

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 her employer, Hollywood starlet Sharon Tate, and her husband, film director Roman Polanski. When Chapman had come to clean up the house, she discovered the bodies of five people, including Ms. 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.” The body of 26-year-old Sharon Tate 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 Frvkowski, a friend of Roman Polanski, had been shot 5 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 Frvkowski 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 LaBianca'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 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, but he orchestrated them through instructions to his obedient followers. He hoped that blacks would be falsely accused and that the race war he envisaged would be hastened. Manson and two of the 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.

In the decades since the Tate/LaBianca murders, Charles Manson has remained a counterculture folk hero and a popular culture icon. As described earlier, 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? . . . but the murders did not take place at the same time or in the same place. Is he a serial killer? . . . but the murder spree lasted only a couple of days. Or does it really matter at all?

MASS, SERIAL, AND SPREE

Once upon a time, yet not that long ago, all forms of multiple murder were considered mass killing. References to “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 two decades ago, neither serial nor spree murder existed as special classifications for homicide. In the early 1980s, however, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched a large-scale initiative at its training academy in Quantico, Virginia, to document, study, and investigate repeat killers, it established a trichotomy of multiple murder.

As shown in Table 2.1, the FBI’s Behavioral Sciences Unit (BSU) defined mass killings (or massacres) as homicides involving the murder of four or more victims in a single episode, although some researchers (see, for example, Holmes & Holmes, 2001) prefer using a three-victim threshold. Repeat murderers were then classified by the BSU as either serial or spree killers based on whether or not the offender “cools off” between attacks. Operationally, 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. By contrast, the serial killer, who may continue to kill over a period of months or years, often has long time lapses between homicides, during which time he maintains a more or less ordinary life, going to work and spending time with friends and family.

Table 2.1 Homicide Classification by Style and Type

<i>Type</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Double</i>	<i>Triple</i>	<i>Mass</i>	<i>Spree</i>	<i>Serial</i>
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+
Cool-off period	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	Yes

Source: Adapted from Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas (1988), *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives*, Table 9-1, p. 138.

Note: NA = not applicable.

Unfortunately, the classification of multiple homicides into mass, spree, and serial subtypes often has been a “red herring,” more a meaningless distraction than a helpful distinction. When a sadistic assailant murdered five college students in Gainesville, Florida, over a 3-day time period, for example, 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 “mass”) 9 months earlier, revealing a very long cooling off period for a serial killer. In a sense, therefore, Rolling’s crimes could have been considered mass, spree, and serial, depending on the point of reference, a case where the distinction adds virtually nothing to our understanding of his crimes.

In this book we strive to minimize the distinctions among the three subforms of multiple homicide, preferring to emphasize similarities in motivation rather than differences based on 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.

A TYPOLOGY 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, like 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 mass killings together as if they all derive from the same underlying factors.

In an early attempt, Holmes and DeBurger (1988) assembled a motivational classification that distinguishes four broad categories of serial killers: visionary (e.g., obeying voices from God), mission-oriented (e.g., ridding the world of evil), hedonistic (e.g., killing for pleasure), and power/control-oriented (e.g., killing for dominance). The hedonistic type is further subdivided into three subtypes: lust, thrill, and comfort. Although fewer researchers have considered mass (rather than serial) murder types, Holmes and Holmes (2001), drawing heavily from an earlier effort by P. E. Dietz (1986), proposed a five-class categorization, including disciples (e.g., youngsters who follow the dictates of a charismatic leader), family annihilators (e.g., estranged husband who slaughters his wife and children), “set and run” killers (e.g., bomb-setter), pseudo-commandos (e.g., military-style assault in a public place), and disgruntled employees (e.g., a former worker who executes his former coworkers).

These (and other) typologies of serial and mass 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 pseudo-commandos 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 “Sunset Strip” killing spree committed in 1980 by Douglas Clark and Carol Bundy, Clark was a sexual sadist who killed for power and control, while Bundy 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 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 resembles 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,

Table 2.2 Generic Examples of Motivations for Multiple Murder

<i>Motivations for Multiple Murder</i>	<i>Type of Multiple Murder</i>	
	<i>Serial Murder</i>	<i>Mass Murder</i>
Power	Inspired by sadistic fantasies, a man tortures and kills a series of strangers to satisfy his need for control and dominance.	A pseudo-commando, dressed in battle fatigues and armed with a semi-automatic weapon, 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 train to send a political message.

profit, and terror. 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.

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. As indicated earlier, many serial murders can be classified as thrill killings. 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 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 more than 80 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 also inspired many mass murderers, particularly the so-called pseudo-commando 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 7 and wounding 18.

The motive of power and control encompasses what earlier typologies have termed the “mission-oriented killer” (Holmes & DeBurger, 1988), whose crimes are designed to further a cause. Through killing, he claims an attempt to rid the world of filth and evil, such as by killing prostitutes or the homeless. However, most self-proclaimed “reformists” are also motivated—perhaps more so—by thrill-seeking and power, but try to rationalize their murderous behavior. 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 suggest a more controlling purpose.

The true visionary killer, as rare as this may be, genuinely believes in his mission. He hears the voice of the devil or God instructing him to kill. Driven by these delusions, the visionary killer tends to be psychotic, confused, and disorganized. Because his killings are impulsive and even frenzied, the visionary is generally incapable of amassing a large victim count. Clearly, the Unabomber does not appear to meet the criteria for this category of multiple killers.

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 *her* children or the boss and all *his* employees.

In discussing family homicide, psychiatrist Shervert Frazier (1975) identified the concept of “murder by proxy,” in which victims are chosen because they are identified with a primary target against whom revenge is sought. Thus, a man might slaughter all of his children because he sees them as an extension of his wife, and he seeks to get even with her. In 1987, for example, Ronald Gene Simmons massacred his entire family, including his grandchildren, to avenge rejection by his wife and an older daughter with whom he had had an incestuous relationship.

Frazier’s concept of “murder by proxy” can be generalized to crimes outside the family setting, particularly in the workplace or in schools. 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 everyone identified with the boss and the post office. Similarly, during the 1990s, a number of disgruntled students, feeling bullied or socially ostracized by classmates, launched murderous rampages in their schools. For the most part, the students and teachers were targeted at random in an attack against the institution.

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, a long-term grudge against 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 at large. 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 group (albeit large), 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 6 and wounding another 12, all total strangers.

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. Certain family massacres involve what Frazier (1975) describes as “suicide by proxy.” Typically, a husband/father is despondent over the fate of the family unit and takes not only his own life but also those of *his* children and sometimes *his* wife, in order to protect them from the pain and suffering in their lives.

For example, in May, 1990, Hermino Elizalde, described by friends as a devoted father, was concerned that his recent job loss would allow his estranged wife to get custody of their five children. Rather than losing his beloved children, he killed them in their sleep, then took his own life. By killing them all, Elizalde may have reasoned they would be reunited spiritually in a better life after death.

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.

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 3-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 illegally transported 2,000 pounds of marijuana per week from Mexico into the United States.

Terror

Some multiple homicides are in fact terrorist acts in which the perpetrators hope to “send a message” through murder. In 1969, The “Manson family” literally left the message “Death to Pigs” in blood on the walls of the Sharon Tate mansion, hoping to precipitate a race war between blacks and whites. Also, in 1978, three brothers—Bruce, Norman, and David Johnston—protected their multimillion dollar crime ring by eliminating several gang members whom they suspected would testify against them to a federal grand jury in Philadelphia. In the process, they also sent a message to the many remaining gang members: “Snitch and the same thing will happen to you.” In the Johnston brothers case, there was, of course, an element of profit in their crime ring, but the main objective in the murders was to create terror, that is, to remind everyone—not just gang members—of just how powerful the Johnston brothers were.

It is not always possible to identify unambiguously the motivation for a multiple murder, to determine with certainty whether it was inspired by profit, revenge, or some other objective. 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.

This typology provides the basic framework for understanding and making sense of seemingly senseless crimes. In the chapters to follow, we shall describe in greater detail each of these motivational patterns that apply to both serial and mass murder. Along the way, we offer a large number of case examples. The goal is not so much to describe grisly and ghastly killings but to see the method and methodical behavior in what on the surface seems to be sheer madness.