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DEFINING MULTIPLE MURDER

Early in the morning of August 9, 1969, housekeeper Winifred Chapman telephoned the Beverly Hills Police to report a ghastly murder at the secluded hillside residence of Hollywood starlet Sharon Tate and her husband, film director Roman Polanski. When Chapman had arrived to clean the house, she discovered the bodies of five people, including 26-year-old Tate, who was eight months pregnant. The word *pig* was scrawled in blood across the front door of the luxurious home.

When the police arrived, they found what one called “a bloody mess.” Ms. Tate’s body lay in the living room of the house, a nylon rope tied tightly around her neck as though in preparation for a hanging. She had been stabbed 16 times. Next to Tate on the floor lay the limp body of her close friend, 35-year-old Hollywood hair stylist Jay Sebring. He had been stabbed seven times and shot. A towel partially obscured the rope that had been tied around his neck and then draped over a beam on the ceiling.

Two more bodies were found on the front lawn of the house, some 50 feet apart. Thirty-seven-year-old Wojciech Frykowski, a friend of Roman Polanski, had been shot five times, stabbed 51 times, and bludgeoned 13 times on the back of the head. His girlfriend, 26-year-old coffee heiress Abigail Folger, had been stabbed 28 times. Both Folger and Frykowski apparently had tried to escape but were caught while running away from the house. The fifth body, that of 18-year-old Steve Parent, was found slumped over the wheel of an automobile parked on the narrow road leading to the entry gate of the property. He had been stabbed once and shot four times. Roman Polanski was in London at the time of the slayings.

Though they lacked firm evidence linking him to the slayings, the police quickly arrested and charged 19-year-old caretaker William Garretson, who lived in a small garage-like cottage at the rear of the main house. Subsequent events, however, made it clear that the police had the wrong man. A new development suggested to the police that they were dealing with something, or someone, far more sinister and deadly.

The day after the Tate massacre, the 15-year-old son of wealthy supermarket owners Rosemary and Leno LaBianca walked into his Los Angeles home to find his parents’ bloodied bodies. Rosemary LaBianca’s body lay in the master bedroom of the house, her hands tied behind her back with an electrical cord and a pillowcase pulled over her face. She had been stabbed 41 times. Leno’s body was sprawled across the living room carpet, his hands fastened behind him with a leather thong and his face covered with a bloody pillowcase. The killers had left a carving fork protruding from his abdomen and had scratched the word *war* in his skin. He had been stabbed 27 times. Scribbled in blood on a living room wall were the words *Death to Pigs*, and on the refrigerator door, *Helter Skelter*.

Taken from a Beatles song, *Helter Skelter* was the name 34-year-old Charles Manson had given to the war between Blacks and Whites—a war that he believed would shortly

engulf the nation. He preached to his flock, members of the so-called “Manson family,” that they must prepare to move to an isolated desert area to avoid the race war he felt would inevitably result in the victory of Blacks over Whites. Manson also believed, however, that the victorious Blacks would be ineffective in governing the country and would eventually be forced to ask him to rule.

Manson never had a direct hand in the Tate/LaBianca slayings, instead orchestrating them through instructions to his obedient followers. He hoped that Blacks would be falsely accused of murdering rich, White folks and that the race war he envisaged would be hastened. Manson and two female members of his “family”—22-year-old Susan Atkins and 23-year-old Patricia Krenwinkel—were convicted on January 25, 1971, of seven counts of first-degree murder. A third Manson follower, 21-year-old Leslie Van Houten, who participated only in the LaBianca assaults, was convicted of two counts of murder in the first degree.

Charles Manson spent the rest of his life incarcerated in a California prison. At the dismay of many, he became eligible for parole due to a quirk in the law that automatically reduced his death sentence to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole when California’s death penalty was declared unconstitutional in 1972. As expected, Manson’s periodic parole reviews were proforma, and he died in 2017 at the ripe old age of 83. Given his infamy, Manson’s death made headlines in countless newspapers, and many with an unabashed tone of celebration. In classic tabloid fashion, the November 20, 2017, cover of the *New York Post* displayed Manson’s photo, beneath which were the words: “EVIL DEAD. Make room, Satan, Charles Manson is finally going to hell.”

In the decades since the Tate/LaBianca murders, Charles Manson has remained a counterculture folk hero and a popular culture icon. As described in the previous chapter, his image and infamy continue to reap profits in the murderabilia market. For the more serious-minded observers of multiple murder, Manson has been a definitional oddity. Is he a mass murderer? The murders did not take place at the same time or in the same place. Is he a serial killer? The murder spree lasted only a couple of days. Does it really matter how he is defined?

MASS, SERIAL, AND SPREE

Once upon a time, yet not that long ago, all forms of multiple murder were considered mass killing. Terms like *spree* and *serial* occasionally were used in a descriptive sense (e.g., “He went on a killing spree” or “He murdered his victims in a serial fashion”), but until just three decades ago, neither serial nor spree murder existed as special classifications for homicide.

Serial murder is a relatively new term, even though the crime itself has existed throughout the history of man’s inhumanity. We may now describe both the Boston Strangler, who terrorized young and elderly women alike in the early 1960s, and Jack the Ripper, who stalked and killed prostitutes in the poor sections of London back in 1888, as serial murderers, yet neither newspapers nor the police ever described these crime sprees as serial. Rather, the term *mass murderer* seemed to suffice. In the early 1980s, however, the FBI launched an initiative at its training academy in Quantico, Virginia, to study multiple murderers, establishing separate terms for serial, mass, and spree killings.

As shown in Table 2.1, the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) defined mass killings as homicides involving the murder of four or more victims in a single episode. A single incident is traditionally characterized as taking place within 24 hours in one location (or occasionally a few closely linked scenes). Mass murders encompass a broad range of circumstances and motives, including domestic terrorism, school shootings, hate crimes, workplace massacres, and family annihilations. We will consider each of these in more depth in later chapters.

As opposed to mass murderers, who kill multiple victims in the same incident, repeat offenders were classified by the BSU as either serial or spree killers depending on the number of victims, and more importantly, on whether or not the perpetrator *cools off* between attacks. For example, the serial killer slowly amasses multiple victims over a period of months or years, with long lapses between homicides (the cooling-off period) during which he maintains a more or less ordinary life. To further distinguish serial murder from the other two forms of multicide, the FBI employed a minimum victim and location count of three. Infamous serial killers have included Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Richard Ramirez.

In contrast, killers must claim two or more victims in multiple locations in quick succession to qualify as spree murderers. Typically, the spree killer launches a swath of destruction, usually over a period of several days, wherein most of his activity surrounds planning or executing his crimes and evading the police. In January, 1958, 19-year-old Charles Starkweather and his 14-year-old girlfriend, Caril Ann Fugate, wreaked havoc across Nebraska, killing 10 people within nine days, including Fugate's entire family. Their spree inspired the film *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and Bruce Springsteen's 1982 song, "Nebraska." In another infamous case, Andrew Cunanan killed five men, including designer Gianni Versace, while on the run in the spring of 1997, ultimately ending his spree with suicide. His actions were dramatized in the second season of the FX series *American Crime Story*.

While the BSU made strides in classifying multiple homicide for the first time, its original definitions of mass, serial, and spree murders have been widely contested over the years. Researchers quibble over the distinctions separating categories, while law enforcement agents question their practical utility. The initial minimum victim, location, incident, and time period thresholds outlined by the FBI in the 1980s seem somewhat arbitrary or vague today. For example, why is the minimum number of victims lower for spree killers than for serial and mass murderers? How long is a cooling-off period? What

TABLE 2.1 ■ Homicide Classification by Characteristic and Type

| Characteristic | Type of Homicide | | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--------|--------|------|-------|--------|
| | Single | Double | Triple | Mass | Spree | Serial |
| Number of victims | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4+ | 2+ | 3+ |
| Number of events | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3+ |
| Number of locations | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2+ | 3+ |
| Cooling-off period | NA | NA | NA | NA | No | Yes |

Source: Adapted from *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives* (p. 138), by R. K. Ressler, A. W. Burgess, & J. E. Douglas, 1988, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

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constitutes a single location—does killing in two buildings on the opposite sides of a college campus count as one scene or two? Does it even matter how these killers are classified?

In some cases, the separation of multiple homicides into subtypes is a red herring—more a meaningless distraction than a helpful distinction. For example, when a sadistic assailant murdered five college students in Gainesville, Florida, over a three-day period, too much focus and debate surrounded whether it was a serial killing or a spree murder. “A true serial murderer has a cooling off period between murders,” Barbara L. Hart of the University of Texas at Tyler told the *St. Petersburg Times*. “This is more of a spree” (Vick, 1990, p. 6A). When the frightful string of murders stopped, so did the senseless debate over classification. As investigators later learned, moreover, the killer, Danny Rolling, had actually committed a triple murder (which some would describe as a mass murder) nine months earlier, revealing the very long cooling-off period of a serial killer. In a sense, therefore, Rolling’s crimes could have been considered mass, spree, or serial, depending on the point of reference. This was a case where the distinction added virtually nothing to our understanding of his crimes.

Although distinguishing mass, serial, and spree murders may not be practically helpful for investigators, it is crucial for researchers trying to compare results across studies. For this reason, scholars have strived for decades to develop consensus definitions for the three types of multiple murder. Unfortunately, as a result, there are many competing definitions that are often—and incorrectly—used interchangeably, leading to gross misunderstandings as to the nature of these horrific crimes. In the following sections, we explore these definitions and their implications for the study of extreme killing.

MASS CONFUSION

“2019 Has Seen More Mass Shootings Than Days On The Calendar”

Source: NPR Weekend All Things Considered, 2/14/2019

“There were at least 11 mass shootings across the US this weekend”

Source: CNN, 5/11/2021

“2021 has already been a very bad year for mass shootings”

Source: Washington Post, 7/7/2021

“U.S. mass shootings set record as gun violence surges in 2021”

Source: Xinhua, 1/2/2022

A disturbing cluster of exceptionally deadly mass shootings in US schools, nightclubs, and houses of worship over the past few years, reflected in startling headlines nationally and abroad like those above, has alarmed the American public. According to the Chapman University annual survey of Americans’ fears, the percentage of respondents indicating that they were fearful or very fearful of mass shootings increased from 21.6% in 2005 to 41.5% in 2019, before being eclipsed in subsequent years by worries over the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, headlines like those cited above constantly bombard the public in the wake of a mass slaughter. While intended to draw needed attention to the scourge of gun

violence in the United States, the stories behind these headlines are somewhat misleading. A mass shooting does happen almost every day in America, but only if one relies on the broadest of definitions.

Consistent with the BSU classification in Table 2.1, mass shootings have traditionally been defined as an event in which four or more victims are killed by gunfire within a 24-hour period of time, excluding the death of the perpetrator(s) (Krouse & Richardson, 2015). However, in recent years, some analysts and news outlets have taken a different approach.

Insisting that nothing in the term *mass shooting* necessarily indicates death, some researchers have opted for a definition that includes both victims who are fatally shot and those who survive their wounds. Most notably, the Gun Violence Archive (GVA), a prominent online data source established in 2013, defines a mass shooting as an incident in which four or more victims are shot, be they dead or alive. The GVA statistics have become a popular source for news outlets, especially when the intent is to run with attention-grabbing headlines. No wonder so many Americans are afraid, believing that mass shootings are a raging epidemic.

We do not mean to ignore the awful suffering that comes from gunshot wounds, but death is different. Conflating fatalities with injuries, some of which may be minor, can be terribly misleading. Nearly half of the GVA mass shooting incidents since 2013 resulted in no fatalities, and less than one-quarter involved multiple deaths (some of which were of the assailant). Beginning in 2019, the GVA began tallying mass murders (4+ victims killed by gunfire) in addition to mass shootings (4+ victims killed or wounded by gunfire). Of the 1,711 mass shootings from 2019 to 2021, only 80 (fewer than 5%) reached the four-victim fatality threshold for mass killing.

Mass confusion arises when figures associated with the broadest notion of mass shooting are referenced by the media in their reporting on an incident of much greater severity (Fox & Levin, 2015). Unfortunately, the GVA counts of mass shootings are often invoked to portray a horrific shooting with double-digit death counts as commonplace—the “new normal” as some contend (Holt & Gosk, 2018). News stories about mass *killings* often cite GVA statistics as context, showing more “mass shootings” than days (e.g., Silverstein, 2020), leading some Americans incorrectly to conclude that mass shootings like the 32 killed at Virginia Tech or the 49 killed at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando are happening every time they turn around.

In May 2021, for example, *The New York Times* (see Victor & Taylor, 2021) published what was described as a “partial list” of the 13 mass shootings that had occurred up to that point in the year, adding that there were “many more” not included. However, the “partial list” of mass shootings was the entire list of mass killings (with 4+ victim fatalities). The incidents not listed were the nearly 200 of lesser severity, half with no deaths. In effect, the “partial list” characterization misleadingly implied that the omitted incidents were like the 13 deadliest.

Another source of confusion involves active shooter events in which a gunman is “actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (FBI, 2021). Imprecise reporting on these cases can easily deceive the public, inadvertently creating panic. News stories often conflate active shooter events with mass shootings. However, most of these wannabe mass killers fail to realize their goal. Nearly half of all active shooter events result in at most one victim fatality. One-quarter involve no deaths, and some result in no one even being injured.

So which definition is optimal? For a variety of reasons, our preferred definition is the FBI's original: four or more persons killed, excluding the offender, over a 24-hour period of time. Inclusion of nonfatal injuries fundamentally alters the nature of the crime—it is called mass murder, after all, not mass attempted murder. Also, in defining mass murder, we do not exclude non-firearm fatalities. Focusing on just mass *shootings*, rather than mass *killings*, marginalizes the deaths of victims who were not shot, but still killed. To them, does it really matter what weapon was used? In fact, the level of suffering experienced by victims who are stabbed, bludgeoned, or burnt to death is often more excruciating than that of gunshot victims.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that in some cases, whether an incident qualifies as a mass murder is simply a matter of timing, opportunity, or the assailant's skill. Public shooters try to gun down as many people as possible, but their aim may be poor or the police and ambulances may arrive in time to intervene and save lives. Some family annihilators are not considered mass murderers because they did not have enough children to kill. However, for the purposes of analysis, definitions need to be clear, reliable, and easy to apply. In the case of a mass shooting, for example, including injuries becomes problematic. Should someone suffering a life-threatening wound and someone grazed by a bullet both count toward the tally? The two are qualitatively very different. Even further, under some conceptualizations, barely injuring four people counts as a mass shooting, but killing three does not, despite the fact that the latter is much more serious. While a strict four-victim fatality threshold is certainly not perfect, at least it is unambiguous and avoids these thorny distinctions. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with our preferred definition, it is important to be aware of which definitions are being used when interpreting study results and other statistics.

COUNTING VICTIMS OF SERIAL MURDER

In the decades since the term was coined, *serial murder* has remained a hot topic for criminologists and journalists alike. At the same time, however, there has been considerable dispute about how it should be defined in practice. Much of the disagreement surrounds its breadth or scope—some practitioners limit the application to the classic lust murder (as in the German term *lustmörd*), whereas others expand the range to include profit-motivated slayings, murders by healthcare practitioners, and repeat murder motivated by hate or terror.

There has even been disagreement about the minimum victim tally required to establish repeat killings as serial—some researchers define serial murder as at least four murders separated in time, whereas others prefer a body count of at least three. Whether three or four is used to distinguish serial killers from more episodic murderers matters only in estimating the number of such predators who are roaming the highways and back alleys of America. Either way, behaviorally, they are a separate breed from those who kill on only one or two occasions, usually in response to situational factors.

In 2005, the FBI's renamed Behavioral Analysis Unit forged a formal discussion about the definition of serial murder—both in terms of victim count and motivational scope—during a five-day conference that brought together more than 100 law enforcement officials and academics who specialize in homicide research. Despite a lack of consensus, the FBI adopted the broadest possible definition in terms of both motivation and

victimization: “Serial murder is the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s) in separate events” (Morton & Hiltz, 2008, p. 12).

It is difficult to say for certain why such a broad approach was favored by the FBI’s behavioral analysts. One possible justification for lowering the minimum victim count is that an individual who repeatedly commits murder has shown the potential to commit more of them, even if circumstances, such as apprehension, curtail his or her criminal career. Nevertheless, we reject this broader definition. Quite apart from the subject of repeat killing, a pair of events usually is not considered a series. The problem with such a general and broad definition is that it loses the important qualitative distinction between someone who has committed murder once or twice and someone for whom murder is a significant feature of his or her lifestyle. Without a narrower definition, there is little reason to study serial murder as a separate phenomenon from homicide more generally.

It’s also possible that the move to lower the victim threshold, thereby expanding the pool of serial murder cases, may have been motivated by political strategy. Back in the 1980s, the FBI behavioral scientists embraced and promoted the position that thousands of Americans were being murdered each year by serial killers—a position that was without empirical foundation and grossly exaggerated. Some have speculated that the purpose of such outlandish estimates was to demand expanded resources from Congress (see Jenkins, 1994). As many researchers eventually pointed out, the serial murder victim count was in the hundreds annually, rather than the thousands. However, by redefining serial murder as repetitive murder on at least two occasions, the problem—and thus the need for additional funding—would only seem to be magnified, although artificially. Unfortunately, some scholars have been all too willing to play along with this newer criterion, even though it casts doubt on much of the research that has been accomplished to date.

A recent empirical study of the minimum victim threshold compared repeat homicide offenders by their number of victims (see Fridel & Fox, 2018). Interestingly, two-victim offenders were significantly less likely to operate with a partner or kill for enjoyment in comparison to three- or four-victim perpetrators. Three- and four-victim offenders, however, were virtually indistinguishable, lending empirical support to the idea that a minimum of three or four victims is appropriate when defining serial murder. Two-victim offenders were clearly different from their more prolific counterparts and should not be considered serial killers. Even further, the study found that the most lethal serial predators—defined as those with at least eight victims—significantly differed from serial killers with between three and seven victims in terms of partnership, method, and motive. Taken as a whole, these results suggest that serial murderers can be broken down into three subtypes: potential or wannabe serial killers with two victims, typical serial killers with three to seven victims, and prolific murderers with at least eight victims.

Equally controversial is the cooling-off period, which distinguishes serial killers from their spree counterparts who do not experience emotional breaks between murders. The precise definition of the cooling-off period remains ambiguous, ranging from 24 hours (Kraemer, Lord, & Heilbrun, 2004) to over 30 days (Holmes & Holmes, 2010) to months and years (Bartol & Bartol, 2008). One study found that the minimum time interval between serial murder kills ranged from one to over a thousand days, suggesting that what constitutes a refractory period may be highly variable (Osborne & Salfati, 2015). Based on the limited sample size, much more research is needed to define this aspect of the definition of serial homicide.

Since the FBI lowered the minimum victim threshold for serial murder to two, the cooling-off period is now the only characteristic distinguishing it from a spree killing. Without clear-cut distinctions as to the length of the cooling-off period, however, considerable overlap exists between serial and spree killing. Due to this issue, Morton and Hilts (2008) decided to abandon the category of spree murder altogether, differentiating only between serial and mass murder. While it is officially not a subtype of multiple homicide, spree murder continues to be used informally in the media.

Considering all of this evidence, we define serial murderers in this book as individuals who kill four or more victims separated by a cooling-off period of at least 24 hours. Considering the somewhat artificial distinctions among mass, serial, and spree murder, a benefit of opting for the higher victim threshold of four for serial homicide is that it parallels the definitional threshold for mass murder. Throughout the following chapters, we emphasize the motivational overlap among these offenders rather than their differences in timing.

For the sake of avoiding confusion, however, we shall follow the common practice in both the popular and professional literatures of discussing mass and serial killings as somewhat distinct types. Nevertheless, our focus on motivation rather than timing eliminates the need for the *spree killer* designation—a category sometimes used to identify cases of multiple homicide that do not fit neatly into either the serial or mass murder types.

TYPOLOGIES OF MULTIPLE MURDER

In criminology, as in most social and behavioral sciences, researchers often struggle to create typologies or taxonomies that help them to understand behavior. When a heterogeneous phenomenon, such as multiple murder, is addressed as a singular concept, it can be difficult to make sense of widely differing patterns of behavior.

There is disagreement about the value of creating typologies. Although many scholars believe that dividing mass killings into homogeneous subclasses helps to conceptualize and explain murderous behavior, some who take a more investigative or crime-solving approach may have less use for these academic exercises (see Keppel & Birnes, 2003). Even though the utility of subdividing may be more theoretical than practical, it is important not to lump all multiple-victim killings together as if they derive from the same underlying factors.

Mass Murder Typologies

Early efforts to classify mass murder were based on Dietz's (1986) typology, which was described in but a single paragraph in his seminal article on multiple homicide. His types included the family annihilator, a suicidal father or intimate partner who targets his spouse and children; the pseudocommando, a military enthusiast who strategically plans his attack and often commits suicide-by-cop; and the set-and-run killer, a vigilante who utilizes indirect means such as bombs, poison, and arson in an attempt to avoid apprehension. While Dietz did provide a useful foundation for future typologies, he only briefly explored the characteristics of each group in but a few sentences. More problematic, however, is the fact that Dietz provided no criteria by which to distinguish each category or guide classification of ambiguous cases. Noting that many incidents do not fit any of the three types, Holmes and Holmes (1992, 1994) expanded the taxonomy of mass murder to

five subtypes based on victim characteristics, motivation, anticipated gain, spatial mobility, killer lifestyle, weapon type, victim-offender relationship, and mental health status. Besides the three groups identified by Dietz, Holmes and Holmes (1992) added the disciple killer, a follower who obeys orders to murder and acts to satisfy a leader and gain psychological acceptance, as well as the disgruntled employee, a mentally ill vengeful worker who seeks revenge for a perceived wrong. Holmes and Holmes (2001) subsequently created two additional types: the ideological mass murderer who kills for a religious cause or cult and the psychotic killer who is defined by his or her mental health problems.

Though Holmes and Holmes (1992, 2001) provide greater detail than Dietz on each type and a brief description of their criteria, many cases cannot be unambiguously classified. Despite listing a plethora of characteristics used to distinguish between subtypes, most of the five groups only differ on one or two aspects (see Table 2 in Holmes & Holmes, 1992). Further complicating the matter is the unclear distinction between the traits used to classify cases in the first place—motive and anticipated gains are considered separate constructs despite their conceptual link, as are victim-offender relationship and victim traits.

Rejecting previous work, Mullen (2004) argues that mass murders can be separated by the victim-offender relationship rather than focusing on offender characteristics alone. Mass killings can thus be victim-specific (or targeted attacks against particular individuals), instrumental (where victims are part of a broad group of interest, e.g., terror killings), or massacres (where victims are indiscriminately killed). Massacres can be further broken down into civil (e.g., the result of large-scale social conflict) or autogenic (i.e., driven by the perpetrator's social history and psychopathology). Despite promise, Mullen's typology has not been widely adopted in the literature.

Regardless of which specific typology is employed, all have been broadly criticized for not being exhaustive or mutually exclusive (Gresswell & Hollin, 1994). More recent research has addressed the classification problem in several ways. Some scholars have simply avoided the issue altogether, lumping all mass murders into a single group regardless of major differences. Even worse, others have honed in on a single type of interest, typically public mass shootings, ignoring familicides and profit-motivated slayings (see Follman et al., 2016; Peterson & Densley, 2021). Considering the similarities among typologies, many scholars have instead adopted unofficial, broad categories that represent an amalgamation of previous types: family killers, who target their spouses and children before committing suicide; felony killers, who eliminate witnesses to another crime; and public killers, who attack strangers in a public space (Krouse & Richardson, 2015; Overberg et al., 2016). Elements of these three types are described in almost all early typologies, albeit with different names. While this *de facto* classification scheme benefits from being broad, multidimensional, and easy to apply, it remains somewhat *ad hoc* and informal.

Serial Murder Typologies

The first and arguably most influential typology of serial homicide is the organized-disorganized dichotomy established by the BSU (Ressler et al., 1986). The organized killer meticulously plans his murders, comes prepared with weapons and restraints, cleans the crime scene, and may even follow stories about his crimes in the news. In contrast, disorganized killers are less intelligent, more impulsive, and sloppy, leaving a plethora of evidence at the scene (Douglas et al, 1992). Research examining the validity of this distinction has been generally negative, finding the typology ineffective in classifying serial killers

(Canter et al., 2004). The original typology has subsequently been revised to acknowledge that the organized-disorganized dichotomy is, in reality, a continuum that includes a variety of mixed-type offenders. Most serial killers, however, tend to fall on the organized side of the spectrum, since they are more likely to stay active long enough to accumulate a high victim count.

Expanding on this early framework, Holmes and DeBurger (1988) and Holmes and Holmes (1998) assembled a motivational classification that distinguishes four broad categories of serial killers: visionary (obeying voices from God), mission-oriented (ridding the world of evil), hedonistic (killing for pleasure), and power- or control-oriented (killing for dominance). The hedonistic type is further subdivided into three subtypes: lust, thrill, and comfort. An empirical test of this typology, however, found that the distinct types were quite difficult to isolate without overlap (Canter & Wentink, 2004). Specifically, the category of power or control killings was found to be so prevalent—apparent in more than half of the cases—that it frequently eclipsed the other types.

An Integrated Approach

These (and other) typologies of mass and serial murder often have a troubling, but unavoidable, degree of overlap among their categories (e.g., serial killers who at one level seek to exterminate marginal victims yet also enjoy the thrill of conquest or pseudocommandos who massacre their coworkers). The potential for dual motivation is particularly likely in multiple murders committed by a team or group of offenders. For example, in the 1980 “Sunset Strip” killing spree committed by Douglas Clark and Carol Bundy, he was a sexual sadist who killed for power and control, whereas she joined in the murders to remain loyal to her boyfriend/accomplice.

Even more problematic is the apparent extent of overlap between typologies of serial murder and mass killings. A number of serial murder cases better fit a mass killer type, and certain mass killers reflect motives more common to serial offenders. For example, Richard Speck, who in 1966 raped and murdered eight Chicago nursing students in their dormitory, may have had robbery as a secondary motive, but his primary objective was, by his own admission, thrill-seeking or hell-raising. Likewise, Theodore Kaczynski, the infamous Unabomber whose fatal mail bombings spanned nearly two decades, was technically a serial killer yet resembled the *set-and-run* mass killer type.

Incorporating many elements of earlier classification schemes, a unified typology of multiple murder can be constructed using five categories of motivation applicable to both serial and mass killing: power, revenge, loyalty, profit, and terror. Multiple murders often involve a mixture of more than one of these motivations. As shown in Table 2.2, through illustrations of each, the differences in motivations seem to be far more important than the issue of timing. Apparently, contrary to the adage, timing isn't always everything.

Finally, although there are instances of both serial and mass murder for each of the five types, they vary in frequency. For example, power is a prominent motivation among serial murder cases, while revenge is the most common motivation underlying mass killings. The remaining three forms of motivation—loyalty, profit, and terror—are less commonplace for both serial and mass murder.

Power

The overwhelming majority of serial killings, as well as a substantial number of mass killings, express a theme in which power and control are clearly dominant. In serial murders,

TABLE 2.2 ■ Generic Examples of Motivation for Both Serial and Mass Murder

| Motivation | Type of Multiple Murder | |
|------------|---|--|
| | Serial Murder | Mass Murder |
| Power | Inspired by sadistic fantasies, a man tortures and kills a series of strangers to satisfy his need for control and dominance. | A pseudocommando, dressed in battle fatigues and armed with an assault rifle, turns a shopping mall into a war zone. |
| Revenge | Grossly mistreated as a child, a man avenges his past by slaying women who remind him of his mother. | After being fired from his job, a gunman returns to the work site and opens fire on his former boss and coworkers. |
| Loyalty | A team of killers turns murder into a ritual for proving their dedication and commitment to one another. | A depressed husband/father kills his family and himself to spare them from a miserable existence and bring them to a better life in the hereafter. |
| Profit | A woman poisons to death a series of husbands in order to collect on their life insurance policies. | A band of armed robbers executes the employees of a store to eliminate all witnesses to their crime. |
| Terror | A profoundly paranoid man commits a series of bombings to warn the world of impending doom. | A group of antigovernment extremists blows up a commercial airplane to send a political message. |

these cases can often be classified as thrill killings, as the killer derives thrills from the sense of power felt during the acts. Although sexually motivated murder is the most common form, a growing number of homicides committed by hospital caretakers have been exposed in recent years. Although not typically sexual in motivation, these acts of murder are perpetrated for the sake of power and control nevertheless. For example, Donald Harvey, who worked as an orderly in Cincinnati-area hospitals, confessed to killing dozens of patients over a period of years. Although he was termed a mercy killer, Harvey actually enjoyed the dominance he achieved by playing God with the lives of other people.

The thirst for power and control has also inspired many mass murderers, particularly the so-called pseudocommando killers—who often dress in battle fatigues and have a passion for symbols of power, including assault weapons. In 1987, for example, 19-year-old Julian Knight, who was truly obsessed with military might and fashioned himself as a war hero, launched an armed assault on pedestrians in Melbourne, Australia, killing seven and wounding 18. Similarly, prior to his July 2011 massacre of 77 victims in Norway, neo-Nazi Anders Breivik posted online a selfie dressed in a military uniform and pointing an assault weapon. Decades later, at his January 2022 parole hearing, Breivik hardly helped his already slim chance for release by extending his right arm and giving a Nazi salute.

The motive of power and control encompasses what earlier typologies termed the *mission-oriented killer* (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988), whose crimes are designed to further a cause. Through killing, the murderer claims an attempt to rid the world of filth and evil, such as by killing prostitutes or the homeless. For example, Peter Sutcliffe, the so-called Yorkshire Ripper who murdered 13 prostitutes in England between 1975 and 1980, in his confession explained that the women were littering the streets and he was just “cleaning up the place a bit.” However, most self-proclaimed reformists are also motivated—perhaps

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more so—by thrill-seeking and power, but provide these missions as a means of rationalizing their murderous behavior.

The true visionary killer, as rare as he may be, genuinely believes in his mission. He hears the voice of the devil or God instructing him to kill. For example, Herbert Mullen murdered 13 victims in Northern California over a period of six months in 1972–1973. In confessing to the crimes, he claimed that the murders were human sacrifices designed to prevent a catastrophic earthquake—at least, that is what the voices in his head instructed him to do. Driven by delusions, the visionary killer tends to be psychotic, confused, and disorganized.

Revenge

Many multiple murders, especially mass killings, are motivated by revenge against either specific individuals, particular categories or groups of individuals, or society at large. Most commonly, the murderer seeks to get even with people he knows—with his estranged wife and all of *her* children or the boss and all of *his* employees. In 1986, for example, Patrick Sherrill murdered 14 fellow postal workers in Edmond, Oklahoma, after being reprimanded and threatened with dismissal by his supervisor. He apparently sought to eliminate almost everyone he associated with the boss and the post office. On February 14, 2018, Nikolas Cruz, having been expelled from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, returned to get revenge against the entire institution, killing 17 students and staff members.

These crimes involve specific victims (or proxies) who are chosen for specific reasons. Some revenge multiple killings, however, are motivated by a grudge against an entire category of individuals, typically defined by race or gender, who are viewed as responsible for the killer's difficulties in life (Levin & McDevitt, 2002). In 1989, for example, long-term animosity toward feminists ignited Marc Lepine's murderous rampage at the University of Montreal, which resulted in the violent deaths of 14 female engineering students. The 1973–1974 San Francisco “Zebra killings,” in which a group of Black Muslims executed 14 White *blue-eyed devils*, illustrates the serial version of the category-specific revenge motive.

A few revenge-motivated multiple murders stem from the killer's paranoid view of society as a whole. He imagines a wide-ranging conspiracy in which large numbers of people, friends and strangers alike, are out to do him harm. William Cruse, for example, suspected that nearly everyone was against him. Unlike Marc Lepine, whose disdain was focused on one (albeit large) group, Cruse hated humanity—indeed, all the residents of his community, including the children. In 1987, the 59-year-old retired librarian launched a murderous shooting spree at a Palm Bay, Florida, Winn-Dixie supermarket, killing six and wounding another 12, all total strangers to him.

Loyalty

Unlike multiple murders for power or revenge, the remaining forms are more instrumental than expressive; that is, in the killer's mind, murder serves as a necessary, even if distasteful, means toward some desired outcome. A few multiple murderers are inspired to kill by a warped sense of love and loyalty—a desire to save their loved ones from misery and hardship. For example, in May 1990, Hermino Elizalde, described by friends as a devoted father, was concerned that his recent job loss would open the door for his estranged wife to gain custody of their five children. Rather than losing his beloved children, he killed them

in their sleep and then took his own life. By killing them all, Elizalde may have reasoned, they would be reunited spiritually in a better life after death. However, some cases of family mass murder appear to involve at least some degree of ambivalence between revenge and loyalty. Such mixed feelings can be seen in the 1991 case of a 39-year-old suicidal father, James Colbert of Concord, New Hampshire, who strangled his wife out of jealousy and then killed his three daughters to protect them from becoming orphans.

Multiple murders committed by cults reflect, at least in part, the desire of loyal disciples to be seen as obedient to their charismatic leader. In an extreme case, more than 80 Branch Davidians died in 1993 in a fiery conflagration at their Waco, Texas, compound. As devoted followers of David Koresh, they were willing to die for their radical religious cause and the beloved leader who had inspired them. Similarly, members of the Manson family, who on their own were hardly the murdering type, were nevertheless prepared to do anything that their *messiah* dictated, including butchering seven victims across two evenings in August 1969 and an additional victim two weeks earlier.

Profit

Some serial and mass murders are committed for profit. Specifically, they are designed to eliminate victims and witnesses to a crime, often a robbery. For example, in 1983, three men crashed the Wah Mee Club in Seattle's Chinatown, robbed each patron, and then methodically executed all 13 victims by shooting them in the head. More unusual, over a three-year period in the late 1980s, a 64-year-old Sacramento landlady murdered and buried nine elderly tenants so that she could steal their Social Security checks.

The 1989 ritualist cult slayings of 15 people in Matamoros, Mexico, were committed by a band of drug smugglers practicing Palo Mayombe, a form of black magic. Human and animal sacrifice was thought by the group to bring them immunity from bullets and criminal prosecution while they smuggled 2,000 pounds of marijuana per week from Mexico into the United States.

Terror

Finally, some multiple homicides are, in fact, terrorist acts in which the perpetrators hope to send a political or ideological message through murder. The Manson followers literally left the message "Death to Pigs" in blood on the walls of the LaBianca home, hoping to precipitate a race war between Blacks and Whites. The Unabomber alleged in his lengthy manifesto that his objective in killing was to save humanity from enslavement by technology. However, his attention-grabbing efforts to publish in the nation's most prominent newspapers, his threatening hoax that shut down the Los Angeles airport, and his obsessive library visits to read about himself in the news also suggest a secondary element of power and control.

A disturbing number of mass killings in recent years reflect a terror motivation. In December 2015, a married couple opened fire at a holiday party for the California Department of Health, shooting to death 14 people and injuring another 22 within just a five-minute span before being killed in an exchange of gunfire with the police. The groundwork for these murders had begun four years earlier, when the couple began discussing the importance of radical Islam, collecting their semiautomatic weapons, fashioning homemade pipe bombs, and preparing to create havoc. Six months later, in June 2016, Omar Mateen slaughtered 49 victims at Orlando's Pulse nightclub. During the shooting, Mateen made a 911 call in which he pledged allegiance to ISIL and made reference to the

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two brothers who bombed the Boston Marathon three years earlier. Reflecting a different form of hate, several White supremacists in recent years have committed mass murder in an attempt to further their agenda of hate, including the 2015 massacre at a Black church in Charleston; the 2018 mass shooting at a Pittsburgh Jewish synagogue; and the 2019 mass killing of Latinos at an El Paso Walmart.

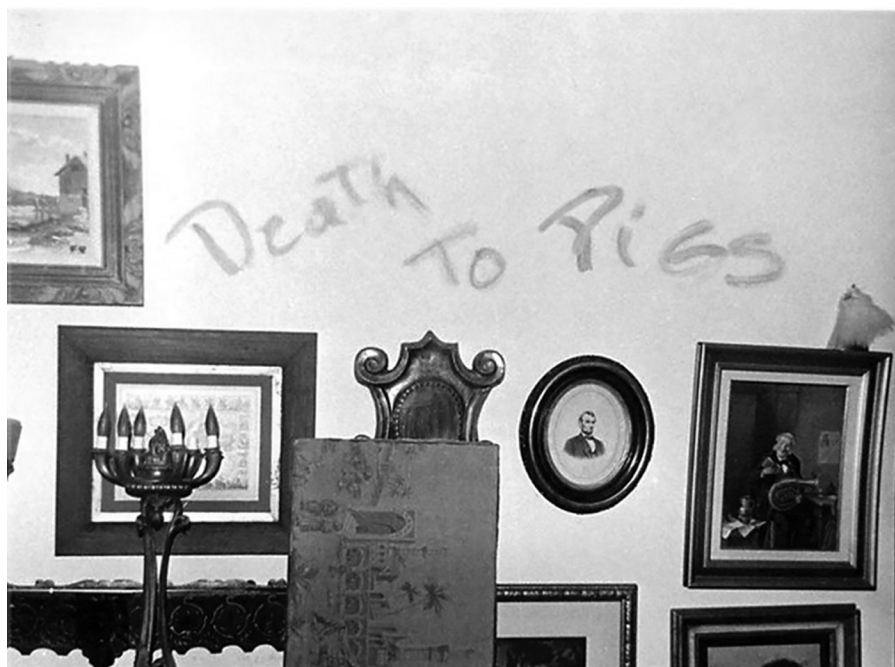


PHOTO 2.1 “Death to Pigs” on LaBianca’s living room wall

Source: [Author’s Collection].

Mixed Motives

It is not always possible to identify unambiguously a single motivation for a multiple murder—to determine with certainty whether it was inspired by profit, revenge, or some other objective. The categories of motivation are not meant to be mutually exclusive. And, of course, in some cases, it may not be possible to identify the motivation, especially if the offender is never apprehended.

In 1982, for example, seven residents of the Chicago area were fatally poisoned when they unknowingly ingested cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules. The killer responsible for placing the poisoned analgesics on the shelves of area drugstores and supermarkets was never apprehended. If the killer’s motivation was to exact a measure of revenge against society at large, then the victim selection was, in all likelihood, entirely indiscriminate or random. If, however, the motivation involved collecting insurance money or an inheritance, the killer may have targeted a particular victim for death and then randomly planted other tainted Tylenol packages to conceal the true intention. The killer’s identity and motivation may remain a mystery forever.