

THE CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROFILE OF UNIDENTIFIED KILLER. THE DENIS RADER CASE

I. A. PLEȘA, R. C. GLIGOR

Ioana-Andra Pleșa¹, Raluca-Clarisa Gligor²

¹ ², „1 Decembrie 1918” University from Alba Iulia

¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7658-8611>, E-mail: ioana.plesa@uab.ro

² <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1065-8514>, E-mail: raluca.gligor@uab.ro

Abstract: *Profiling is a technique for determining the personality and behavioral characteristics of an individual, taking into account his criminal past, personality types of offenders who commit similar offenses. The criminal is the subject of criminological research and can be defined as an individual who commits acts criminalized by criminal law or who has a deviant behavior that generates legal consequences. A murderer is a criminal who commits criminal acts that harm a supreme value, namely the life of the victim. The serial murderer is characterized by the killing of three or more persons within a time span of more than one month, with a lull between the criminal acts. It is eminently necessary for serial killers to be categorized and referred to as such that the murders take place at different times in separate events, which often have no explanation, the motive being the pleasure of the killer.*

Keywords: *serial-killer, profiling, victim, Denis Radler, criminological theories.*

Introduction

According to experts, "serial killers are often devoid of empathy and guilt and more often than not become egocentric individuals; these manifestations classify some serial killers as psychopaths. Serial killers often use a "mask of sanity" to hide their true psychopathic tendencies and to appear normal, even charming. (George E. Rush, Dictionary of Criminal Justice 4th Edition)

Similar to the term "crime", the term "murderer" has several meanings:

According to the common understanding of the term and without having specialized knowledge, by murderer we mean a person who suppresses the life of another, so we use the term murderer in the case of criminals who commit crimes followed by the death of the victim and we may in this context use synonymously the term „murderer".

In criminal parlance, by murderer we mean an offender who commits acts of a high degree of social danger, i.e. serious offences and not just acts against life. We regard murder, robbery, rape, etc. as crimes.

According to criminology, when analyzing this concept, we take into account the commission of any incriminated anti-social act, including deviant acts that generate legal consequences.

Practical cases have demonstrated that "the victim is chosen according to availability, vulnerability and desirability". Availability is explained as the victim's lifestyle or the circumstances in which the victim is involved, which allow the offender access to the victim.

*THE CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROFILE OF UNIDENTIFIED
KILLER. THE DENIS RADER CASE*

Vulnerability is defined as the degree to which the victim is susceptible to attack by the offender. Desirability is described as the appeal of the victim to the offender. Desirability involves many factors based on the motivation of the offender and may include factors relating to race, gender, ethnicity, age of the victim or other specific preferences that the offender determines. Availability, vulnerability and desirability. Availability is explained as the victim's lifestyle or circumstances involving the victim that allow the offender access to the victim. Vulnerability is defined as the degree to which the victim is susceptible to attack by the offender. Desirability is described as the appeal of the victim to the offender. Desirability involves many factors based on the motivation of the offender and may include factors relating to race, gender, ethnicity, age of the victim or other specific preferences that the offender determines. Availability is explained as the victim's lifestyle or circumstances involving the victim that allow the offender access to the victim. Vulnerability is defined as the degree to which the victim is susceptible to attack by the offender. Desirability is described as the appeal of the victim to the offender. Desirability involves many factors based on the motivation of the offender and may include factors relating to race, gender, ethnicity, age of the victim or other specific preferences that the offender determines.

In common parlance, crimes are crimes against life, while from a criminological perspective, by crime we mean any act contrary to the law, which harms values inherent to the human being. In the above sense, crime is both an offense against life and an offense against property or any other value protected by criminal law.

The right to life is the most important right inherent to the human being; without the guarantee of this right, all other rights would be devoid of purpose.

Etymologically, criminology can be defined as the science of crime.

What is it that can induce an individual to commit acts that violate values inherent to the human being? What is it that causes a person to take another person's life? Is it genetic predisposition or the environment in which the individual lives? (Pleșa, 2020, p.85). When we use the term "criminal", we realize the association with a person who has committed a crime in the sense of a crime against life.

From a criminological point of view, 'criminal' is used synonymously with 'offender' and 'delinquent' to designate a person who has violated the Criminal Code by committing a crime. In order to be considered a criminal, a final judgment of conviction is required.

According to the doctrine, "A criminal is a person who commits a crime in the sense of a criminal act or with a justified criminal appearance. (Cioclei, 2021, p.19). The crime is also a social fact and not merely a criminal fact". Thus according to the above opinion, which is also a general opinion, from a criminological point of view deviance is also a crime. Although deviance is characterized by a lower social danger, it is a crime because, like crime, it is detrimental to fundamental/essential values such as the norms of social coexistence.

In the opinion of Professor Egger of the University of Sangamon: A serial murder is when one or more individuals (in most cases male) commit a second and/or subsequent homicide and/or murder; it is without predetermination (there is no prior relationship between perpetrator and victim); it occurs at a distinct time and is apparently unrelated to the initial homicide, and is generally committed in a different geographical area.

1. The murderer. General aspects and profiling aspects of offenses with unknown perpetrators.

One of the objects of study of crime science is the murderer, along with the victim, crime, criminality and anticriminal practice. We can state with certainty that it is the most important object of study and at the same time subject of criminological research, because without it we would not have the other objects of criminology, thus the notions of crime, victim, criminality and anti-criminal practice would be alien, because the criminal is the one who generates them in the chain.

With regard to the profiling of the perpetrator of crimes with unknown perpetrators, the FBI methodology is briefly presented below. The methods and techniques used by the FBI for profiling are therefore as follows: (Whiteley, 2021, pp.16-19)

The stage of data assimilation at which the profiler collects the data (e.g. physical evidence and coroner's report). Categorizing the crime scene as organized or disorganized. Reconstitution/reconstruction (hypotheses about modus operandi, motive of crime-once known can connect the crime to others.

Profile generation stage - hypotheses about the offender are brought together (habits, lifestyle, personality dynamics)." (Whitely, 2021, p.20)

Thus the murderer can be categorized as organized / disorganized, making it easier to create a "portrait" of the subject (family environment, level of intelligence, etc.)

2. Dennis Rader

Dennis Rader was born March 9, 1945, Pittsburg, Kansas, USA. He is an American serial killer who murdered 10 people, the crimes spanning three decades before he was caught in 2005. He called himself BTK - short for the actions he took to achieve the life-suppressing result of tying up, torturing and killing his victims.

In terms of education, occupation and family background in the 1960's he served in the U.S. Air Force and in 1970 returned to Wichita, where he married and had two children. He held various jobs, including a brief stint as a factory laborer for the Coleman Company, a camping equipment manufacturer. In 1979 he graduated from Wichita State University, where he studied criminal justice. During that time, he began working for ADT, a home security company, and in 1991 became a compliance officer in Park City, Kansas. Rader was active in his church and served as a Boy Scout leader.

His church attendance supports Rafaelo Garofalo's theory that religious upbringing does not hinder the killer, and can only play a role if instilled in him early in childhood.

We also realize that there are no clear patterns in delineating the organized from the disorganized serial killer. The fact that he was educated, had an organized family environment and attended church did not prevent him from committing his acts with unbridled frenzy and cruelty.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica and other articles/documentaries sourced from internet resources including the press:

a. On Jan. 15, 1974, Rader committed his first murders, strangling four family members, including two children, in their Wichita home; the mother worked for the Coleman Company. Rader took a clock from the home and obtained souvenirs-often underwear-from subsequent victims. Taking souvenirs is typical of the organized serial killer.

*THE CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROFILE OF UNIDENTIFIED
KILLER. THE DENIS RADER CASE*

b. In April 1974, Rader targeted a 21-year-old woman who was another Coleman employee. After breaking into her home, he also encountered her brother, who managed to escape despite being shot. Rader stabbed the woman before fleeing. Later that year, he wrote a letter detailing the January murders and saying that "code words for me will be... tie them up, torture them, kill them, B.T.K." He left the note in a book at the Wichita Public Library, and it was eventually recovered by police.

From the above we infer that like any serial killer even if he wished to carry out his criminal activity without being caught, he at the same time wanted his deeds to be noticed.

His slogans and the atrocity of his acts support Rafaele Garofalo's theory that "the murderer is a moral monster", which denotes that he lacks compassion and is unable to empathize.

c. Over the next two decades, Rader murdered five more women. His sixth victim was strangled to death in March 1977, after locking her three young children in the bathroom.

The less publicized death of his next victim in December 1977 caused him to snap. In a letter to a local television station, he wrote: "How many people do I have to kill before I get a name in the paper or national attention."

d. The resulting coverage helped spark a panic. Rader then waited eight years before murdering a neighbor in her home in 1985; a 28-year-old mother of two was killed in 1986, and in 1991 Rader committed his last murder, strangling a 62-year-old woman in her secluded home, then a lull settled over his criminal activity.

According to the source, in 2004, on the 30th anniversary of Rader's first murders, a local newspaper published an article speculating that the killer was either dead or in jail. Rader responded by sending a reporter various pieces of evidence from his ninth murder - most notably a copy of the victim's driver's license and photographs of her body. For the next year, he sent packages to the press or simply left articles around Wichita. He often used cereal boxes - possibly a reference to "serial killer" - to hold drawings; criminal memorabilia, including photographs; written descriptions of the murders; and even posed dolls to mimic the various deaths. In January 2005, police got a break after recovering a cereal box that included a note in which Rader asked police if they would be able to track a diskette he wanted to send them. Through a classified notice, law enforcement officials indicated it would be safe. He then sent them a disk, which police quickly traced to his church, where he served as president of the congregation. Rader's DNA was then matched to semen found at the first crime scene. He was arrested in February 2005 and soon confessed to the crimes - and expressed shock that police had lied to him. In June, Rader pleaded guilty and two months later was sentenced to 10 consecutive life sentences. (Tikkanen, 2024)

Conclusions

As for the case presented above, Denis Rader meets the characteristics of the "hybrid" serial killer, with elements specific to the organized killer (family background, level of education) and specific to the disorganized serial killer (the traces left, the desire to assert himself, the frenzy). The mind of the human being is an enigma, all the more so the mind/thinking of the murderer is an enigma, which has not been unraveled even by the great criminologists of all times. From Cesare Lombroso's theory that man is born a criminal with

certain stigmata (protruding eye sockets, protruding jaw), to Alexandre Lacassagne's theory that 'society has the criminals it deserves', to the socialist school's theory that 'inequality begets crime', to Freud's theory that 'the idea of crime is born in the unconscious', no one has yet been able to unravel the fundamental cause that causes an individual to become a criminal. As for the factors that contribute to triggering criminal behavior: "Neglect and abuse in childhood has been shown to contribute to an increased risk of violence in the future. Substance abuse can and does lead to increased aggression and violence. There are documented cases of people who suffered serious head injuries and eventually became violent, even when there was no history of violence". (Morton, 2005)

The symposium organized by the FBI concluded that there are a multitude of factors that contribute to the development of a killer: "Predisposition to serial killing, like other violent crimes, is biological, social, and psychological in nature and is not limited to any specific characteristic or trait; the development of a serial killer involves a combination of these factors, which exist together in a rare confluence in some individuals. They have the appropriate biological predisposition, molded by their psychological makeup, which is present at a critical point in their social development; there are no specific combinations of traits or characteristics shown to differentiate serial killers from other violent offenders; there is no generic template for a serial killer; Serial killers are driven by their own unique motives or motives; Serial killers are not limited to any specific demographic group such as their gender, age, race or religion. " However, it was concluded that more research is needed to identify specific developmental pathways that generate serial killers." (Dolan, 1997)

According to an opinion to which we adhere, "The psycho-moral portrait of the serial killer is as complex as the mechanisms of the transition to the act. "When the subject becomes an adult, he has the physical capacity to act. The first homicide of the organized serial killer generally results from revenge fantasies triggered by a stressor. When committing the crime, the killer externalizes a fantasy, but the reality is never identical to the fantasy, which causes him to relapse in an attempt to achieve perfection, which leads to serial killing." (Montet, 2002) What is it that can make a man commit a cruel murder? We believe that sometimes it is a combination of factors: predisposing genetics (and here we are not referring to the fact that his ancestors had criminal tendencies, but to the genetic information that appears in the individual from the moment of conception) which manifests itself in that thirst to kill, possibly a violent environment without moral values in which he is formed in the first part of his life, lack of empathy and here we can talk about the type of remorseless killer who has psychopathic personality traits. Sometimes we can also talk about the indiscriminate or impaired individual who commits the crime in a moment of rage, and when they come back to reality they either regret it or the blind spot appears in their memory and they no longer remember.

Sometimes it is a combination of factors, other times the criminal acts on impulse, but there are always small signs of behavioral disorders that should be a warning to those close to the perpetrator, who morally are not allowed to act passively, because in this case, from a moral point of view, those who do not try to prevent the crime even though they observe deviant behavior are the moral authors of the crime. (Pleșa, 2020, p.86)

REFERENCES

1. Cioclei, V., Manual of Criminology, 9th Edition, C.H.Beck Publishing House, 2021.

*THE CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROFILE OF UNIDENTIFIED
KILLER. THE DENIS RADER CASE*

2. Dolan, R. W., *Serial Murder*, Chelsea House, NCJ Number: 178578, United States of America, 1997. Available at: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/serial-murder-1>. Accessed 12.11.2024.
3. Encyclopaedia Britannica [online] <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dennis-Rader> Accesed 02.12.2024.
4. Montet, L., *Les tueurs en serie,- Pourquoi devient-on serial-killer*, P.U.F., Paris, 2002.
5. Morton, R.J., *Serial Murder. Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives for Investigators*, U.S. Departament of justice, 2005. Available at: <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder#three>. Accessed 10.11.2024.
6. Pleșa, I-A, Subject of the offense of aggravated murder. Criminal and criminological perspective, *Annales Universitatis Apulensis*, no. 23/2020.
7. Rush, George., E., *Dictionary of Criminal Justice* 4th Edition. Available at: <https://libguides.cccneb.edu/serialkillers>. Accesed 02.12.2024.
8. Whiteley, C., *Criminal profiling. A forensic criminal psychology guide to fbi and statistical profiling*, USA, 2021.