotomies. Surely no child emerges into the world with the ambition to become a lust killer. However, they could be born with a predisposition to violence. Even if this were so, it is surely not enough to make a killer. Rather, we need to look into killers' experiences during childhood and adolescence to find answers (Chapter 8).

THE BITS THAT MAKE UP THE WHOLE

It is sometimes remarked about a killer, 'He could have been the chap talking to me in the supermarket queue'. He could indeed. Equally, he could be the kindly neighbour who offers to help with DIY, as with Fred West. He might be the police officer who arrests you, exemplified by Gerard Schaefer, or your commanding officer, as with Russell Williams. These individuals can be alarmingly normal in many, if not all, respects other than that of their perverse desire.

This consideration leads to the theme of Chapter 9, which is to investigate particular features of how brains normally work and how they are distorted in the case of killers. This chapter does so by looking at experimental studies into component processes in the brain/mind and cautiously extrapolating to the brain/mind of a serial killer.

Chapter 10 is devoted to the excitement value of lust killing. Here again, the killer is not so unusual. People run with bulls or ride rollercoasters, lured by the prospect of high excitement. It is just that the killer finds an extreme means of gaining a thrill. One contributory factor is often the desire to relieve boredom.

Israel Keyes

Israel Keyes specialized in arson, robbery, kidnapping, rape and murder by strangling. Keyes exemplifies that more than one motivation can coalesce in producing lust killing. By endlessly criss-crossing the USA, Keyes proved very difficult to catch. Women and married couples were killed somewhat indiscriminately, apparently in large part for the thrill of doing so. Some women were sexually assaulted before being killed. All these crimes produced a very high level of excitement, termed 'arousal', expressed in his own words:

‘Mostly for the adrenaline. It’s not so much why I did it as “why not?”... I was kind of out of control’ (Hunter, 2016, p. 180). Having obtained a high from killing, calm would follow. However, its duration got shorter as the killing series progressed and urges returned more quickly and built up in intensity, indicating sensitization. One detective argued that over time, he became more impulsive and compulsive.

Keyes ventured an explanation of his actions arguing that a *combination* of things motivated him: sexual fantasy, adrenaline and monetary gain (Hunter, 2016).

SEXUAL ODDITIES: HARMLESS AND PATHOLOGICAL

Outside the realm of lust killing and inside it, a wide array of things excites people sexually. This includes exhibitionism, sadism, rape, fetishes towards such things as high-heeled shoes, and forms of voyeurism, such as watching women urinate. They are termed ‘paraphilias’. Chapter 11 is devoted to them, being there for two closely related reasons. First, their study can yield useful clues as to how the ultimate paraphilia of lust killing can arise. Second, lust killers often exhibit such non-lethal paraphilias, through which they graduate to killing. Rape is the most obvious example. Also, they often have a history of voyeurism and exhibitionism, as well as showing fetishes.

CAN IT BECOME ADDICTIVE?

Sexual serial killing can display features of addiction (e.g. escalation over time, craving and withdrawal symptoms). So, the theme of Chapter 12 is that studying addiction (as in drug, gambling and sex addictions) can give useful insights into lust killing.

DISTINGUISHING SERIAL KILLERS FROM MASS/SPREE KILLERS

We distinguish between serial killers, ‘mass killers’ and ‘spree killers’, all such groups being mainly male (Hickey, 2016). Serial killers kill, usually

one individual at a time, and then have a cooling-off period. They take care to stay free, while, in the case of lust killers, often enjoying fantasy and pornography.

By contrast, the mass killer (almost always male) kills a number of people on one occasion in one location, as a 'final statement' to the world.⁸ The spree killer moves around killing individuals in a number of places, but on one day. Neither mass nor spree killers appear to have a sexual motive as such, seemingly motivated primarily to obtain recognition (Allely, 2020). There is a very high chance that he will be captured, shot or will commit suicide.

There are also some similarities between these types: serial killers often seem to bear a grudge and mass/spree killers seem always to do so (Leary et al., 2006). All such types commonly have been bullied and taunted. They often feel they are failures and are ostracized, a potent trigger for aggression (Pedersen et al., 2017). Their ambitions have commonly been thwarted (Allely, 2020). By their actions, all such killers become noticed even if only in death. They attribute collective guilt, usually targeting innocent strangers. It is doubtful that any such killer suddenly flips and then kills for no reason. Rather, evidence points to extensive fantasies about killing (Murray, 2017), periods of stress and frustration, sometimes terminated by a particularly stressful event prior to killing, such as jilting ('last straw') (Leary et al., 2006).

Typically, a mass or spree killer just fires on people apparently chosen at random. Such killers have commonly shown an interest in guns prior to the killing (Leary et al., 2003).

There can be an indirect sexual connection in the case of mass/spree killers in that they often feel bitter because of having no luck with the opposite sex, as is the case with some serial lust killers.

Elliot Rodger

In 2014, in a short time in the vicinity of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Elliot Rodger killed six people by shooting and

⁸ Exceptions include Jennifer San Marco and Amy Bishop. There appear to be very few, if any, exceptions to the rule that lone lust killers are male.

stabbing (Allely, 2020). He wrote a lengthy manifesto. Rodger's complaint was that he hated girls because he was still a virgin at age 22 and that he hated men because of their success in having girlfriends.

So, who are the lust killers? The next chapter turns to this.