

Review
Suicide in Mass Murderers and Serial Killers

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Abstract: Research carried out by the author on suicide in mass murderers and serial killers is reviewed. The incidence of suicide in rampage murderers (34.7%) is much higher than in serial killers (4.4%). Whereas all of the suicides in mass murderers occurred during attempts to arrest them, 52% of the suicides in the serial killers occurred after arrest. Case studies are presented, and suggestions made for future research.

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Murder followed by suicide is not an uncommon event, and several research reports have appeared on the topic. For example, Palermo, et al. (1997) found that typical murder-suicide in the Midwest of America was a white man, murdering a spouse, with a gun in the home. In England, Milroy (1993) reported that 5% to 10% of murderers committed suicide. Most were men killing spouses, with men killing children second in frequency. Shooting was the most common method. Similar patterns have been observed in Canada (Cooper & Eaves, 1996) and Japan (Kominato, et al., 1997).

Mass murder has become quite common in recent years, from workers at post offices “going postal” to school children killing their peers in school. Data from the United States indicate that the percentage of homicides with more than one victim increased over the period from 1976 to 1996 from 3.0% to 4.5% (Lester, 2002). Indeed, Lester (2004) recently called mass homicide “the scourge of the 21st Century”.

Examples are easy to find. Here are three cases from recent media reports:

March 11, 2009:

Winnenden, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Tim Kretschmer, aged 17, a former student, enters the Albertville-Realschule and kills 9 students and a teacher, flees and kills 3 others before committing suicide when confronted by police.

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April 3, 2009:

Binghamton, New York

Jiverly Wong, aged 41, a Vietnamese immigrant, kills 13 immigrants and wounds 4 others at a community center, and then commits suicide.

April 30, 2009:

Baku, Azerbaijan

Farda Gadyrov, a Georgian citizen, enters the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy, kills 12 and injures 13 before turning his gun on himself.

There are many categories of mass homicide, including familicides (in which a person slaughters other members of his or her family), terrorists such as Timothy McVeigh who killed 168 people at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma city on April 19th, 1995 (Michel & Herbeck, 2001), and those who simply “run amok,” such as Martin Bryant who killed 35 people and wounded over 30 others at Port Arthur, Australia, on April 29th, 1996 (Cantor, Sheehan, Alpers, & Mullen, 1999).

Holmes and Holmes (1992) classified mass killers into five types: Disciples (killers following a charismatic leader), family annihilators (those killing their families), pseudocommandos (those acting like soldiers), disgruntled employees, and set-and-run killers (setting a death trap and leaving, such as poisoning food containers or over-the-counter medications). It has been difficult to study several of these categories of mass murderers because no one has developed a comprehensive list of murderers falling into the groups. The only category studied hitherto has been the pseudocommandos (also known as rampage murders).

In a preliminary study of mass murderers, Lester, Stack, Schmidtke, Schaller and Müller (2004) examined 143 incidents of mass murder committed by 144 men and one woman reported in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* between January 1, 1993 and August 31, 2002. They found that the death toll was

significantly higher for those murderers who committed suicide (an average of 5.6 victims) than for those killed by police officers (4.2 victims) or captured (3.1 victims). Mass murders in Europe (2.8 victims) and the Americas (2.8 victims) had fewer victims than mass murders committed elsewhere in the world (6.3 victims)¹. The number of victims was not associated with the year of the event, the sex or age of the murderer, the number of offenders, or whether strangers, friends or family were the victims.

Lester, Stack, Schmidtko, Schaller and Müller (2005) studied 100 rampage homicides since 1949, listed in an article on rampage murders in the United States published in the *New York Times* in the year 2000. They sought to explore two facets of the sample (the outcome and the deadliness) and two questions: (1) what are the differences between those rampage killers who completed suicide at the time of the act and those who were captured, and (2) whether any of the characteristics of the rampage killers were associated with the deadliness of the rampage.

Several attempts were made to obtain the data set that the *New York Times* reported as having collected. The requests were rejected. Since access to this purported data set was refused, data were collected on each of the 100 rampage homicide incidents using searches of the Internet (from www.google.com and other search engines) and the electronic data-base provided by Lexis-Nexis. For some killers, information was easily available. For example, Charles Whitman who killed 16 and wounded 31 on August 1st, 1966, on the University of Texas campus, has a full-length biography available (Lavergne, 1997), while others had only a paragraph or two available from the Internet (such as Drew Cade who killed one and wounded two in a supermarket in Pennsylvania on June 20th, 1997).

The reports were coded for characteristics of the rampage and of the killer. Characteristics (such as marital status) were coded when the information was available, and lack of information was coded as missing data. On the other hand, characteristics such as prior psychiatric care and interest in guns were coded as present if mentioned and absent if not mentioned in the reports.

The 98 incidents with a single perpetrator took place from 1949 to 1999, with 90% taking place in the period 1980-1999. The age of the 98 killers ranged from 14 to 70 with an average age of 34. There were 93 men and 5 women. It was noticeable that fewer of these incidents took place on Saturdays or Sundays (an average of only 4.5% each day) compared to weekdays (an average of 17.8% each day). This is in contrast to homicide in general in the United States for which the incidence is higher on weekends (Rogot, Fabsitz & Feinleib, 1976).

The mean number of victims killed was 4.15 (SD: 3.84) and the mean number of victims wounded was 4.72 (SD: 5.99). The number killed in the 98

incidents and the number wounded were moderately associated (Pearson $r = .50$, two tailed $p < .001$), and the correlates of these two measures of deadliness were similar. Fifty-six of the killers were captured, 7 were killed by the police and one by a civilian, and 34 completed suicide at the time of the act (that is, within a few hours of the first killing and before capture). For all three measures of deadliness (the number killed, the number wounded, and the total number of victims), the acts of rampage killing became less deadly in recent years, and were more deadly if the killer had had shown an interest in guns and had parents who were divorced. Several variables were associated with two of the measures of deadliness: killing significant others, prior evidence of violence in the killer, paranoia and suspiciousness, and prior service in the military.

The deadliness of the rampage homicides was also associated with the outcome. Those killers who were killed by the police were more deadly than those who killed themselves who, in turn, were more deadly than those who surrendered or who were captured. Overall, those killed by police killed and wounded an average of 18.3 victims, those who committed suicide had 10.1 victims, and those who surrendered or were captured had 6.9 victims. These differences were also found separately for the number killed (8.1, 4.8, and 3.2, respectively) and the number wounded (10.1, 5.3, and 3.8, respectively).

Since only seven individuals were killed by the police, the analysis of outcome compared the 56 who surrendered or were captured with the 34 who completed suicide. Only a few significant differences emerged. Suicide as an outcome was less likely if the killers were adolescents or diagnosed as schizophrenic and more likely if the killer had friction with co-workers or the killings took place at work.

These results are of interest because they suggest that it may be possible to create a classification of rampage killers as well as profiles of the different types of killers. However, the results of this study were limited because of the lack of detailed information on many of the rampage killers. The study had to rely primarily on newspaper reports and websites maintained by individuals interested in mass murder. Thus, information for many of the variables in the study was not available, and absence of a mention of a characteristic (such as interest in guns) was coded as "absent" whereas it may instead not have occurred to the newspaper reporter to ask about this characteristic. Reports in the press and online may also be limited in accuracy (or validity). For cases in which several alternative reports exist, the reliability of the information (i.e., does it appear in several independent reports) could be checked.

Ideally, in the future, researchers trained in psychological autopsies should investigate a sample of rampage killers, using a detailed interview schedule, so that all of the critical variables can be explored for their absence or presence in each case. If this were done, the data and results obtained would have greater validity than those obtained for the present study.

¹ This may be related to the phenomenon that more people have to die in an incident of any kind in under-developed nations than in Western nations for it to be reported in Western newspapers.

A Case Study: Joseph Wesbecker

On September 14th, 1989, Joe Wesbecker went to the printing plant where he worked (although he was on disability leave at the time) and, firing his semi-automatic assault weapon, killed eight co-workers and wounded many more. He then shot himself in the head with a pistol and died (Cornwell, 1996).

At the time of the massacre, Wesbecker lived alone and had been on disability for about a year. Occasionally he visited and slept with his second ex-wife, Brenda. He was seeing a psychiatrist, Dr. Lee Coleman, who had given Wesbecker lithium for his manic-depressive disorder and Prozac for his depression, but Coleman was beginning to think that Wesbecker had a schizoaffective disorder, a psychosis that is a mix of schizophrenia and depression. Wesbecker had been in and out of treatment before, attempting suicide in 1984 with an overdose and with car exhaust. Over the years, all kinds of psychotropic medications had been tried, but the current medications did not seem to be helping Wesbecker, and they seemed to be making him agitated. Coleman had tried to persuade Wesbecker to go into the hospital on September 11th, but Wesbecker refused.

On September 13th, Wesbecker drove his son James to his college classes and picked him up after class. He insisted on buying a textbook James needed for class. He spent that night with Brenda, his ex-wife. On September 14th, Wesbecker failed to pick James up. He was already on his way to the Standard Gravure printing plant to get revenge.

Wesbecker was born on April 27th, 1942, in Louisville to Martha Wesbecker who had married the previous year at the age of fifteen. Wesbecker's father fell to his death while mending a church roof the next year, and Wesbecker's grandfather (who had become his surrogate father) died when Wesbecker was almost two. The next few years were filled with moves as Wesbecker's mother moved to different sets of relatives and then back to Louisville. He was even placed in an orphanage for a year when he was ten. Although he was back with his mother the next year, life was still unstable – for example, Martha attempted suicide by drinking rat poison soon after Wesbecker arrived back with her.

As a teenager, Wesbecker was rather wild. He dropped out of high school and was arrested several times for disorderly conduct and fighting. He spent a night in jail for siphoning gas out of someone else's truck. He often carried a starter gun which he fired just to scare people.

At the age of eighteen, Wesbecker went to work as a printer and married Sue White. For the next twelve years, Wesbecker settled down. He worked hard and moved to Standard Gravure in 1971, bought better and better houses for his family, and had two sons, Kevin who developed curvature of the spine and James who later became a compulsive exhibitionist, causing Wesbecker a great deal of stress.

Wesbecker had some strange traits. He was a perfectionist and seemed to have an unusual desire to be clean. He frequently quarrelled with his neighbors. His mother lived with him for a time, and the problems with the two boys began to get worse when they became teenagers. The stress in the marriage grew, and it ended for good in 1980.

Meanwhile the stress at Standard Gravure had become overwhelming. The printing plant had once belonged to the local newspaper, the *Courier-Journal*, but the paper was sold to Gannett (who published *USA Today*). The plant was then sold to Brian Shea who ran it independently. Faced with rising costs and a demand for increased productivity, the plant installed high-speed machines, and the men were forced to work sixteen-hour shifts. The noise was tremendous, and the fumes from the toluene used in the ink made the men pass out. The men were made to work night and weekend shifts, and there were pay cuts and erosion of job security as men were laid off. Strangely, rather than banding together against the foremen, the men started taking out their frustration on one another, such as pouring water on the printing paper and fouling up the machines that others were trying to run. In the mid-1980s, the men began bringing guns to work.

Wesbecker attended Parents without Partners and met Brenda Beasley who had two teenage girls. They married in 1981. Wesbecker wanted Kevin to have surgery for his spinal problem, but Kevin refused and the relationship between the two grew distant. James continued to expose himself, and Brenda's ex-husband was concerned about the safety of his daughter, eventually getting custody of them. Wesbecker paid for residential psychiatric care for James, but James continued his exhibitionism. Wesbecker and his ex-wife continued to fight, and Wesbecker won a lawsuit against Sue for slander and had her placed on two-years probation for threatening him.

Wesbecker thought that the foremen at Standard Gravure were deliberately assigning him the most stressful jobs, and he talked to the plant's social worker about it. (Eventually, his psychiatrists wrote to the plant to insist that Wesbecker get less stressful tasks.) It was at this time that Wesbecker attempted suicide and was committed to a psychiatric hospital (on April 16th, 1984) where he was diagnosed as Major Affective Illness, Depressed, Recurrent Type. The hospital's psychologist also thought that Wesbecker had a borderline personality disorder. After his discharge, Wesbecker was put on an antidepressant (one of the many medications that he tried), but Brenda moved out and divorced him in 1984. Despite this separation, they remained good friends and lovers.

Wesbecker continued to press for easier working conditions, even going to the Human Relations Commission in Louisville in May 1987. But his case worker there made little progress in his negotiations with the plant.

Wesbecker began to buy weapons in 1988 and to read magazines such as Full Auto Firearms and

Soldier of Fortune. He went to shooting ranges with Brenda. His son James was caught exposing himself again and was sentenced to ninety days in jail. Wesbecker was so irritable that, when he had trouble with his lawnmowers, he wrecked them with an axe and drove his car over them. He often talked to his friends and co-workers about bombing the plant or “wiping the whole place out.” On September 7th, 1988, Dr. Lee Coleman got Wesbecker placed on disability leave, but Wesbecker believed that he had been cheated over the amount of his disability pay.

Wesbecker visited a funeral home and arranged and paid for his cremation. He deeded his house to Brenda, and he continued to accumulate an arsenal of guns. As 1989 passed, Wesbecker’s son James continued to get into trouble almost every week. In July, Wesbecker discussed suicide with his friend James Lucas.

Wesbecker’s grandmother, who had been a surrogate mother for him, died on August 5th, 1989, and a few days later Dr. Coleman switched Wesbecker to Prozac (Fluoxetine) and began to wean him off the other medications. Wesbecker told his friend Lucas not to go to work because he had a plan to eliminate the place. He had a list of seven people there he wanted to eliminate. Lucas swore (later in court) that he warned the managers at the plant but that they did not take the threat seriously.

On September 14th, 1989, Wesbecker arrived at the printing plant just after 8:30 am and began his shooting rampage.

What makes this mass murder of special interest is that those who were wounded, but who survived the massacre, sued Eli Lilly, the makers of Prozac, arguing that Prozac was responsible for Wesbecker’s rampage at the plant. The jury decided that Eli Lilly was not responsible, but the author of the book on the case, John Cornwell (1996) suspects that a deal may have been made “under the table” between Eli Lilly and the plaintiffs.

Serial Killers

In contrast to mass murder, serial killers are defined as those who kill three or more victims over a period of at least thirty days (Lester, 1995). No study had appeared prior to 2008 on the extent to which serial killers complete suicide, but the informal impression gained from studying the cases (e.g., Lester, 1995) is that suicide is less common among them. However, occasional serial killers do complete suicide.

For example, Herb Baumeister was a married man with three children who was suspected of killing 16 gay men by strangulation in Indiana and Ohio during the 1990s. An organized lust killer, he buried some of his victims on his property. Baumeister began killing when he was age 33. When Baumeister became a suspect in the disappearances of gay men in the area, and when his marriage fell apart, he drove to Ontario and shot himself in the head after leaving a two-page suicide note.

Another example of a serial killer who chose suicide over prison was Leonard Lake. He and his partner, Charles Ng built a bunker in which to keep female sex slaves, and it is believed they killed 12 people. When apprehended for shoplifting, Lake took a cyanide capsule and died.

Some serial killers commit suicide after being sent to prison. Richard Trenton Chase suffered from paranoid schizophrenia when he killed and mutilated six people in Sacramento, California in 1978. Chase drank the blood of some of his victims because he thought his own blood was turning into powder. After being arrested, charged, and convicted of murder, he was sentenced to die in the gas chamber. Chase committed suicide in prison by taking an overdose of his medication that he had saved for several weeks.

Some serial killers have made failed suicide attempts (e.g., Cary Stayner) before they embarked upon their serial killing. They appear to have turned their suicidal urges into murderous rampages.

Newton (2006) has provided a detailed listing of serial killers, and his data were used to explore the occurrence of suicide in his sample of serial killers in a study by White and Lester (2008). Newton listed solo serial killers and group serial killers. He also listed cases from around the world and back into the 19th Century. In order to make the sample comparable to the study of mass murderers in the United States by Lester, et al. (2005), the cases were restricted to solo killers, in the United States, from 1950 to 2002.

Newton provided data on age, sex, race, the year that the murders took place, and the number of murdered victims. The types of serial murderers were classified as nomadic, territorial or stationary. The motives were classified as criminal enterprise, personal causes, sexual and sadistic, and some killers were classified as having more than one motivation. The outcome was coded as suicide, captured, killed by police during attempts to capture, and other (including murdered by others and death from natural causes).

The sample consisted of 594 serial killers: 559 men, 31 women and 4 of unknown sex; 392 were white, 95 African American, 38 Hispanic, 5 “other” and 64 unknown. The mean number of victims was 6.4 (SD: 7.1) with a range of 3 to 70. Several cases were listed as having “numerous” victims and these were entered as “missing data.” Of the 594 killers, 26 committed suicide, 67 were executed, 481 others caught and processed by the criminal justice system but not executed, 8 were killed by police officers, 6 were murdered and 6 had missing data. By decade, 19 cases came from the 1950s, 66 from the 1960s, 162 from the 1970s, 196 from the 1980s, 134 from the 1990s, 13 from the 2000s, and 4 had missing data.

Three hundred and seventeen were classified as territorial killers, 27 as stationary, 246 as nomadic, and 4 had missing data. 29% were classified as having a criminal enterprise motive, 37% as personal cause,

50% as sexually motivated and 14% as sadistic. (Some killers were assigned multiple motives.)

The number of victims was associated with the type of crime: Territorial killers killed fewer victims (5.2) than stationary (8.0) or nomadic (7.8) killers. The number of victims was not related to whether the motive was criminal enterprise, personal cause, sex, or sadism. The number of victims was not associated with the decade that the killings began, but men did kill more victims than women (means 6.6 versus 3.9).

Table 1. Suicide in serial killers in Newton’s data.

	sample size	proportion of suicides
United States		
<i>> 3 victims</i>		
1900 - present	696	4.17%
1900 - 1949	103	2.91%
1950 - present	593	4.38%
<i>2 victims^a</i>		
pre 1900	68	2.94%
1900 - present	248	4.03%
1900 - 1949	10	0%
1950 - present	238	4.20%
Other Countries		
<i>Total</i>	399	5.26%
United Kingdom	80	7.50%
Australia/Canada/NZ	54	5.56%
Europe	150	7.33%
Rest of the world	116	0.86%
Team Killers		
Complete sample	159	4.40%
United States		
1950 - present	74	2.70%

^a Comparing the suicides with those with other outcomes (1900-present) produced no significant differences with the variables (year, sex, race, criminal enterprise, personal cause, sexual motive, sadism, or territorial/stationary/nomadic).

There were no differences by race (White, Black and Hispanic) in the number of victims. Those executed tended to kill fewer victims than those captured but not executed (means 4.9 versus 6.7).

Those committing suicide (n=26) were compared with those captured (n=547). The two groups did not differ in sex, race, whether territorial, stationary or nomadic, or motive (personal cause, sex, or sadism). However, those killing for criminal enterprise were more likely to complete suicide (5.7% versus 1.8%).

In this very large sample of serial killers in the United States from 1950 to 2002, only 26 committed suicide, that is, 4.4%. (A more detailed breakdown of the incidence of suicide in Newton’s

complete sample is shown in Table 1.) In contrast, in the study on rampage mass murderers in the United States during the same period, reported above, 34.7% committed suicide, a far higher proportion. It is perhaps possible that rampage murderers are energized by such a great amount of anger that even killing many victims is not sufficient to discharge the anger, and the residual anger is turned inward on the self. Serial killers, on the other hand, may be less impulsive, with much more cognitive planning and self-control. Empirical studies comparing the psychodynamics of rampage and serial killers are needed to explore such potential psychological differences.

The study was limited by the variables that Newton used to describe the serial killers. Future research should explore more characteristics of the serial killers and their criminal acts for their relationship to the deadliness of the killings and to the outcome (suicide versus capture).

A More Extensive Study of Suicide In Serial Killers

In order to pursue the study of suicide in serial killers, a data set for serial killers who completed suicide was created. The list of serial killers is shown in Table 2, and data were available for 58 serial killers. For these, the timing of the suicide was as follows:

Prior to identification	5 (8.6%)
To avoid arrest	10 (17.2%)
During arrest	13 (22.8%)
Before trial	15 (25.9%)
After conviction	15 (25.9%)

It can be seen that the timing of the suicide varies quite widely. Only 9% completed suicide prior to identification, motivated by guilt perhaps or despair at their uncontrollable murderous impulses, 17% completed suicide to avoid arrest, and 23% completed suicide during the arrest process. In contrast, almost all mass murderers complete suicide during these phases of the process. Suicide after arrest and suicide after conviction were equally common, each accounting for 26% of the suicides.

Analysis of the psychodynamics of the motives of these serial killers is difficult because the biographies are typically written by journalists or crime writers (rather than mental health professionals), and most of their accounts focus on the details of the crimes and crime scenes rather than psychodynamically relevant information. Whereas it has been relatively easy to profile the typical rampage mass murderer, there is no “typical” serial killer who completes suicide. However, it is of some interest to examine briefly two cases.

Table 2. Serial killers who completed suicide (20th Century).

Name	Birth year	Year of death	Nationality	Suicide	Method	Place	Prior suicide attempt	Alone
Akinmurele, Stephen	1978	1999	England	before trial	hanging	jail	yes	yes
Ball, Joe	1896	1938	USA	during arrest	gun	his bar		yes
Baumeister, Herbert	1947	1996	USA	avoid arrest	gun	park		yes
Birnie, David	1951	2005	Australia	after conviction	hanging	prison		no
Brandt, Carl	1956	2004	USA	at crime scene	hanging	home		yes
Butts, Vernon	1957	1981	USA	before trial	hanging	jail	yes	no
Carr, Hank		1998	USA	during arrest	gun	store		yes
Carter, Jonathan	1980	1999	USA	prior to capture	gun			yes
Chanal, Pierre	1946	2003	France	after arrest	cut	jail	yes	yes
Chase, Richard	1950	1980	USA	after conviction	medication	prison		yes
Clements, Robert	1890	1947	England	avoid arrest		home		yes
Costa, Antone	1945	1974	USA	after conviction	hanging	prison		yes
Cota, Fernando	1946	1984	USA	traffic stop	gun	van		yes
Crutchley, John	1946	2002	USA	after conviction	plastic bag	prison		yes
DeJesus, Carmello	1934	1973	USA	prior to identification	gun	field		yes
Denke, Karl	1870	1924	Silesia	after arrest	hanging	jail		yes
Edwards, Mack Ray	1919	1971	USA	after conviction	hanging	prison	yes	yes
Evonitz, Richard	1963	2002	USA	during arrest	gun	public place		yes
Fazekas, Julia	1865	1929	Hungary	avoid arrest	poison	home		no
Gamper, Ferdinand	1957	1996	Italy	during arrest	gun	home		yes
Glover, John Wayne	1932	2005	Australia	after conviction	hanging	prison	yes	yes
Grossman, George	1863	1921	Germany	?	hanging	jail		yes
Hatcher, Charles	1929	1984	USA	after conviction	hanging	prison		yes
Herzog, Loren	1966	1999	USA					
Hohenberger, Robert		1978	USA	during arrest	gun	public place		yes
Iqbal, Javed	1959	2000	Pakistan	after conviction	hanging	prison		no
Jackson, Michael	1945	1986	USA	during arrest	gun	barn		yes
Lake, Leonard	1945	1985	USA	after arrest	cyanide	jail		no
Macek, Richard	1948	1987	USA					
Merrett, John	1908	1954	UK	avoid arrest?	gun	?		yes
Moore, Douglas	1967	2004	Canada	after arrest	hanging	jail		no
Perry, Calvin	1965	1984	USA	after arrest	hanging	jail		yes
Player, Michael	1960	1986	USA	prior to identification	gun	hotel room		yes
Pleil, Rudolf		1958	Germany	after conviction	hanging	prison		no

Table 2. (continued) Serial killers who completed suicide (20th Century).

Name	Birth year	Year of death	Nationality	Suicide	Method	Place	Prior suicide attempt	Alone
Poehlke, Norbert		1985	Germany/Italy	avoid arrest	gun	car		yes
Pough, James	1948	1990	USA	during mass murder	gun	business place		yes
Prudom, Barry	1944	1982	England	during arrest	gun	public place		yes
Rezala, Sid Ahmed	1979	2000	France	after arrest	fire	jail		yes
Richards, Robert		1989	USA	?	v-p murder	cell		yes
Robbins, Gary	1935	1988	USA	during arrest	gun	highway		yes
Rodriguez, Robert	1950	1992	USA	avoid arrest?	poison	highway		yes
Rolle, Randal	1918	1949	USA	?	gun	home		yes
Rooyen, Gert van		1990	South Africa	during arrest	gun	in public		no
Sack, George		1963	USA					
Savini, Paul		1992	Italy	avoid arrest?	?	?		yes
Schlatter, Darrell	1952	1993	USA	after arrest?	hanging	jail		yes
Schmidt, Helmuth		1918	USA	after arrest	?	jail		yes
Schmidt, William	1933	1989	USA	avoid arrest?	?	?		yes
Shipman, Harold	1946	2004	UK	after conviction	hanging	prison		yes
Succo, Roberto	1962	1998	Italy	after conviction	plastic bag	prison		yes
Tannenbaum, Gloria		1971	USA	after conviction	poison	mental hospital		yes
Travis, Maury	1965	2002	USA	after arrest	hanging	jail		yes
Unterweger, Jack	1952	1994	Austria/Czech/USA	after conviction	hanging	prison		yes
Vakrinos, Dimitros		1997	Greece	after arrest	hanging	jail		yes
Vermilyea, Louise		1910	USA	during home arrest	poison	home		yes
Weber, Jeanne	1875	1910	France	after conviction	strangulation	asylum		yes
Wenzinger, Gerd	1944	1997	Germany/Brazil	awaiting extradition	hanging	jail	yes	yes
West, Fred	1941	1995	UK	after arrest	hanging	jail		no
West, John		1948	USA	during arrest	gun	public place		no
Wheat, Clarence		1980	USA	prior to identification	gun	?		yes
Whitt, Jimmy	1971	1994	USA	during arrest	gun	highway		yes
Wilcox, Donald	1968	2003	USA	during arrest	gun	motel		yes
Wilder, Christopher	1945	1984	Australia/USA	during arrest	gun	gas station		yes

Two Cases Of Serial Killers Who Completed Suicide

Herbert Baumeister

Baumeister was born on April 7, 1947, in Indiana (Weinstein & Wilson, 1998). His father was an anesthesiologist. He had one younger sister and two younger brothers. He experienced an apparently normal childhood. In adolescence, however, he exhibited bizarre behavior, playing with dead animals and having strange fantasies such as wondering what urine tastes like. He was diagnosed as schizophrenic (or multiple personality – the journalistic report confuses the two diagnoses), but he did not receive any treatment. He had a series of jobs, worked hard, but continued to exhibit bizarre behavior, such as ranting at fellow workers and urinating on his boss's desk. He once sent a Christmas card with a photo of himself and another man dressed in drag.

He married Juliana Saiter in 1971 and had three children, but Juliana reported later that they had sex only six times in their 25 years of marriage, and she never saw her husband nude. He founded the Save-A-Lot chain of discount stores in 1988 and quickly rose to affluence and prominence in his community. By the mid-1990s, however, the business began to falter.

In the 1990s, a number of gay men in the Indianapolis area disappeared, and in 1993, police were contacted by a man claiming that a "Brian Smart" had killed a friend of his and attempted to murder him. In his interaction with "Brian," Baumeister had the man strangle him while he masturbated, and then they reversed roles.

In 1995, he saw the man again, recorded the license plate of the car, and the police traced the car to Baumeister. Investigators approached Baumeister, informed him that he was a suspect and requested permission to search his house. Baumeister refused. In 1996, his wife filed for divorce, frightened by Baumeister's mood swings and erratic behavior, and permitted the search while Baumeister was on vacation. The search yielded the remains of eleven men, four of whom were identified.

Baumeister fled to Ontario where he committed suicide in Pinery Provincial Park by shooting himself in the head. His suicide note gave his failed marriage and his business problems as the cause. It made no mention of the murders. Baumeister is also suspected of the murder of nine men found along Interstate 70 in Indiana and Ohio.

Baumeister showed early signs of psychiatric disturbance but, despite this, was reasonably successful at work and managed to marry and have a family. His disturbance, whatever it was, did not grossly impair his life-path. He had homosexual inclinations and sadistic fantasies and, in killing gay men, an obvious hypothesis is that he projected his self-loathing for his own homosexuality onto others, permitting him to abuse and murder them.

In the opinion of Virgil Vandagriff (unpublished), Baumeister fits the profile of a "lust

killer" (rather than the psychotic, the missionary or the thrill killer).

Richard Chase

Richard Chase is an example of a psychotic serial killer (Biondi & Hecox, 1992). He was born on May 23, 1950, in California. He was abused by his mother and, by the age of ten, showed the classic triad of danger signs: bedwetting, pyromania and sadism toward animals. In his teenage years, he abused alcohol and drugs and had impotence problems.

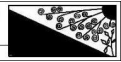
He developed delusions that his heart occasionally stopped beating and that someone had stolen his pulmonary artery. He tried to absorb vitamin C by holding oranges over his head, and he shaved his head so that he could watch his cranial bones move around. He left his mother's home, believing that she was trying to poison him. In his apartment, he captured, killed and disemboweled animals which he ate raw to prevent his heart from shrinking.

In 1975, he poisoned his blood by injecting rabbit blood into his veins and was committed to a psychiatric institution. He was treated with medication and released in 1976. His first murder was a man, killed in a drive-by shooting on December 29, 1977, but he then switched to women. Chase entered the home of Teresa Wallin on January 21, 1978, shot her, had intercourse with her dead body and bathed in her blood. On January 27th, he entered the home of Evelyn Miroth, shot a man there and her son and her nephew, and then repeated his pattern with her body. He fled with the dead 22-month-old nephew and ate parts of him. The police arrested him at his apartment, where he proclaimed his innocence. He was found guilty of six counts of murder and sentenced to death. He was found in his cell on December 26, 1980, where he had committed suicide using an overdose of anti-depressants prescribed by the prison doctor that he had hoarded.

Discussion

It is clear that serial killers are less likely to complete suicide than mass murderers. The reasons for this are far from clear, and psychological autopsy studies are needed to suggest hypotheses for this difference. For American rampage mass murderers, those who completed suicide (typically at the scene of the crime) killed and wounded more victims than those who were captured, but had fewer victims than those killed by the police.

An understanding of the reasons why a small percentage of serial killers complete suicide (only about 3% to 5%), as well as the timing of their suicide, must similarly await a sound psychological autopsy study. In the meantime, John White and I are collecting a data set for over 500 serial killers, based on biographies, newspaper reports and website information, and one of the analyses we plan is a comparison of those who completed suicide with those who did not. We hope that this study will provide clues to the suicide of serial killers.



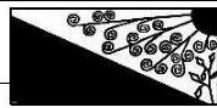
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