

On Canadian Serial Killers  
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It's been Canadian serial killer week for me. All of the cases I'll refer to here received enormous media attention in Canada, one of them in the early 1990s and the other three around 2010. I hadn't known of any of them until the last few days.

This inquiry started for me—I can't remember what prompted it—with Luka Magnotta (born Eric Newman). Back around 2010, late-twenties male model and gay escort Magnotta found it advisable—get this—to post videos of himself killing kittens and stabbing to death and dismembering and eating someone, without, apparently, a hint of regret. I started with his Wikipedia entry and googled around about him. Netflix has a documentary on him called “Don't F---k with Cats,” which I can't bring myself to watch—killing kittens, including feeding them to a python, not up for that (though, I am up for encountering, as I did with these serial killer cases, the brutalization and murder of human beings; what's that about?). I read a book about Magnotta, who is now in prison for life, I didn't find useful (Brian Whitney, with Anna Yorkin [Magnotta's mother], *My Son, the Killer*).

The Magnotta material mentioned Karla Homolka. Karla was a young bride who in the early '90s with her husband, Paul Bernardo, sexually assaulted and murdered teenage girls, including her younger sister (!). Bernardo was also a serial rapist. I found the book by Nick Pron, *Lethal Marriage*, stomach-churning but riveting. Homolka made a plea bargain that got her out of prison after twelve years. She disappeared and her whereabouts and activities have remained a topic of intense interest. The Kindle Single by Paula Todd, *Karla*, was worth my time. Todd was able to track Karla down a couple of years ago and interview her. As with all of these cases, there is a ton of material online about the “Ken and Barbie killers,” as Homolka and Bernardo were called. There's

a movie, “Karla,” available at streaming sites. I watched it; awful, don’t bother.

The Homolka/Bernardo book referred to another Canadian serial killer, Russell Williams, whose case turned out to be, for me, the most fascinating of the four. Williams, a colonel in the Canadian Air Force—this was also around 2010--went from breaking into houses to steal underwear to sexual assault to the sexual assault and murder of two women. I found Alan Warren’s book, *Beyond Suspicion*, compelling reading. It includes a transcript of Williams’ confession. There’s much online about the case, including a video of his confession. Documentaries and movies have been made about Williams you can find easily enough. I haven’t seen them.

Last, the young couple, Michael Rafferty and Terri-Lynn McClintic. I came upon them because the Ontario police officer who wrung a confession out of Russell Williams, Jim Smyth, interrogated both Rafferty and McClintic. Smyth, a quiet, unassuming sort, has become a celebrity in Canada as a result. Actually, Rafferty and McClintic weren’t serial killers; they just committed one particularly heinous act. Terri-Lynne—this was in 2009--lured an eight-year-old girl walking home from school to get into Rafferty’s car by telling her she was going to see a cute puppy. Rafferty raped the little girl, and one of the two of them, it’s not clear which one, bludgeoned her to death with a hammer. Egad. No books or movies about this case that I know of, but all sorts of internet material, including their interrogations by Smyth.

What was I doing getting into serial killers (except Rafferty and McClintic), which just happened to be Canadian? I’ve expended very little energy attending to true crime in the past. There was Truman Capote’s superb literary effort, the book *In Cold Blood*, about the murder in the late 1950s of a family in Kansas, and, like everybody around at that time, I followed the O.J. Simpson and Jon Benet Ramsey murder cases in the ‘90s, but that’s about it. Oh, and there was a murder case in my home town in my youth—a lawyer contracted the murder of his wife, the mother of their four children. I wrote about it in a July, 2010 thought in this site, “On Dick WC

Anderson . . . And Me.” But nothing else comes to mind at the moment

I found a couple of things particularly intriguing about these four cases.

One of them was the mind-boggling depravity exemplified in these four cases. The Homolka/Bernardo and Williams books in particular go into great detail about what happened. That anyone could do this to another human being is incredible to me, not the least bit credible. These weren't spontaneous, heat-of-the-moment acts; they were calculated, and in some cases, they stretched out of hours, even days. Except for Terri-Lynn McClintic, I couldn't pick up remorse in any of these individuals.

What accounts for this atrocious thinking and behavior? The material I read was much better at describing what happened, and labeling it—sexual deviance, and so on—than explaining it. In truth, I haven't come to any answers about why people would commit such monstrous acts beyond the conventional wisdom (sexual abuse and violence toward them in childhood, media images, including pornography, etc.).

About all I have come to is that, indeed, there are horrible people out there, so be careful where you walk alone, and be sure to lock your doors. As I was going through these cases, I flashed on my time decades ago teaching high school subjects to incarcerated teenagers. Some of these kids were truly scary creatures—violent, amoral, without conscience. After I taught in the lock-up facility, I saw some of my former students walking the streets in the town where I live after they were released looking very ordinary and thought, people don't know what kind of beasts of prey are among them, who would torture and murder them without a moment's hesitation.

The other thing I found captivating was the interrogation of Williams by Jim Smyth. The *Beyond Suspicion* book transcription of it starts with Williams denying everything and ends with him confessing everything. How did Smyth bring that off? I went back

though the interview to see if I could pick up what Smyth was doing. Videos of the interview are online.

It turns out that Smyth employs what's called the Reid interviewing and interrogation technique—I'd never heard of it. Descriptions and analyses of it are online. Reading about the Reid technique and seeing how Smyth implemented it (google Jim Smyth) got me thinking about the suggestibility and malleability of human beings. If you know what levers to push, you can get them to think and do just about anything you want, even to point that, in Smyth's case as it's come out, they will make false confessions. You can get Iowa farm boys to put down their plows and cross the Atlantic to murder strangers (WWII). How that is done fascinates me.

Mind management piques my interest because I see people thinking and doing things that make no rational sense to me. That was particularly the case in my last years of university teaching. I see it going on in the Covid hysteria that prevails at this writing. The basic conclusion I've come to is that people can readily be shaped, conditioned. I've explored this topic some in this site. For example, see the 2011 writing on psychologist Robert Jay Lifton's formulations, "Totalism and Thought Reform in America's University."

I found all four of these cases emotionally moving and intellectually stimulating. If you have limited time and want to get into this topic, I suggest looking into the Russell Williams case. It will get you into Jim Smyth and the Reid technique. Read *Beyond Suspicion*. Google Russell Williams. Watch the videos of Smyth getting Williams to confess. I'll never forget that interrogation, affable Williams incrementally revealing himself as a ravaging murderer. Wow.

