

CHAPTER 19



Going Berserk

The August 12, 1966, issue of *Time* magazine led with a story of national pride—the wedding of Luci Baines Johnson, daughter of President Lyndon and Mrs. Lady Bird Johnson. Americans certainly love a wedding, but apparently they are more fascinated by murder. The presidential wedding was unceremoniously upstaged by a story of national sorrow. The cover photo of *Time* highlighted another Texan, Charles Whitman. On August 1, 1966, Whitman had climbed atop the 307-foot tower on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin and had opened fire on the campus from a vantage point behind the tower's huge clock. Ninety-one bloody minutes later, 14 people were dead or dying. Thirty more lay injured in a 16-block area surrounding the tower; strewn with casualties, it looked more like a war zone than a college campus. Another victim of Whitman's rampage was the fetus of a woman 8 months pregnant that was stillborn. In addition to these casualties, Whitman had killed his mother and his wife the night before, and Whitman himself was gunned down by a team of four officers at the top of the tower.

To those who knew Charlie casually, he was the all-American boy, certainly not the popular image of a deadly killer. A committed and hardworking student, he had earned all As during his final semester at the University of Texas; over his entire college career as an architectural engineering major, his average was in the B range. He also seemed to be a friendly and caring fellow. After having been an Eagle Scout in his youth, Whitman as an adult served as a scoutmaster and impressed the scouts' parents as being good with the children. Being a bright student and a respected member of the community, he seemed to have a promising future. But his parents, his wife, and his friends knew the real Charles Whitman, a troubled man who, according to his psychiatrist, was “oozing with hostility” (Lavergne, 1997, p. 70). Whitman had in fact told the doctor that he thought about “going up on the tower with a deer rifle and shooting people” (Lavergne, 1997, p. 71), but the therapist considered this to be merely one of the many idle fantasies that depressed college students entertained about the tower. Whitman also beat his wife on occasion, as reportedly his father—whom he hated passionately—had done to the mother Charles loved.



Photo 19.1 Random massacres, such as Charles Whitman's shooting spree from the University of Texas tower, attract the most attention yet are the rarest form of mass murder. (Associated Press)

Charles Whitman was proud to have served in the Marines. However, his military career was not as honorable as some believed. He had been demoted from corporal to private for a number of transgressions, including assault, gambling, and the possession of illegal firearms. While in the Marines, he was decorated for achieving the class of sharpshooter. Whitman was well acquainted with guns even as a youngster. "Charlie could plug a squirrel in the eye by the time he was sixteen," said his father, in a dramatic example of understatement (Lavergne, 1997, p. 5). During Whitman's spree at the tower, an onlooker three blocks away remarked to a friend that they were safely out of range; then he was shot.

Whitman had the hostility to commit the crime as well as the skillful shot, needing only to amass the large arsenal of weapons that Texas law permitted him to purchase. It was only the delay of a few minutes, when Whitman stopped to shoot a receptionist and some tourists who stood between him and his gun post that prevented him from opening fire between class periods on the thousands who would have been under his gun.

PARANOID THINKING

Most mass killers target people they know—family members, friends, or coworkers—in order to settle a score, to get even with the particular individuals whom they hold accountable for their problems. Others seek revenge against a certain class or category of people who are suspected of receiving an unfair advantage. But a few revenge-motivated mass murders stem from the killers' paranoid view of society at large. They imagine a wide-ranging conspiracy in which large numbers of people, friends and strangers alike, are out to do them harm.

As we have seen, family and workplace mass murder typically is committed by a perpetrator who is clearheaded and rational, though resentful and depressed. By contrast, a random mass murder often reflects the distorted thinking of a psychotic on a suicidal mission.

Mullen (2004) has labeled this type of massacre as *autogenic*. Based on a detailed examination of five cases, he concluded that autogenic mass killers

share certain social and psychological traits, including social isolation, feelings of persecution verging on delusional, an absence of remorse, and suicidal intentions. Most also exhibit an extreme sense of entitlement as well as a self-righteous view of their troubled life.

This kind of mass killer blames the world for his problems and decides to get even. The more people he kills, no matter who they are, the sweeter the revenge. To some extent, this psychotic reasoning also may be found in certain hate-motivated mass killers, such as Patrick Purdy, who targeted absolute strangers just because they were Southeast Asians. But those who carry out a random massacre believe that almost everyone is their enemy. They hate virtually all of humanity.

Mass murderer William Cruse, for example, suspected that nearly everyone was against him. He focused his anger on his noisy neighbors and gossipy grocery clerks, and on the children who played on his block, but he really hated all of the residents of the Palm Bay, Florida, community in which he lived.

On a Thursday evening, April 23, 1987, the 59-year-old retired librarian went on a bloody rampage in a local shopping center, killing six people and injuring another 12. At his trial, several psychiatrists testified that William Cruse suffered from a severe mental illness known as paranoid schizophrenia. He believed that he was the target of a wide-ranging conspiracy to destroy his life, and he often imagined seeing acts of disrespect and indignity that were designed to anger him.

As a young man, Cruse seemed happy and healthy enough. He graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1951 with a BA in history and in 1954 with a master's degree in library science. From 1955 to 1967, he worked as a librarian at the Cincinnati Public Library.

But Cruse had long-standing psychological problems that became more severe with advancing age. As a middle-age adult, he was described by neighbors in his home state of Kentucky as a weird and strangely cantankerous man who despised children. In 1980, he was charged in Lexington with public intoxication.

After Cruse moved to Palm Bay, his already considerable paranoia deepened. He was convinced that the people on his block were spreading false rumors that he was a "homosexual," "effeminate," and "queer." The clerks at the local Winn-Dixie and Publix supermarkets must have heard the gossip somehow, Cruse imagined, because they appeared to stare at his crotch whenever he went shopping. He even thought he saw one grocery store clerk stick out his tongue at him, for no good reason.

Almost every afternoon for 2 years before his rampage, the nondescript, gray-haired man would visit the Palm Bay Public Library located little more than a mile from his home. He never spoke to employees nor did he check out a book. For a few minutes daily, he sat quietly by himself at a table and read the *Wall Street Journal*.

From Cruse's paranoid perspective, the neighborhood children repeatedly harassed him and trespassed on his property. He interpreted normal juvenile behaviors as personal assaults on his privacy. If a child attempted to retrieve a wayward ball, Cruse saw it as trespassing. If the kids on the block made noise, he took it as harassment. In response, he shouted obscenities and

made sexually suggestive gestures. After a while, Cruse felt so beleaguered that even a child innocently strolling past his house was enough to send him into a frenzy. He would rush out and shoot his rifle into the air.

At 6 p.m. on the fatal evening in April, Cruse heard a noise outside his house. He peeked through the blinds to find two young boys walking back and forth past his bungalow. Cruse confronted them outside, screaming vulgarities at them, but they only laughed in his face. Enraged even more, he then rushed back into his house to get his three guns—a Ruger .223 semiautomatic rifle, a .357-caliber Ruger revolver, and a Winchester 20-gauge shotgun—and a bagful of bullets.

By the time he came back out front, the boys were nowhere to be found. Having nobody else to victimize, Cruse aimed his rifle at a 14-year-old boy who was shooting hoops in his driveway across the street, striking him in the buttocks. He then jumped into his white Toyota and drove to a nearby shopping mall in which the Publix supermarket was located. First, he opened fire at point-blank range on two college students as they strolled nonchalantly in the parking lot. Then he walked over to a woman who was sitting in her car and shot her in the head.

Cruse must have been thinking of all those grocery store clerks who he thought had sneered at him and had challenged his sexuality, as he tried in vain to get into the Publix Market through an automatic exit-only door. But he was so confused that he couldn't find the entrance. Giving up in frustration, he then drove his Toyota to the Winn-Dixie supermarket in a shopping center across the road. Rushing to the grocery store, he confronted two policemen who had been dispatched in response to the shooting. Cruse quickly gunned them down as they attempted to block the entrance to the store. He then shot his way through the Winn-Dixie, firing at frightened customers and employees as they fought to get out of his way.

Cruse followed a 21-year-old woman into the ladies' restroom and, for 6 hours, kept her hostage. In the meantime, the police formed a human barricade surrounding the store. Cruse talked to his captive about killing both of them, but shortly after midnight, he released his hostage. The police apprehended him as he attempted to escape.

Cruse pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. He claimed no memory of the tragic massacre, and defense psychiatrists confirmed that he was a paranoid schizophrenic. Despite Cruse's history of bizarre behavior and delusional thinking, the jury wouldn't buy the defense. Perhaps fearing that he might escape too easily if they were to return an insanity verdict, the jury found Cruse guilty on six counts of first-degree murder and recommended the death penalty. On November 30, 2009—more than 20 years after he committed mass murder—Cruse died in his cell on Death Row, but of natural causes.

Unlike mass killings in which specific victims are targeted because of a grudge, random massacres are not necessarily preceded by some clear-cut precipitant such as the loss of a job or a relationship. The psychotic killer can create his own catalyst in his mind, even if no major external event occurred. Thus, for example, a clerk who is perceived to stick out his tongue is enough to drive someone like William Cruse over the edge. Also, unlike family-related and workplace rampages for which the perpetrators generally

engage in long-term planning, random slaughters occasionally are spontaneous, in response to objectively trivial or innocuous experiences. There is no evidence, for example, that William Cruse contemplated, for any longer than a few moments, his attack in Palm Bay.

CONFUSED STATE OF MIND

Part of the reason why random massacres occur so infrequently is that their perpetrators are typically too out of touch with reality to carry out their plan of attack in an effective, methodical manner. They may attempt mass murder, but generally they fail to complete it—perhaps succeeding in killing one or two of their many “adversaries.” Indeed, it may be difficult to concentrate on killing scores of people if “the voices” keep interrupting.

The deranged mind of 26-year-old Dion Terres of Kenosha, Wisconsin, apparently prevented him from exacting as much revenge on society as he had sought. He lived by himself, had no real friends, and hated the world and everybody in it—everybody, that is, except for Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Aileen Wuornos, and Adolf Hitler, all of whom he admired. More than just a serial killer groupie, Terres believed that his thought processes were just like those of serial killers, except that he was smarter. In addition to his odd fascination with the champions of murder, Terres suffered from numerous delusions. He claimed to have exhumed the corpse of Abraham Lincoln and to have placed it in his bathtub. He reported hearing voices and he worshipped Satan.

For Dion Terres, 1993 was not a good year. In March, he was fired from his job assembling cellular phones at the Motorola plant in Arlington Heights, Illinois.irate over being terminated, Terres went out and purchased an AR-15 assault rifle from a local gun dealer, though he thought twice about using it on his former boss. In August, the other shoe dropped, and Terres thought a third time about using his rifle. His girlfriend, 16-year-old Kimberly Sinkler, said she wanted nothing more to do with him after he began making veiled threats about raping and poisoning her. He even went so far as to follow Kim to her job at a local hospital.

By August 10, Terres could take no more of life. It was time to get the justice he believed he deserved. Dressed for battle in his military fatigues, he tossed two guns, including the AR-15 that he had bought in March, onto the passenger seat of his blue sedan and drove 2 miles to the McDonald’s on Pershing Boulevard in Kenosha. Parking in the lot next to the drive-through, Terres grabbed his weapons and, in a panic, locked his car behind him. At this point, he realized that he had locked his keys inside the car—and, worse, his 30-round gun clip for the semiautomatic. He was getting more and more confused and disoriented. Rather than abort his mission, Terres threw the useless AR-15 onto the pavement, forgetting about the spare clip in his breast pocket, and decided to forge ahead with just his .44-caliber revolver.

There were some 20 employees and customers inside the restaurant when Terres made his entrance. Standing over two young boys who were eating their lunch, he shouted, “I want everybody out of here!” (Lisher & Tijerina,

1993). Before anyone could move, however, Terres fired away. Fifty-year-old Bruce Bojesen was shot in the head and died instantly. Sandra Kenaga, age 39, died the next morning from back wounds. One other person received a minor injury in the arm. Terres saved the last bullet for himself. He shoved the revolver under his chin and pulled the trigger.

Those who survived the attack were lucky—lucky because Terres had locked himself out of his car, had forgotten to take the clip from inside, and had forgotten about the spare clip he was carrying. They were lucky that Terres's state of mind got in his way. He had everything it takes—the frustration, catastrophic loss, isolation, conspiratorial thinking, and access to firearms—to become a mass killer. He had everything, that is, but the ability to think clearly and act methodically.

Mass murderers who attempt to settle a grudge against a particular list of victims—such as an estranged father or husband or an embittered employee—tend to be middle-age. It is generally not until they reach their 30s or 40s that life's frustrations accumulate to the point that they seem intolerable and insurmountable. But those killers who actually go berserk and kill indiscriminately as a result of psychotic thinking can come from any age group. Schizophrenia, for example, often has its onset in late adolescence. Thus, someone as young as Terres, or even younger, can perceive that the whole world is out to get him, so he decides to get them first. Any minor incident could trigger a rampage.

LONG-STANDING MENTAL ILLNESS

In December 2007, Robert Hawkins, a 19-year-old man with a history of mental illness, carried the semiautomatic rifle he had stolen from his stepfather's home into an Omaha, Nebraska, shopping mall and took the elevator to the third floor of a department store, where he opened fire at random on customers and employees. Before killing himself with a gunshot to the head, Hawkins took the lives of eight innocent people. The killer left a suicide note in which he apologized "for everything" but then added "Now, I'll be famous."

Apparently, the appeal of infamy was a result of the gunman's immediate miseries as well as his long-standing mental illness. He had moved out of his parents' house a year earlier and, 2 weeks before his rampage, had broken up with his girlfriend and then lost his job at McDonald's. To add insult to injury, Hawkins had been arrested 11 days earlier and was due in court a couple of days after his rampage on a charge of underage drinking.

Like so many of those gunmen who go berserk, Hawkins's troubled past extended back into his early childhood. By the age of 6, he had already taken psychiatric medications, undergone psychotherapy, and been hospitalized for depression. At the age of 14, he spent time in a mental health treatment center after threatening to kill his stepmother with an axe. For a period of 4 years, Hawkins became a ward of the State of Nebraska and was hospitalized twice more for depression-related illnesses. He was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, mood disorders, and oppositional defiant disorder. To the very end, family members and friends described him as being plagued by psychiatric problems.

The pseudocommando, Rambo-style killer isn't always a man. It was in the late afternoon of October 30, 1985, that a young woman walked hurriedly from the parking lot into a shopping mall in Springfield, Pennsylvania. Unlike other shoppers, with their bags and packages in hand, 25-year-old Sylvia Seegrism carried a .22-caliber semiautomatic rifle and was dressed in battle fatigues and black boots.

Pausing briefly at the entrance to the mall, Seegrism eyed her prospective victims and opened fire. Her first target was a 2-year-old boy who couldn't escape fast enough. Seegrism fired point-blank at the youngster; his body slumped to the ground in a heap. She then rushed into the mall, firing indiscriminately at least 15 times as she made her way along the main walkway through the crowd of shoppers. One bullet hit a 64-year-old man as he attempted to take refuge in a nearby shoe store. Seegrism continued her shooting spree until a college student managed to wrestle her to the ground and take her weapon. By that time, she had hit 10 people with gunfire, killing three of them.

At her arraignment, Seegrism told the judge, "Hurry up, man. You know I'm guilty. Kill me on the spot" (Botsford, 1990). She was charged with murder, attempted murder, aggravated assault, and possession of an unregistered firearm but was later found to be criminally insane and was committed indefinitely to a psychiatric hospital.

Only the criminal aspects of the case had been resolved. What remained was a question of civil law: Was the shopping mall in some way responsible for Sylvia Seegrism's rampage and therefore liable to the victims for the damages? Was the mall negligent in failing to provide adequate security for its customers? Should the mall have initiated commitment proceedings against Seegrism, who had been known to the security force for her belligerent and threatening manner?

In court, a security expert for the plaintiffs in the civil suit testified that a well-trained guard stationed at the main entrance to the mall could have stopped Seegrism from shooting customers. The plaintiffs' psychiatrist noted that she had visited the McDonald's restaurant in the mall shortly after a widely publicized rampage at the San Ysidro McDonald's in July 1984. At that time, she had suggested—mainly to herself but out loud nonetheless—that she might repeat Huberty's mass murder in Springfield and pointed her finger like a gun, while saying "rat-tat-tat-tat." Several more times over the course of the next year, she returned to the mall, acting in a bizarre manner and making threats or threatening gestures. The psychiatrist for the plaintiffs suggested that the mall management should have attempted to have Sylvia Seegrism committed to a mental hospital, but didn't.

The defendant's psychiatrist testified that it was extremely doubtful that Seegrism would have been committed for making threats. Pennsylvania laws had been tightened in recent years in order to prevent unjustified civil commitments. It was no longer possible to hospitalize a person against his or her will without clear-cut proof of dangerousness. Moreover, even if successfully committed, Seegrism could not have been held very long anyway. A criminologist testifying for the defense emphasized that most people who make threats never follow through with them. He argued that a reasonable person could not have foreseen the occurrence of the crime, because it is extremely

rare. Even if it had been foreseeable, Sylvia Seegrist's shooting spree was still unstoppable—unless, of course, the entire mall had been turned into an armed camp (Sherman, 1990).

In February 1990, a Delaware County jury decided that the shopping mall was indeed liable for damages and awarded an undisclosed amount of money to Sylvia Seegrist's victims. Seegrist herself remains hospitalized in an institution for the criminally insane. Only after murdering three innocent strangers was there sufficient proof to ensure that Seegrist would receive the long-term psychiatric care that she had long needed for treatment of psychosis.

Sylvia Seegrist was truly an exceptional case. Not only is it rare for a woman to murder strangers, but it is equally uncommon for a woman to kill in the manner that she did. Even though females sometimes commit murder with a firearm, it is usually a handgun, not a military assault rifle. Seegrist used a .22-caliber semiautomatic and dressed in military fatigues.

Serious mental illness is apparently an important predisposing factor in the lives of rampage killers. Unlike their more prevalent counterparts who target family members, coworkers, or classmates, those who kill indiscriminately either within a category (e.g., women) or against humankind in general seem to suffer from severe psychopathology. They may be delusional and hallucinatory, killing in the course of a psychotic episode. The more random a massacre, the more likely it is that serious mental illness plays a role.

One clue that killers may be psychotic is their age at the time that they go on a rampage. Aside from school shooters who target their classmates, mass murderers generally tend to be at least in their thirties if not older. Their motivation usually comes from seeking to get even with those particular individuals whom they blame for their personal miseries, but they are typically not psychotic. Instead, they have suffered some catastrophic loss—the loss of a job or money, the loss of an important relationship, or the loss of academic standing—and seek to exact a measure of revenge against those who are regarded as responsible. Most middle-age mass killers are selective in targeting specific individuals—coworkers, family members, or classmates. Some have gone out of their way to avoid taking the lives of easy targets who are perceived to be entirely innocent of having contributed to the killer's miseries. In 1986, for example, postal worker Patrick Sherrill, the evening before he attacked fellow employees in an Edmund, Oklahoma, postal facility, made a phone call to his good friend and colleague at the post office warning him not to come to work the next morning.

By contrast, those killers who have committed a random massacre of strangers in a public place—a shopping mall, a parking lot, a cinema—are frequently in their early to mid-20s, a stage of life during which the symptoms of severe mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia) begin to take hold. Schizophrenia is a serious illness that often appears during late adolescence or early adulthood and is frequently marked by an inability to distinguish fantasy from reality or to be in touch with other people. The condition's characteristics include having delusions and hallucinations, as well as withdrawal, lack of emotion and motivation, and attention and memory problems (Mayo Clinic, 2012). People who suffer from a particular form known as paranoid schizophrenia may hear voices that aren't there, feel anxiety and anger, and believe

that people are out to get them. Most schizophrenics never kill anyone, but a few lose the capacity to think clearly about themselves and others, perceiving that everybody is out to get them.

Ted Kaczynski, the so-called Unabomber who sent letter bombs through the mail for some 18 years, was still an undergraduate student when he developed the symptoms of schizophrenia. Twenty-four-year old Jared Loughner, who, following his deadly rampage at a public rally for Arizona Congresswoman Gabby Giffords in Tucson, was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic by more than one psychiatrist; Sylvia Seegrist was 25 years old when she killed three customers at a mall in a Springfield, Pennsylvania, shopping center. Seegrist who had been diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia was found not guilty by reason of insanity.

Similarly, the Aurora cinema killer, James Holmes, was only 24 when, in 2012, he directed gunfire indiscriminately at total strangers in the audience of a showing for a new Batman film. After leaving his PhD program in neuroscience at the University of Colorado in June 2012, he opened fire in a crowded cinema rather than on campus where he might have taken the lives of the professors on his graduate committee. As indicated earlier, there have been other graduate students who blame professors for their loss of academic standing, but they usually aim their violence at faculty and students, not at dozens of strangers in a motion picture audience.

The Aurora killer's indiscriminate rampage provides a clue as to his mind-set. On campus, Holmes had seen a psychotherapist who specialized in schizophrenia. The schizophrenic diagnosis would explain a number of characteristics that depart from the profile of a typical mass killer.

It would explain why Holmes dyed his hair red and then informed the police "I am the Joker" when he was apprehended. If schizophrenic, he might really have believed it.

It would explain why he booby-trapped his apartment with explosives in order to take the lives of police officers but then told the police about it before they entered the building. His original intention was to rig his apartment so that attention was diverted from his cinema attack. But he seemed to be profoundly confused, suffering from a serious thought disorder that prevented even more innocent lives from being taken by the bombs in his apartment.

It would explain why he never intended to commit suicide. Most other mass murderers set out to take their own lives, even if they don't succeed. This killer went to the crime scene wearing protective body armor and then dropped his weapons and gave himself up without a struggle.

Schizophrenic or not, there is really little that can be done to deter a mass killer once he has murderous intentions. But we should attempt to intervene in the life of a troubled individual long before he becomes troublesome. The Virginia Tech mass murderer Seung-Hui Cho had been bullied and humiliated throughout middle and high school but was never helped by staff members or bystanders. It was only during his college days that an instructor who felt threatened by Cho's behavior in class attempted to get him into counseling. At that point, it was simply too late to avert disaster.

A Gallup poll taken after the Washington Navy Yard massacre in which 12 people were fatally shot by an apparently deranged gunman revealed that Americans fault

the mental health system for mass murder, even more than inadequate gun laws (see Saad, 2013). Apparently, according to John Q. Public, guns don't kill, psychotic people do.

It would certainly be a fitting legacy to the tragedy of mass murder if mental health services were expanded and improved. Countless people who struggle psychologically would benefit as a result. However, greater access to treatment options may not necessarily reach the few individuals on the fringe who would seek to turn a school, a movie theater, or a military facility into their own personal war zone. With their tendency to externalize blame and consider themselves victims of injustice, mass killers demand fair treatment, not psychological treatment on demand.

The postmassacre initiative to aid the psychologically impaired is the right thing to do, but for the wrong reason. For example, during a speech in Hartford, Connecticut, delivered months after the Newtown school shooting, President Barack Obama (April 8, 2013) urged Congress to respond: "We need to help people struggling with mental health problems get the treatment they need *before it is too late*" [emphasis added]. We should endeavor to help the mentally ill out of concern for their well-being, not just because we are worried about the well-being of those they might kill.

We must resist the urge to equate mental illness with mass murder. Unfortunately, the timing of current proposals to upgrade the mental health system whose flaws have been exposed by mass murder tends to stigmatize the vast majority of people who suffer with mental illness, as if they too are mass murderers in waiting. We might not only fail to prevent mass murder but make it less likely that those most in need will seek appropriate treatment.

CIVILIAN BATTLEFIELDS

It is not possible to trace how Sylvia Seegrist developed her unusual passion for military paraphernalia, but for 41-year-old James Oliver Huberty, fascination with firearms was somewhat of a family tradition, dating back at least to his great-uncle, who had invented a machine gun used during World War I. There were guns everywhere in the Huberty home—in the bedroom, in the kitchen, on the shelves in the parlor, and, of course, in the basement, where James maintained his own makeshift firing range. He spent hours practicing his shooting, that is, when he wasn't cleaning his guns or modifying a semi-automatic into a fully automatic-fire instrument. He especially loved his dearest friend and companion—his Uzi, one of several guns he took to McDonald's on July 18, 1984.

For most of his adult life, Huberty had been slipping down a deep hole of depression and paranoia. By the time he moved his family to California and then lost his job as a security guard for a condominium complex in San Ysidro, he had reached rock bottom. On that fateful Wednesday in July, after an uncharacteristically relaxing family outing with his wife, Etna, and his two daughters, Zelia and Cassandra, Huberty was ready for Armageddon.

Huberty changed into his favorite, most comfortable clothes, military fatigues that he had purchased through an army surplus mail-order catalog.

He wrapped his favorite weapon, an Israeli-made Uzi assault rifle, in a blue-and-white-checked blanket and said good-bye to his wife and daughter Zelia. “I’m going hunting,” he told his wife of 19 years.

In the middle of San Ysidro, a working-class suburb of San Diego just north of Tijuana, Mexico, there are no hunting grounds. Etna knew that, but she also knew that her husband frequently babbled nonsense. Recently, he had been experiencing hallucinations, including imagining a 3-foot Jesus conversing with him in the living room. She urged her husband to seek professional help, and he was beginning to realize that he needed it. In fact, on July 17, he placed a call to a local mental health clinic seeking an appointment. By the time that someone from the clinic called back, however, it was too late.

And a-hunting he did go—hunting for humans at the McDonald’s just a few blocks down San Ysidro Boulevard. Huberty drove the short distance to the popular family restaurant and parked his beat-up Mercury sedan in the parking lot out front. He then strode through the door, armed to the teeth and hungry for revenge.

Looking up from their Happy Meals, children sat frozen in disbelief as Huberty started shouting and shooting. “I’ve killed a thousand,” screamed Huberty, “I’ll kill a thousand more” (Time-Life Books, 1992, p. 127). People both inside and outside the restaurant were in his line of fire. One young girl died from a bullet wound in the back of her neck, despite her mother’s attempt to shield her. Two teenage boys, riding bicycles past the restaurant, were struck down by stray bullets, as was a motorist on the freeway behind the McDonald’s.

When the police arrived, the area resembled a battlefield. By the time a police sharpshooter from the SWAT team drew a bead on Huberty from a distance, 21 people had been killed and more than a dozen wounded in the 77-minute siege.

Huberty’s trip to the San Ysidro McDonald’s may have taken a matter of minutes, but his journey in effect began decades earlier, back in Ohio. It was a journey lowlighted by failure, withdrawal, and disappointment.

Shortly after marrying Etna in 1965, James took a job working for a Canton funeral home. His career as a mortician was short-lived, however. Even though he did a fine job in the embalming room, his cold and unsympathetic demeanor with grieving mourners was a significant problem. Trying his hand next at welding, Huberty spent more than a decade working for Babcock & Wilcox, an engineering firm in nearby Massillon. Things worked out quite well for James; with overtime, he earned a decent salary. But then, in 1982, hard times hit and the plant closed, leaving Huberty nowhere to turn except to the West Coast.

Throughout his years in Ohio, Huberty became increasingly reclusive, cutting himself off from all friends. Even his relationship with Etna was one of dependency rather than companionship. She cooked, cleaned, and washed for him; managed the household expenses and other matters; and even chauffeured him back and forth to work. Besides his job, the only activity that he found satisfying was working with his gun collection. Being without friends was not a problem—he could always count on his guns.

If only we had gun laws as strict as those in England, some Americans lament, James Huberty might never have become such a prolific mass killer.

Of course, they likely have not heard of Michael Ryan, a resident of Hungerford, England, who killed 15 people and wounded just as many during a 4-hour siege through town before taking his own life. His victims included his own mother, his neighbor, and his two dogs, but most of those gunned down were perfect strangers who just happened to get in Ryan's way. Ryan was able to accomplish his tour of murder, which began at his home and ended at the school that he once attended, despite the country's rather restrictive gun laws.

Ryan, a 27-year-old good-for-nothing, had long had a bad reputation for belligerence. Despite his argumentative nature, however, he never had a brush with the law or involvement in the mental health system. Indeed, neither a criminal record nor a history of profound mental illness is a requirement for mass murder, even the indiscriminate type. Although he may have tended toward paranoia, he was far from psychotic in his thinking. Thus, each time Ryan applied to have his gun permit expanded, he was able to survive the screening process—a process that included an interview with local police to verify his sporting purpose.

By 1987, Ryan was licensed legally to own semiautomatic rifles for the sake of sportsmanship, but he viewed it as a license to murder. Ryan used his large cache of weapons that he had legally purchased under English law to take target practice on humanity. In the process, he committed the crime of the century, at least by English standards. In America, it would have been the crime of the week.

It took more than a large arsenal of weapons for Ryan to carry out his assault on his hometown. He developed the gun-handling skills through membership in a variety of gun clubs, the same memberships that earned him the legal right to own his weapons. But mass murderers don't have to join hunting clubs to become expert marksmen. Many of them are trained to handle high-powered firearms in preparation for military careers. The skills they acquire in the military for going to war prepare them in civilian life for going berserk.

When it comes to pseudocommandos, Julian Knight of Melbourne, Australia, was as pseudo as they come. For as long as he could remember, and with his interest fostered by his adoption into a military family, the 19-year-old Aussie had focused nearly all his energies and thoughts toward a career in the military. In short, Knight was obsessed. He fashioned himself as a military man—better yet—a war hero. But the only war he would ever fight was a civil war. On August 7, 1987, along Hoddle Street in Melbourne, the “enemy” consisted of innocent strangers, seven of whom were killed and 19 more of whom were wounded.

Unlike other pseudocommandos, such as James Huberty and Patrick Purdy, Knight survived to become a hero in his own eyes. “I performed exactly as my Army superiors would have expected me to perform in a combat situation,” reflected Knight from his jail cell. “In other circumstances I would have gotten a medal for what I did” (Time-Life Books, 1992, p. 70).

Knight was indeed well trained to kill. He received his first gun, an air rifle, as a gift for his 12th birthday. Even with this relatively “harmless” initiation into weaponry, within 2 years, Knight was being trained in the use of an M16 rifle. Within 2 more years, Knight was learning ambush tactics after joining the Melbourne High School cadet unit. By the time he reached the military academy, he was expert in the use of a variety of pistols, automatic

rifles, submachine guns, grenade launchers, and hand grenades. His passion consumed all aspects of his life. In school, for example, he sought to use his favorite periodical, *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, as reference material for his school papers.

Julian Knight may have had a clear vision of his career goals and ambitions, but his intensity likely led to his downfall. He was rejected on all fronts, beginning with his birth parents when he was a 10-month-old baby. His obsession with combat played a major role in his troubles with classmates as well as in his rejection by his girlfriend just a few days before the shooting. His weird fascination with the military was disturbing, even scary, to those around him.

Most critical, however, was his failure at his lifelong ambition to graduate from the Duntroon Military College, an elite program for training military officers. Despite finishing high school with C grades, Knight was accepted into the prestigious military school in 1986. After all, he was bright, with an IQ measured as high as 132. But in the military academy, his personality got the better of him. Knight had difficulty accepting the rigid hierarchy of authority and frequently became embroiled in disputes with his superiors. His hopes for a military career all but ended in a Canberra night club when he pulled a pocketknife on a sergeant, leading to his expulsion from Duntroon.

During the 9 weeks after his arrest for assaulting his superior officer, Knight became increasingly depressed and desperate. Added to his frustration over his failing military plans, the transmission in his car blew up and his girlfriend left him. He was now ready to do what he had been trained to do—kill. He would finally get even with the world that had for so long cruelly rejected him, and he would get a chance to demonstrate his incredible power.

Just after 9:30 p.m. on the evening of August 7, Knight left his apartment on Ramsen Street in the Clifton Hill area of Melbourne, armed with a Ruger .22-caliber semiautomatic rifle, a .308-caliber M14 rifle, and a 12-gauge Mossberg pump-action shotgun. He also packed 200 rounds of ammunition—enough for an army, albeit an army of one. During the next 40 minutes, Knight exhausted his entire cache of ammunition as he walked north on Hoddle Street and doubled back along the railway tracks, shooting indiscriminately. Following a shootout in which a police helicopter was shot down from the sky, Knight was captured by “enemy forces.” But he still took his parting shot at the police, later charging in the press that they were “ill-equipped and ill-prepared” (Conroy & Murdock, 1988, p. 21). As a self-styled authority on military tactics, Knight surely felt he knew better.

On the afternoon of April 15th, 2013, near the finish line of the Boston Marathon on Boylston Street, two brothers allegedly planted a couple of pressure cooker bombs among the spectators. Exploding seconds apart, the assailants’ bombs killed three and injured at least another 264. Later that day and still on the loose, the suspects, who were identified as 19-year-old Dzhokhar and 26-year-old Tamerlan Tsarnaev, also shot to death an MIT police officer and, during an exchange of gunfire, wounded a transit police officer. Attempting to escape by automobile, Dzhokhar accidentally ran over and killed his older brother and then fled into a nearby 20-block neighborhood, where he hid in a boat in the backyard of a resident. Thousands of police officers conducted a thorough



Photo 19.2 As they walked among spectators, the suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing were caught in a still frame by investigators who pored through hundreds of hours of surveillance video footage. (Associated Press/FBI)

manhunt, leading to the capture and arrest of the surviving brother, Dzhokhar.

The alleged Marathon bombers apparently came to identify closely with the cause of radical Islam, but that is not the whole story. These marathon terrorists were more like rampage killers who enter a school, cinema, or shopping mall and indiscriminately target anything that moves. Their motive for planting explosives near the finish line of the marathon seemed to be revenge: They apparently blamed the United States for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but they also seemed to blame everybody but themselves for their personal miseries.

It has been reported that Tamerlan was intensely angry—so much so that he disrupted a prayer service at his local mosque. The brothers' uncle referred to the two terrorists as “a couple of losers.” And, it was true that Tamerlan had recently suffered some major losses. He had become unemployed, on welfare, and dependent on his wife's meager income. Moreover, the older brother claimed to have had no American friends and apparently did little better befriending fellow Muslims aside from his younger brother, being recently expelled from his own mosque. The final straw may have occurred when Tamerlan, who was reputedly the best boxer in New England, was declared ineligible for national competition because of his lack of U.S. citizenship. Referring to the Boston Marathon bombing, President Obama used the term *self-radicalizing* to indicate the absence of an organized network such as al Qaeda.

BRAIN ABNORMALITIES

The only combat that tower sniper Charles Whitman ever saw was his one-man attack at the University of Texas in Austin. Whitman's case did, however, spark a battle of sorts within the medical community about the connection between violence and brain abnormalities. Whitman's postmortem examination revealed a walnut-size, highly malignant tumor of the brain (a glioblastoma multiforme). Could not the presence of a profound abnormality in Whitman's brain explain what looked to be a sudden, episodic attack of violence in which 14 people died and 31 were wounded?

University of Michigan psychologist Dr. Elliot Valenstein (1976) pointed out that Whitman's violent behavior was anything but episodic or sudden. In fact, Whitman had written his detailed plan for mass killing in his diary days before the actual massacre, describing not only how he intended to protect his position on the tower and how he planned to escape, but even what he was going to wear. Moreover, Whitman's killing spree did not occur in quick succession: The night before, he killed deliberately. First, he traveled to his mother's apartment in Austin, where he stabbed her in the chest and shot her in the head. He then sat down and wrote a note, placing it on his mother's body:

Monday, 8-1-66, 12:30 AM

To Whom It May Concern

I have just taken my mother's life. I am very upset over having done it. However, if there is a heaven she is definitely there now. . . . Let there be no doubt in your mind that I loved the woman with all my heart. . . . (Lavergne, 1997, p. 103)

Returning home, Whitman then stabbed his wife three times in the chest, an event he noted in the margin of a letter explaining why he needed to kill her: "3:00 AM Both Dead" (Lavergne, 1997, p. 108). No one can say with certainty what role Whitman's tumor played, because its location in the brain was obscured by the gunshots that ended his life. Although the debate over Whitman's behavior may never be settled, the assumption that the tumor was responsible is clearly not justified. The same kind of reasoning was used to try to account for James Huberty's 1984 murder spree at a McDonald's restaurant. Hopeful that some neurological abnormality might be the cause, pathologists examined Huberty's brain tissue. They were disappointed when the autopsy failed to reveal a tumor or any other physical explanation for his rampage.

Notwithstanding the lack of conclusive evidence linking organic abnormalities to Whitman's and Huberty's murderous rampages, there is considerable research on the contribution of biochemical dysfunction to severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic depression. As noted in Chapter 5, there has been a recent upsurge in research that focuses on biological factors in the etiology of the serial killer. It may be just a matter of time before we identify a neurological factor, interacting with environmental causes, that accounts for random acts of mass murder.



Photo 19.3 Charles Whitman's massacre on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin was widely regarded as "the crime of the century," indicating the rarity of such multiple murders during the decade of the 1960s.

DEADLY WEAPONS

Whatever the source of his grudge against society, the mass killer must also have access to a means of mass destruction, and the United States, in particular, makes it easy enough for a vengeful madman to purchase all the guns and ammunition needed to carry out his attack. Massacres can and do occasionally happen in countries such as England, Australia, Canada, and elsewhere, but nothing to match the bloodshed in the United States. Although gun proponents are correct when they argue that firearms are not to blame per se for the behavior of mass killers, guns do make their attacks far bloodier. It would have been nearly impossible for James Huberty to quickly slay 21 people with a knife or his own hands. In addition to the greater lethality of the firearm, guns also distance the attacker psychologically from his victims. It is possible that James Huberty or Sylvia Seegrist might not have been emotionally able to kill young children had they had any physical contact with their victims. But with a rifle, they could dispassionately shoot down innocent strangers as if they were moving objects in a video game or even toy soldiers on an imaginary battlefield.

Table 19.1 Deadliest Mass Murders in the United States Since 1900

Name(s)	Victims	Year	Primary location	Place	Weapon(s)
Timothy J. McVeigh	168	1995	Federal building	Oklahoma City, OK	Bomb
Julio Gonzalez	87	1990	Night club	New York, NY	Fire
Andrew Kehoe	45	1927	School	Bath, MI	Bomb
Jack Gilbert Graham	44	1955	Airplane	Denver, CO	Airplane
David Burke	43	1987	Airplane	Cayucos, CA	Airplane
Seung-Hui Cho	32	2007	College	Blacksburg, VA	Gun
Adam Peter Lanza	27(26+1)	2012	School	Newtown, CT	Gun
Humberto de la Torre	25	1982	Hotel	Los Angeles, CA	Fire
George Jo Hennard	23	1991	Restaurant	Killeen, TX	Gun
James Oliver Huberty	21	1984	Restaurant	San Ysidro, CA	Gun
Charles Whitman	16(14+2)	1966	College	Austin, TX	Gun

Name(s)	Victims	Year	Primary location	Place	Weapon(s)
Ronald Gene Simmons	16(14+2)	1987	Home	Dover, AR	Gun/Knife
Patrick Sherrill	14	1986	Post office	Edmond, OK	Gun
Eric Harris & Dylan Klebold	13	1999	School	Littleton, CO	Gun
George Banks	13	1982	Home	Wilkes-Barre, PA	Gun
Howard Unruh	13	1949	City street	Camden, NJ	Gun
Jiverly Wong	13	2009	Immigration center	Binghamton, NY	Gun
Nidal Malik Hasan	13	2009	Military base	Fort Hood, TX	Gun
Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, & Tony Ng	13	1983	Night club	Seattle, WA	Gun
Aaron Alexis	12	2013	Navy yard	Washington, DC	Gun
James Eagan Holmes	12	2012	Movie theater	Aurora, CO	Gun
Mark O. Barton	12(9 + 3)	1999	Office building	Atlanta, GA	Gun
James Ruppert	11	1975	Home	Hamilton, OH	Gun
Michael Kenneth McLendon	10	2009	Home	Geneva, AL	Gun
James Edward Pough	10(8 + 2)	1990	Office building	Jacksonville, FL	Gun

Note: Victim counts in parentheses represent death tolls at separate locations.

For mass murderers like Huberty and Knight, the gun is like an old friend. In times of stress, they might go target shooting to ease frustrations. Some mass killers have even measured their own self-worth in terms of their marksmanship abilities. It is easy to understand, therefore, why so many have seen the fire-arm as the way, ultimately, to resolve their grudge against society.

The availability of high-powered, rapid-fire weapons of mass destruction, like those used by James Huberty, is surely a large part of the reason why the death tolls in mass murders have been so large in the recent past. As shown in



Photo 19.4 This photo released Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2011, by the U.S. Marshal's Service shows Jared Lee Loughner, who pleaded guilty in the Tucson, Ariz., shooting rampage that killed six people and left several others wounded, including then-U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. Hundreds of pages of police reports in the investigation of the shooting were released Wednesday, March 27, 2013, marking the public's first glimpse into documents that authorities have kept private since the attack on Jan. 8, 2011. (Associated Press/Pima County Sheriff's Department via The Arizona Republic)

Table 19.1, three quarters of the deadliest mass murders in the United States have occurred since 1980, most of which involved firearms as the exclusive or primary weapon.

In January 2011, Jared Loughner, a 22-year-old distraught and angry loner, allegedly shot to death six and injured another 14 outside a supermarket in Tucson, Arizona. Loughner's primary target was apparently Gabrielle Giffords, a Democratic congresswoman who had voted for certain liberal policies that the shooter opposed (but who also supported Second Amendment rights). It became clear in the aftermath that the shooter had planned for months to assassinate Representative Giffords, purchasing his semiautomatic 9mm Glock, equipped with an extended magazine, several weeks before and waiting for an opportunity to make contact with his intended victim when she met with constituents. In addition, inside a safe at the house where Loughner lived with his parents, investigators found the handwritten statements "I planned ahead" and "my assassination," as well as the name "Giffords" and what appeared to be Loughner's signature. Notwithstanding Loughner's bizarre behavior in the months prior to the shootings, he was able to pass a federal background check, allowing him legally to buy the weapon reportedly used to shoot his primary target along with others who happened to appear in the crosshairs of his sight.

Can any form of gun control prevent a person like Loughner from accessing powerful weaponry? Unfortunately, background checks, as prescribed by the Brady Law of 1994, do not necessarily provide effective preventive measures against the

onslaught. Few mass killers have criminal or psychiatric records. Furthermore, most mass murderers would not consider buying a weapon through illegal means. After all, they see themselves as law-abiding citizens who are only looking for some justice.