

## ✎ A Typology of Serial Killers

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Holmes and DeBurger (1998) have provided a typology that divides serial killers into four broad types: *visionary*, *mission-oriented*, *hedonistic*, and *power/control*. These are not definitive categories; many serial killers may evidence aspects of all types at various times.

- ◆ **Visionary serial killers** are typically out of touch with reality, may be psychotic or schizophrenic, and feel impelled to commit murder by visions or “voices in my head.”
- ◆ **Mission-oriented serial killers** feel it is their mission in life to kill certain kinds of people such as prostitutes and homosexuals.
- ◆ **Hedonistic serial killers** are the majority of serial killers. They kill for the pure thrill and joy of it, engaging in cruel and perverted sexual activity.
- ◆ **Power/control serial killers** gain more satisfaction from exercising complete power over their victims rather than from “bloodlust,” although sexual activity is almost always involved.

## ✎ What Causes Serial Killing?

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Becoming a serial killer is a long, drawn-out process, not a discrete event. A theory that has attempted to integrate cultural, developmental, psychological, and biological concepts is Stephen Giannangelo’s *diathesis-stress* model (1996). The theory states that all serial killers have a congenital propensity to behave and think in ways that lead to serial killing, if combined with environmental stressors. This combination leads to the development of self-esteem, self-control, and sexual dysfunction problems. These problems feed back on one another and lead to the development of maladaptive social skills, which moves the person to retreat into his private pornographic fantasy world. As he dwells longer and longer in this world, he enters a dissociative process in which he takes his fantasies to their moral limits. At this point, the killer seeks out victims to act out his fantasies, but the actual kill never lives up to his expectations or to the thrill of the hunt, so the whole process is repeated and becomes obsessive-compulsive and ritualistic.

The article by Anthony Walsh in this section examines why African American serial killers do not get the attention that white serial killers do. Walsh indicates that the media gives the impression that only white males commit serial murder, and this becomes a “fact” in the minds of the public. His sample of 413 serial killers operating from 1945 to mid-2004 in the United States, however, found that African Americans constituted 22% of the total. Because blacks have constituted about 10% of the American population averaged over that period, they are represented in the population more than twice as often as expected from their proportion of the population.

## ✎ Terrorism

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On the morning of September 11, 2001, Americans woke to horrifying images that are seared into their memories forever. Nineteen Islamic terrorists led by Mohamed Atta had hijacked four airliners and used them in coordinated attacks against symbols of America’s financial and

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military might. At 8:45 a.m., American Airlines flight 11, with 92 people on board, crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Eighteen minutes later, United flight 175, with 64 people aboard, smashed into the south tower. At 9:40, American Airlines flight 77, carrying 64 people, crashed into the Pentagon. Then at 10 a.m., United flight 93, carrying 45 people, crashed into a Pennsylvania field, having been prevented from accomplishing its mission (apparently to destroy the Capitol Building or the White House) by the courageous actions of its passengers. These actions cost the lives of close to 3,000 people from 78 different countries, making it the deadliest terrorist attack in history anywhere (U.S. Department of State, 2004). What were these people trying to accomplish by such a wanton act, and what drove them to sacrifice their own lives in the process?

The FBI defines **terrorism** as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social goals” (Smith, 1994, p. 8). It is estimated that up until 1995, terrorists cost the lives of 500,000 people in the 20th century (Rummel, 1992), with another 1,269 killed in the last five years of the century (U.S. Department of State, 2004). Terrorism has a long history; it is “as old as the human discovery that people can be influenced by intimidation” (Hacker, 1977, p. ix). Terrorism is a tactic used to influence the behavior of others through intimidation, although terrorists typically appeal to a higher moral “good,” such as ethnic

autonomy or some religious or political dogma, to justify the killing of innocents. Nevertheless, they strike at innocents because the very essence of terrorism is public intimidation, and the randomness of terrorist action accomplishes this better than targeting specific individuals would. Victims are incidental to the aims of terrorists; they are simply instruments in the objectives of (1) publicizing the terrorists’ cause, (2) instilling in the general public a sense of personal vulnerability, and (3) provoking a government into unleashing repressive social control measures that may cost it public support (Simonson & Spindlove, 2004).

While terrorist violence is immoral, it is not “senseless” because it has an ultimate purpose: Evil means are justified by the ends they seek. The terrorist attacks on trains in Madrid, Spain on March 11, 2004 (exactly 911 days after the 9/11 attacks in America), which took the lives of at least 200 people, led to the fall of a conservative government that supported the U. S. action in Iraq and the election of a socialist government three days later. The new government immediately pulled Spanish troops out of Iraq, which was evidently the purpose of the bombings. Every time terrorists gain an objective they have sought, the rationality of terrorism is demonstrated along with its immorality.



▲ **Photo 10.4** The September 11, 2001 attack on New York’s Twin Towers and the Pentagon, carried out by al-Qaeda operatives, stunned the world. Ultimately, it resulted in passage of a comprehensive Patriot Act, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and a war with Iraq.

While terrorism has ancient roots, it is far more prevalent today. Of the 74 groups listed by the U.S. Department of State (USDS) in 2003, only three active at the turn of the 21st century originated before 1960 (IRA, ETA, and the Muslim Brotherhood). Terrorist incidents also rose dramatically after the 1960s, peaked at a high of 665 in 1987, and then dropped to a low of 190 incidents in 2003. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCC) reports 651 terrorist attacks in 2004 that claimed 1,907 victims (NCC, 2005). Of the 74 listed terrorist groups, 39 are Islamic, 18 were Marxist/Maoist, and the remaining 17 were hybrids of Marxist/Islamic groups or nationalist groups.

## The Causes of Terrorism

There are as many causes of terrorism as there are terrorist groups because it cannot be understood without understanding the historical, social, political, and economic conditions behind the emergence of each group. Perhaps the one generality we can make is that all groups originated in response to some perceived injustice. Although certain kinds of people may be drawn to terrorism, terrorists are not a bunch of “sicko-weirdos.” If they were, we would have defeated terrorism long ago. Terrorist groups take pains not to recruit anyone showing signs of mental instability because such people are not trustworthy and would arouse the suspicion of their intended targets (Hudson, 1999, p. 60).

Many Islamic terrorists are recruited from religious schools known as **madrasas**. Some of these schools teach secular subjects, but they mostly focus on religious texts and stress the immorality and materialism of Western life and the need to convert all infidels to Islam (Armanios, 2003). The madrasas are appealing to poor Muslim families because they offer free room and board as well as free education. Many members of the Afghani *Taliban* regime studied and trained in Pakistani madrasas stressing a strict form of Islam. Children are indoctrinated in these schools with anti-Israeli and anti-American propaganda from the earliest days of their lives. A person nurtured on such material is ideal material for recruitment as a “martyr” to the cause. Martyrdom brings with it the promise of immediate ascension into heaven, where he will find “rivers of milk and wine . . . lakes of honey, and the services of 72 virgins” (Hoffman, 2002, p. 305).

## Is There a Terrorist Personality?

Some theorists are of the opinion that we should look at what terrorist groups have to offer if we want to understand why individuals join them: “Terrorism can provide a route for advancement, an opportunity for glamour and excitement, a chance of world renown, a way of demonstrating one’s courage, and even a way of accumulating wealth” (Reich, 1990, p. 271). Terrorism is much like organized crime, in that it provides illegitimate ways to get what most of us would like to have—fame and fortune. Terrorists also have a bonus in that they, and their comrades and supporters, see themselves as romanticized warriors fighting for a just and noble cause, and in the case of religious terrorists, the favor of their God and the promise of a rewarding afterlife.

Some scholars view terrorists as people with marginal personalities drawn to terrorist groups because their deficiencies are both accepted and welcomed by the group (Johnson & Feldman, 1992). These scholars also see the terrorist group as made up of three types of individuals: (1) the *charismatic leader*, (2) the *antisocial personality*, and (3) the *follower*. The