

A Simple Classification Chart of Serial Killers, Spree Killers, and Mass Murderers

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Abstract: Multiple murder is a popular topic for many movies, TV series, novels, and other art forms due to its seemingly mysterious nature. However, against the depictions of the perpetrators as being rather charismatic and charming personas, the reality is that they are individuals with serious personality disorders. To correct these misleading public images, this paper introduces a simple classification chart of serial, spree, and mass killers to promote correct public understandings of who they are and where they come from.

Keywords: serial killer, mass murder, spree killer, classification, background, cause, motive, difference

1. Wrong Public Perceptions of Multiple Murderers

Although our understanding of multiple murder has progressed substantially due to vigorous research in the field, these crimes remain the objects of unusually high levels of public curiosity, in part because of their seemingly mysterious natures [1, 2]. Indeed, serial, spree, and mass murders are the topics of many movies, TV series, novels, and true crime books. This is especially true of serial murder [3, 4]. In these productions, it is not rare for murderous characters to be depicted as being highly charismatic and rather charming people with the ability to do what ordinary people cannot, or to have understanding of an unknown truth of deep human nature that ordinary people can never achieve [5–7]. However, the fact is that those who commit these crimes are simply individuals who have been deeply psychologically scarred in their childhoods and grown up to develop pathological obsessions that allow them to commit these acts [8, 9]. That is, they have serious personality disorders and, as such, do not deserve the public attention they so often receive [10,

11].

2. A Necessary Correction

We must change the public's incorrect perceptions of murderers. It is wrong for a society to hold in awe people who pursue their own agendas and pleasures by victimizing others. To stop such social trends, we need to demystify murderers for the public by promoting an understanding of who they are and where they come from [12–13]. To dispel these myths, we need a simple system by which the public can get a clear image of who murderers really are and why they do what they do. To avoid sensationalism, we must also strive to describe serial, spree, and mass murderers concisely, without going into a level of detail that only those who specialize in the field need to know.

3. A Simple Classification Chart of Mass, Spree, and Serial Killers

Below is a simple classification chart of serial, spree, and mass murderers aimed at providing a clear image for comparing the three types of murderers, the conditions that

[26]. There have also been serial killers who show characteristics of mass murder, such as mission-orientation.

9. Availability of Human Interactions in the Childhood Backgrounds of Spree Killers

Spree killers, who had access to human interactions in their childhood, develop virtually the same emotions as typical people, yet they go on to kill multiple people in a relatively short period time without a cooling-off period [27]. They are classified into two basic types. One comes from highly neglectful family backgrounds with human interactions available, while the other comes from highly abusive family backgrounds with human interactions available. The former want to stop their murderous rampages but simply cannot, because of their pathological obsession with money, materials, or abnormal acts (i.e., murder/rape), desires that developed to fill the emotional void left by their early maternal neglect [29]. In the latter group, once they commit one murder, they become hooked on the excitement and a chain of murderous rampages ensues until some outside force stops them. In the case of spree killers, the perversion of the personality has not progressed so deeply as among genuine mass and serial killers, who were raised in neglectful or abusive homes without human interactions. Because of this, spree killers often show strong feelings of guilt or regret over their destructive acts, which sometimes leads to suicide while genuine serial and mass killers typically justify their actions fully. Also, because of this availability of human interactions, which works against the building up of stresses and frustrations, the *McDonald Triad* (i.e., a history of bedwetting, arson, and animal abuse) may not necessarily be seen in the spree killer's childhood. All, or at least two, are often seen in serial killers' childhoods [29]. Because these three types of murder are on a continuum, there are spree killers who show strong mass murderer-like characteristics and those who show strong serial killer-like characteristics.

10. All Distorted Indirect Forms of Revenge Violence

Although these three types of murder appear to be entirely

different phenomena, they are common in that they are all distorted, indirect forms of revenge violence not committed against the original perpetrators of the abuse or neglect (e.g., caregivers, bullies, teachers, etc.). Thus, the murderers' pent-up anger is released years after the fact and aimed at secondary targets, often unsuspecting total strangers, either all at once, with only very short breaks, or serially after certain intervals [25, 30]. In the case of serial murder, the unreleased anger is fermented in killer's fantasies over time and is of an extremely abnormal level. Serial killers fantasize about the absolute domination of others, controlling others' lives and deaths, the complete destruction of their bodies, sadistic acts, and so on. They often envision themselves totally covered with blood, enveloped in the putrid odor of the dead bodies [31]. In cases of mass murder, the killer's anger is either an envious rage at not being accepted by a group or society, or the desire to destroy the meaningless society that does not reflect his (or her) own values. In the mind of a mass murderer, glorified revenge-suicide (*Thanatos*) is romanticized to a level that excels sexual desire (*Libido*) [24, 32, 33]. Again, in the case of spree killers, their murderous acts are either due to a pathological obsession with certain things or acts that they want to get out of, or to a chain of destructive outbursts beyond their control once they have begun.

11. The Degree of the Normal Emotions Decides the Levels of Their Guilt

All three types of killers begin to show symptoms of their future actions around adolescence [2, 13–18]; this is typically accompanied by a strong surge of sexual hormones and psychological maturation [34, 35]. Unless they happen to have developed high levels of typical emotions, as some spree killers and exceptional serial and mass murderers have, most killers justify their murderous acts either by laying the blame on the victims (who are often social minorities), by establishing their own self-centered quibbles, or by adopting existing fundamental/satanic religions or radical/extreme philosophies, such as white supremacy [24, 25, 32, 36–38].

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