Profiling the Age of Serial Killers

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Radford Serial Killer Data Base

- Currently has 2,006 serial killers
  - 1,201 from the U.S.
  - 805 from other countries
- Began with student serial killer timelines
- 15 years of data collection
- Goals
  - Provide accurate information to the public
  - Potentially assist law enforcement using statistical profiling models
Creating the Database

- Compiling names of serial killers
  - What is a serial killer?
    - 3 or more victims
    - 3 separate events
    - Cooling off period in between
  - Determine whether person is actually a serial killer or a
    - Spree killer
    - Mass killer
    - None of the above
- Issues
  - What to do with people who have killed twice and clearly would have killed again had they not been caught?
  - What about a person with two kills and nine attempts?

Creating the Database

- Gathering Information
  - Sources
    - True-crime books
    - Newspaper articles
    - On-line prison records
    - Court documents
    - Internet sites
  - Issues
    - Accuracy of information
    - Availability of information
Creating the Database

Gathering Information
- Information Obtained (141 variables)
  - Demographics (age, sex, race, country, state, city)
  - Childhood info
    - Birth order, raised by, teased, abused
  - Education and IQ
  - Vocational and military history
  - Criminal and forensic record
  - Information about the crime
    - Method, victim, location, partner
  - Information about the trial
    - NRGI, sentence, confession,

Classifying the Killers

- Motive
  - Financial, thrill, power, revenge, anger, convenience
- Victim
  - Age, sex, race
  - High risk vs. low risk
  - Acquaintance vs. stranger
- Location (e.g., home invasion, street, hospital)
- Method
  - Strangle, bludgeon, shoot, stab, suffocate, poison
Classifying the Killers

- Kills family
  - Black widow (financial gain)
  - Bluebeard (power)
  - Attention (Munchhausen by proxy)
- Kills patients or other dependents
  - Angel of death (power)
  - Lethal caretakers (financial gain)
  - Baby farmers (financial gain)

Classifying the Killers

- Home invasion
  - Rape or no sex
  - Robbery or just killing
  - Age of victim (elderly, family, adult female)
  - Type of weapon used
  - Torture?
  - Overkill or mutilation?
  - Staging, posing, totems?
What Have We Learned so Far?

- Last year at SPCP
  - Profile of white, male, mid to late 20s is accurate only 18% of the time
  - Race of U.S serial killers mirrors census
  - Men are more likely to commit homicide, but once they have killed, women are as likely as men to kill again
  - Median IQ of serial killers is 103
    - Lower for rape, using hands to kill, overkill
    - Higher for using bombs and shooting

Age of Serial Killers

- Age at the start of the series
- Potential problems
  - Should we use age at first kill rather than first kill in series?
    - 6% killed prior to the start of the series
  - Should we use age at first attempted murder
  - Many of the older serial killers spent time in prison prior to their series
- Simple descriptive statistics
  - Mean = 28.8 (SD = 9.27)
  - Median = 27
  - Youngest = 11 (Mary Flora Bell, Kody Scott)
  - Oldest = 72 (Ray Copeland)
- Only 29% actually fall into their mid-to-late 20’s (23 – 29)
### Age Distribution of Serial Killers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40’s</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50’s</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60’s</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Can we predict age?
- Basically, no
- Very few significant relationships
  - Even the significant ones were very small
- Best regression model was three years more accurate than guessing the mean
  - Statistically significant
  - Useless from a practical standpoint
- Currently looking at victim type and motive
  - Shows some promise, but…
Older serial killers

- More likely to
  - Have a higher IQ
  - have been in the military
  - be married
  - have been arrested and spent time in prison
  - take a totem from the crime scene
  - kill an adult

- Less likely to
  - have a brain abnormality
  - have tortured animals
  - have been sexually abused
  - leave the body unhidden and unmoved

Age & Victim Type (in progress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street people (e.g., homeless, prostitutes)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>32.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>30.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminals (e.g., drug dealers)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home invasion</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>26.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees/customers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age and killer motive (in progress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang member</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger – Racial</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention – Munchausen by proxy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger – General anger or jealousy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain – Robbery</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>27.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment – lust &amp; thrill killers</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>28.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger – Missionary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness – Visionary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power – Angel of Death</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger – Revenge</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain – Other (e.g., black widow, baby farmer)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>34.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power – Bluebeard</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next Steps

- Continue to collect and verify data
- Finish classification system and apply to serial killers in the database
- Run regression analyses to determine if we can narrow age range of an unknown suspect
- Continue other analyses
- Publish (book? Internet? Journal?)
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Citation Information