



# A case of mass murder: Personality disorder, psychopathology and violence mode

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a fully documented case of a mass murder. The offender willingly underwent a psychological assessment and discussed his motivation and subjective experience of the slaying. The researchers also had access to the official records maintained by criminal justice entities. The data thus were gathered from both interviews with the offender and a review of the official record. The diagnosed borderline personality disorder was coherent with the offender's pervasive feelings of loneliness, the lack of availability of the attachment figure in childhood and the clinical depression during the incubation phase of the murders. The ruminations about revenge appeared to be compulsive and ego-dystonic, which is in line with what has emerged as the goal of predatory violence, namely relief. The crime also grew out of the offender's perception of himself as a powerless victim of a malevolent world and his systematic rejection of responsibility. The mild psychopathic dimension that was found may characterize the anxious, secondary psychopath.

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## 1. Mass murder

Although evidence has been found that the occurrence of mass murder – perpetrated by adolescents as well as adults – has increased over the past half century (Lester, 2002, 2004; Mullen, 2004), scientific studies of such cases are scarce. Methodologically sound studies are rare and case studies with empirical foundation are exceeded by autobiographical, journalistic, or other treatises that are

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less reliable and limited in scope. One possible reason for this is that researchers do not have access to the detailed and reliable records maintained by criminal justice entities (Fox & Levin, 1998, 2003). Another factor is that, in many cases, the mass murderer cannot be interviewed because he commits suicide or (puts himself in situations where he) is killed by the police (Hickey, 2002; Holmes & Holmes, 1992; Lester, 2002, 2004; Mullen, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Therefore clinical, behavioral and motivational data, as well as knowledge of the offender's subjective experience of the killing and personality disorders, are lacking and have to be inferred or hypothesized. Next, when reviewing scientific literature, it appears that the concepts used are not always precisely described. For instance, some mass murderers have been labeled "loners" and have been found to ruminate on revenge plans (Hempel, Meloy, & Richards, 1999; Holmes & Holmes, 1992; Lester, 2002, 2004; Mullen, 2004). It is not always clear, though, if their isolation is due to an incapacity to form affective bonds or simply to their disinterest in doing so. It is also sometimes difficult to determine whether their revenge ruminations are ego-syntonic or ego-dystonic and whether the act is compulsive in the clinical sense. Finally, dysthymia is also rather ubiquitous with mass murderers, but most of the time it remains unclear whether they fulfill diagnostic criteria of a clinical depression.

The offender discussed in the present study killed five people at their home: four family members and a friend of the family's. The victim selection was random, although a symbolic link with the offender most likely played a role. While the mass murder was planned and executed in a cold-blooded way, it was nevertheless preceded by a phase of affective turmoil. The offender suffered from frustration, loneliness, and isolation, which culminated in a clinical depression. Perceiving himself to be the victim of a malevolent world, the offender was overwhelmed by ego-dystonic ruminations focused on revenge, which created an unbearable tension that could not be catheted. A setback with respect to a romantic relationship precipitated the crime, which alleviated the tension.

Some points are quite atypical in this case. Unlike most mass murderers, the offender did not commit suicide, nor was he shot by the police. In fact, he and his accomplice took pains to avoid detection. Further, the rampage was not committed in a public place, but rather in the home of a family. Finally, the offender was not alone, but accompanied by a person who was intended to play – and actually did play – a rather passive role in the mass murder. The accomplice was thus not meant to be a co-gunner. The presence of the third party most probably had to do with the offender's attachment disorder. As unearthed by the collateral information, and also consistent with a borderline personality disorder, the offender appeared to be unable to do anything by himself and thus always needed a companion. As for the accomplice, he only joined the offender to rob the house.

## 2. Method

The mass murderer that is the subject of the present study is still alive and was willing to collaborate with the research project. Also, all of the official data and records on the mass murder were available to the researchers. The first author of this paper received permission from criminal justice authorities as well as the offender to study the official records for scientific purposes. The latter signed an informed consent stating that interviews, test results, and elements of the dossier could be used for this purpose, if made anonymous. Further, the offender was informed that the study would not affect his status as

<sup>1</sup> As the studied subject and, to the best of our knowledge, all known mass murderers, are male, the gender specific "he" was used throughout the article. This according to definitions and typologies of mass murder that exclude criminally, military or politically (terrorism) motivated murder of three/four victims at the same time and place.

a detainee in any way. Last, he was informed he could stop participating in the study at any time if he so desired.

The present case study is, thus, the result of the analysis of the full official record and clinical assessment of the perpetrator. The clinical interviews took place in the penitentiary where the offender resides and were conducted by the first author. For the first interview, the official record/collateral information was not consulted in advance. The respondent talked freely about his case. For the following interviews, the collateral information was thoroughly reviewed beforehand, giving the assessor the ability to probe for additional information and to investigate inconsistencies or deceptions. No inconsistencies or deceptions were found between the interview and the collateral information. Similarly the interpersonal style of the offender as observed in the interview situation was coherent with his functioning throughout his life, as revealed by the collateral information. The latter contained a variety of official records, reports of officials' interviews with family members, friends, employers, co-workers, former teachers, etc., as well as the results of medical and psychological assessments. With respect to our assessment, we obtained a PCL-R score (Hare, 2003), and Axes I and II diagnoses on the basis of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I disorders (First, Spitzer, Gibbon, & Williams, 1997) and Axis II disorders (First, Spitzer, Gibbon, Williams, & Benjamin, 1997). The good structural properties, reliability, validity, and generalizability of the PCL-R are well established (see reviews by Fulero, 1995; Hare, 2007; Hare & Neumann, 2008). Psychometric properties of the SCID-I and SCID-II have been investigated with various populations and have also proved to be good (e.g., Maffei et al., 1997; Martin, Pollock, Bukstein, & Lynch, 2000; Weertman, Arntz, Dreessen, van Velzen, & Vertommen, 2003). Finally, the mode of aggression was assessed. Since some offenders tend to minimize or omit predatory elements and exaggerate affective ones (Meloy, 2006; Porter & Woodworth, 2007), the data were gathered from both an interview with the offender and a review of the official record. This combined method of data gathering would be most effective in retrospectively determining the mode of violence (Monahan et al., 2001). Here again, no inconsistencies could be found between the offender's declarations and the collateral information. The PCL-R, the Axes I and II diagnoses, and the assessment of the violence mode were conducted by both authors independently. The second author's assessment was based on the study of the collateral information and on the interview transcripts.

## 3. The criminal offense

The day of the mass murder, the offender called his accomplice on the phone and picked him up at his residence. Both met each other in jail and re-established contact after the accomplice's release. During their incarceration they had already agreed on committing hold-ups together. Yet, the offender's primary intention was not to steal, but to kill. When driving, they decided to "do it today." The offender proposed they hit a salesman of a specialized item as it would be easy to introduce themselves as potential buyers. Besides, the offender had noticed the location where the killings would take place some weeks ago when he was in the area. As it was withdrawn and had a back entrance, they would also be less exposed.

Before they proceeded to their destination, they went to a construction site where they had tested the rifle a week before to pick up the empty shells they left there at the time so as to avoid their fingerprints being traced. They then had a meal and went to an isolated place to test the rifle again and to devise a way to catch the empty shells by binding a plastic bag to the rifle. The offender fired two shots, the accomplice, one. The plastic bag technique appeared not to work, though. Before they continued on to their destination, the rifle was fully loaded with ten 6.35 mm bullets. The offender was packing a 22 mm rifle with a butt he had sawed off himself so he could hide the rifle in a common bag. The accomplice carried a knife given to him by the offender just before they went in.

After arriving at the home of the salesman, they made sure everything was quiet and parked their car further away near a public building; they then proceeded back to the house on foot. They introduced themselves as potential buyers and were let inside. The salesman took them to the place where the merchandise was stored and both agreed to purchase an item. The salesman's wife, in the meantime, was waiting in the kitchen. While the offender was talking to the salesman, the accomplice discreetly erased the offender's fingerprints. When the offender and accomplice were brought into the kitchen to sign the documents, the offender suddenly pulled out his rifle, held its butt against his hip and said it was a hold-up. The accomplice pulled out his knife and took position at the door between the kitchen and the living-room. Once there he noticed that another member of the family was in the living-room and ordered her to join them in the kitchen, and she complied. Scared, both the salesman and his wife agreed to give them anything they wanted and cooperated fully. The offender told them they were escaped convicts and had not eaten for three days. He asked the wife for food. She offered them sandwiches and a soft drink. She also put some eggs in a bag and gave them money to buy train tickets to flee from the country. Both offenders consumed the sandwiches and the drink. As a motive for lying about their escape and his subsequent behavior, the offender stated he had enjoyed scaring and exercising power over the family, as it made up for the years of fear and powerlessness he endured during his incarceration. Noteworthy is that neither of the two offenders reported sadism and/or brutality towards the injured, which is consistent with the report of the crime scene investigation, which mentioned there were "no traces of violence or resistance." The experts stated the scene pointed to a "cold blooded execution."

The salesman proposed to bring them to the railway station where they could take the train abroad, whereas his wife proposed that they just take a car. The offender said he wanted the salesman to drive them, though, in order to prevent the victims from calling the police as soon as the offender and his accomplice left. He then asked the salesman where he could lock up his family in the meantime. After locking them up in the basement, he told them: "we won't be long. I'm going to take your husband with me and give him back the keys of the cellar when I let him go." The offender took the salesman to the garage while his accomplice searched the kitchen for money. He wore rubber gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints. Once the offender arrived at the garage, he decided to kill the salesman there. However, he told the first victim that he would lock him up in the garage. The salesman was told to take his place in the driver seat of a car. There, a conversation ensued, as the first victim tried to convince him he would not call the police. As a token of his honesty he pulled out the telephone and placed it outside under a tree near the garage (this was confirmed by the reconstruction). Struck by the first victim's honesty and helpfulness, the offender started having doubts, and hesitated to kill him. He commanded the first victim to stay where he was and went back to his accomplice, in the kitchen. He told him that the first victim was not going to alert the police and asked his opinion on "staying or leaving." The latter reported that they had not yet found any money and that he did not believe the victim either. He emphasized that everyone in the house had seen them clearly and thus they would be easily recognized and go back to jail.<sup>2</sup> The offender then retraced his

footsteps. In the meantime, the salesman had not moved.<sup>3</sup> The offender pointed the rifle at him while he himself stood outside the car. According to the offender, a short verbal exchange took place. The father asked him again to leave, repeating he would not call the police, and said they would not be mad at him. He also said that, like himself, the offender also looked scared (which, the offender recognized, was true). That, the offender later reported, made something snap: "Suddenly I saw the Assize courts again, the jury members, and I got angry again. I told him [the salesman] to be quiet now, to turn his head and to look ahead of himself. From this position, avoiding eye contact, because I didn't want to face it, I shot a round in the salesman's left temple of the head," from a distance that was later estimated to be about 20 to 30 cm.

After shooting the first victim, the offender rejoined his accomplice. While both searched the kitchen and the living room for money and valuables, another female family member accompanied by a friend unexpectedly arrived at the house. Both offenders concealed themselves and let them come in. The offenders then threatened the two with the rifle and led them to the basement to join the others. When the friend asked about the salesman, he was brought to the garage by the offender, where the former was supposed to meet the salesman. The offender walked behind him without saying a word and when victim number two entered the garage, he was shot with a round in his neck from a short distance. The offender then went back to the house. There, he took the family member that arrived unexpectedly out of the basement and led her to the living-room with the intention of killing her there, because "he didn't want to shoot the injured in a hit-or-miss way." When she asked him where her friend was, he told her he was locked with the salesman. As he considered women to be whores, he wanted to humiliate her first. He ordered her to undress and lifted her dress with his rifle. She resisted by hitting him on the hands with a shoe. The offender then took her in a stranglehold while the accomplice pulled off her dress and underwear and commanded her to lie down on the couch. The accomplice opened his trousers and lay on her with an erection, but did not succeed in penetrating her. During this, the mass murderer retreated to the kitchen. As the accomplice ceased his attempts with the girl, the offender came back in the living room and told the girl it was now his turn. According to him, he said that to scare her. He claimed he did not have any interest in raping her and did not have an erection either. A short conversation then took place and the girl asked them to leave. He told her to lie on her belly in order to avoid eye contact when killing her (he was not capable of killing her while she looked at him). When she refused, he ordered her to put a cushion on her face. When she asked why, he told her he did not want her to see in what direction they would flee. After complying, he fired a round through the cushion at point blank range. As she was still moving, he fired another round into her head. He does not remember if he shot the second shell through the cushion or not. The offender then covered up the whole body with other cushions in case someone from the outside looked into the house and together he and his accomplice picked up the shells.

Afterwards, the offender went to the basement where the last two victims were still secluded. Standing on top of the stairs, he told both to sit down on the bottom stair with their backs turned to him. In order to avoid eye contact, he killed the fourth victim with a neck-shot from a short distance and turned his head away while shooting. When he subsequently fired the first round in the neck of the last victim, she unexpectedly jumped up and turned her face to him. He then fired a second round in her head and she dropped to the ground. The offender reported being shook up by this. He climbed out of the

<sup>2</sup> On this point and on others, the statements of the offender and his accomplice diverge. The latter confirmed the offender came back to the kitchen and went back to the garage again. However, he argued he never knew the offender's intention was to kill the salesman and the others. When asked by the interrogators why the offender went back then, he stated that he thought the salesman was being locked up and the offender went back to check if there were escape possibilities. With respect to the two versions, the police report mentions that given the outcome of the confrontation of both the offender and his accomplice and the contradictory statements – the preparations (test-shootings, the system for catching bullets) etc. – they had to assume that the accomplice knew what was going on. The police report notes that "the accomplice's explanations clearly show that he was trying to escape the heart of the matter [the killings]."

<sup>3</sup> Rejecting responsibility, the offender will later deplore that the salesman hadn't fled when he was alone in the garage. According to statements the offender made during our interview with him, he and his accomplice probably would have left if the salesman would have escaped.

basement and went to his accomplice and told him he could not cope any more. He asked him to go downstairs and pick up the shells. His accomplice then took over the rifle, pulled its lock and descended to the basement on his own, while the offender remained at the top of the stairs. According to the offender's statement, the accomplice heard the last victim's breath rattling in her chest, saw the shells, stepped over the body, picked them up, stepped over her again and went back upstairs. Both then resumed their search of the house. When doing so, they heard a rattling sound coming from the basement again. Once more the accomplice took the rifle and went downstairs. When he saw the last victim had vomited, he put his hand on her heart and felt it was still beating. He then wound a dish-towel he found in the basement around the ejection mechanism of the rifle (that way he did not have to look after the shells afterwards) and shot another three rounds into the victim's body.<sup>4</sup>

In order to create the impression that the crime was connected to the theft of antiques, they took some antique items as well as a jewel box. The day after the mass murder, the offender disposed of them by dropping them in a river. Before leaving, the accomplice suggested that they steal one of the cars instead of walking back to their vehicle. He asked the offender to look for keys in the pockets of the first and second victims, but he said he could not do so because he was too shaken up. Therefore, the accomplice searched their pockets, moving the bodies to do so, as the mass murderer watched from a distance. The accomplice also took their wallets and pulled out the money inside. The amount retrieved was very small and representative of day-to-day living expenses. He split the money in two and threw the empty wallets in the direction of the corpses. Both left in one of the cars and drove to the offender's vehicle, which was parked further away. The offender dropped his accomplice at a dancing establishment and returned home to his girlfriend. When the offender and the accomplice met again the next night, the latter told him his girlfriend would provide him with an alibi. The day after that, the offender hid his rifle and a non-working revolver they found in the victims' house somewhere in the woods. On the same day he heard from his accomplice's girlfriend that the former had been arrested. In the early morning of the next day, the offender was also apprehended at his home without resisting.

When interrogated, the offender first tried to deny taking part in the mass murder, stating he was with his girlfriend. Later on she retracted her alibi. Both she and the offender were confronted. The dossier does not make mention of this, but the offender told us during the interview that the breakthrough to a full confession came when the inspectors heard him saying to his girlfriend that she shouldn't have left him alone that day. Indeed, his girlfriend refused to accompany him to the town where the mass murder occurred and went alone to a pub instead. The offender hated her doing that, because he suspected her of fooling around with other men.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Definitions and typologies

Concerning the definition of mass murder, there seems to be a consensus on the aspect of spatial mobility. Mass murder is distinguished from spree and serial murder by the fact that the mass murder concerns a number of persons at one time and in one space. The exact number of victims, however, seems to be more arbitrary. Some

authorities advance four (Hazelwood & Douglas, 1980), others three victims (Dietz, 1986; Holmes & De Burger, 1985). As the offender discussed in the present study killed five people at the same time and at the same place, he corresponds to this definition.

##### 4.1. Revenge as root cause

The motive of revenge appears to be paramount in mass murder. For instance, resentments about failed business schemes and anger at the legal system led G. L. Ferri to massacre eight people and wound six others. J. O. Huberty and D. Terres initiated their mass murder in a McDonalds restaurant in 1984 with: "now, it's pay-back time" (Palermo, 1997) and Hempel et al. (1999) of a non-random sample of mass murderers in the U.S. and Canada in the past 50 years reports the following sentences were uttered prior to, or during, the mass murder: "Now you pay. Here's for all the bitches at Belton"; "The people here have ruined my life"; "I told them I would be back. Back off and get out of the way"; "This is for the feminists," etc. With respect to the revenge motive, victim selection seems to vary from random to non-random: in some occurrences the victims are co-workers or supervisors, while in others the victims are randomly chosen. For instance, the McDonalds' customers had no role in the Huberty and Terres' rampage other than just being there. The victims merely seem to represent the society, which is perceived as unjust and menacing to and by the murderer.

The case studied here is consistent with the revenge motive, as the perpetrator is severely frustrated by perceived wrongs he has suffered. He "hates society" and wants "to get even." The root cause of the mass murder appears to be a seven-year, court-imposed sentence for a series of thefts perpetrated by the offender. Indeed, like the majority of mass murderers found in the aforementioned non-random sample, the offender has a history of antisocial activities, among which, property crimes. Despite his regular, official blue collar job, the offender perpetrated repeated property offenses prior to the mass murder, e.g. several thefts (shoplifting, theft in a canteen after closing, and theft in a place where he was a salaried employee), aggravated thefts, aggravated theft attempts, breaking and entering, thefts of old metals, etc. Although there is an extensive pattern of theft, it should be noted that the loot he received from his efforts was always small. Moreover, it was always split in two or more parts as he was never alone during his expeditions. Noteworthy is the motive of his criminal conduct. His wife later corroborated that the benefits of his thievery (together with the wages of his regular job) went straight to her, whose task it was to save it in order to buy a house for her and the children. As his wife declared, he himself would hardly spend anything. In fact, the offender was convinced he suffered from a heart disease and would die from a heart attack before his children were adults: he did not want them and his wife to live and grow up in poverty as he and his parents had. His criminal career thus seems also to be driven by endogenous moods and morbid ideations ("the world is dangerous and malevolent"; "we are powerless victims," etc.: see further) closely related to borderline functioning, next to antisocial motives.

The link with the revenge motive is that his trial was held before the Assize Court, which normally deals only with the most serious offenses, namely homicide.<sup>6</sup> As his repetitive criminal activities concerned thievery, it is indeed rather unusual that his trial was held before the Assize Court.<sup>7</sup> In the offender's perception this situation and the subsequent sentence was experienced as a profound injustice. One of his ideations concerning the mass murder was that "as I had to stand trial before a court that deals with homicides

<sup>4</sup> In earlier interrogations the accomplice acknowledged this version of the facts. Later on he retracted and denied his own involvement, saying that she was already dead when he shot. He claimed her arm fell from her body when he checked to see if her heart was beating and, startled, he fired. When asked why he declared otherwise in the previous interrogations he declared that, obviously, he was misunderstood by the interrogators.

<sup>5</sup> The police investigation revealed he was not entirely wrong in that respect. The evening of the event she had made contact with a man in a bar who walked her home and tried to seduce her. She didn't, however, let him in.

<sup>6</sup> The latter is more or less comparable to the District Court in the U.S. and the Crown Court in Great Britain. In the Assize Court, the jury is composed of civilians.

<sup>7</sup> We questioned a police officer that was chief of police at the time. His opinion is that the penalty was indeed quite harsh.

without having committed one, I'll commit one in order to get even." Along with this, his intention was to kill civilians and not policemen or judges because he blamed the jury for the sentence. Moreover, one of the victims allegedly made a false statement when he declared physical violence was used during a robbery, which was not the case according to the offender.

In the present case, this root cause seems to be intertwined with another one, namely the loss of his wife and children occasioned by the prison sentence and the "idée fixe" that he'll never find a romantic partner again. Indeed, his wife quickly told him she would not spend years waiting for him and did, in fact, divorce him shortly after the sentence was pronounced. The offender experienced the separation as not only a dramatic loss, but also as a burden on his future. In his perception, he would never find a girlfriend again and would, thus, remain alone for the rest of his life. This was because he considered himself physically repulsive and worthless on the one hand, and because in his opinion women that still were not married at the age he would be when released from jail would be no good. Only "whores" would still be single at that age. The offender thus experienced this seven-year sentence as "a life sentence" as he explained.

Both issues – his extreme negative self-image and perception of women – need clarification. The first one has to do with the fact that at the age of 12, the offender had a severe traffic accident, which left him temporarily in a coma. The driver of the car was responsible for the accident. As a consequence of the accident, the upper side of the offender's face is disfigured by huge scars. Also, his eyes are asymmetrical, as one of them is a centimeter lower than the other. The offender was very ashamed of these injuries and tried to disguise them as much as possible by letting his front hair grow and combing it over his forehead. Because of this disfigurement he became the perpetual object of ridicule by other children, who called him names like Frankenstein, monster, "sewed together," and so on. He was deeply unhappy about this and withdrew from social contact. When he was 15 years old another accident occurred: on the playground, a piece of coal kicked by a peer ended up in his eye. Surgery was necessary, but his eye nonetheless suffered permanent damage. Since that time he had to wear dark glasses on a permanent basis. He took up the habit of wearing very dark, large ones that allowed him to hide his scars as well. Unfortunately this appearance – long dark hair combed over his forehead and huge dark glasses – attracted even more mockery and provocations from peers (some of them wanting to pull them off in order to see or expose his scars) which sometimes ended up in fights. On one occasion this led to a fight in a bar that resulted in the victim's need for medical assistance.

According to the offender, the *sequelae* of these two accidents played an important role in his life and, indirectly, in the murders as well. The pain and shame for years on end resulted in his very low self-esteem and also affected his attachment patterns. Throughout his life he manifested affective hunger on the one hand, and ambivalence with respect to close attachments on the other. The offender needed and desired affective bonds but also viewed and expected others to be unreliable and malevolent. With respect to romantic attachment, the offender concluded that a woman would never want somebody who was disfigured like him. Still, when he was 20, he fell in love with a 17-year-old girl. To his astonishment, the attraction was reciprocal. The girl was his first girlfriend – he never dared to approach women before, as he thought they would reject him because of his scars. They soon married and had two children: a boy and a girl. The offender liked to spend time with his children and his wife and neighbors later testified that he got along well with them. His marriage was harmonious apart from quarrels, mostly concerning jealousy by both parties. The quarrels follow the cycle described by Dutton: tension building, explosion and contrition (Dutton, 1994; Dutton & Starzomski, 1993). The dossier reports the offender was typically short-tempered and regretted his outbursts afterwards. His partner stated he would weep afterwards and ask her why she had to upset

him all the time. Sometimes he forced her to leave and after doing so immediately called her back.

As for his perception of women as whores, this is most probably an exponent of his borderline personality disorder and the insecure attachment style that goes with it. It has been well documented that women are perceived as malevolent, unreliable, and also promiscuous by male subjects with this disorder. Their jealousy is extreme, irrational, and has a pronounced sexual connotation (Dutton, 1994, 1999; Dutton & Golant, 2000; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997; Resnick & Walker, 1994). Such morbid sexual jealousy is very present in these subjects and is, in the vast majority of the cases, based on dubious assumptions concerning their partner. Being dressed too well, not being able to account for 15 min in their occupations, etc. (Dutton & Golant, 2000) can be enough to arouse a subject's conviction that his partner is having an affair or is looking for one. In the present case, his partner going to the pub on her own, for instance, triggered jealous ideations about her being promiscuous. During the interviews, the offender confesses the "silliness" of these ideations.

#### 4.2. Precipitants

Precipitants appear to be very common in mass murder. Most of the time it concerns a major setback related to employment or a relationship (Cantor, Mullen, & Alpers, 2000; Fox & Levin, 1994; Hempel et al., 1999; Mullen, 2004). In the present case, the loss concerns a relationship. Indeed, soon after his release from prison he met and became romantically involved with a woman. Once again, he was astonished a woman wanted him despite his scars and previous incarceration. They quickly moved in together after two months, but things rapidly turned bad, as his girlfriend appeared to be addicted to alcohol and pills. The relationship deteriorated further when she lost her job and began to go to a pub while the offender was at work. The latter was very upset by this as he thought she would be unfaithful. It has been clinically and empirically documented that for individuals with a borderline personality disorder, jealousy but also being alone is an unbearable experience, fueling hate, resentment, and feelings of revenge. In the present case, these affects seemed to have triggered the massacre. Indeed, the day of the event, he wanted to go out with his girlfriend, but she refused to accompany him and went to a pub on her own instead. His response was to pack his rifle, go to town alone, and phone his accomplice. As already mentioned, the offender later stated that she should not have left him alone: "Then, all of it wouldn't have happened."

#### 4.3. Dysphoria: Axis I diagnosis

If not psychotic, mass murderers are typically assumed to be dysphoric, to suffer from loneliness and isolation, and to lack support and encouragement (Fox & Levin, 2005; Hempel et al., 1999; Mullen, 2004; Palermo, 1997; Palermo & Ross, 1999). The aforementioned Huberty, for instance, was described as a man prickly about privacy: he kept his blinds drawn, his doors triple locked, and had "no trespassing" signs posted all over his property (Levin & Madfis, 2009). In the present case, however, loneliness, isolation, and despondency seem to be a consequence of the offender's borderline attachment style, rather than a marked desire not to interact with others. Indeed, the offender was in permanent need of intimacy and the company of others but remained unable to satisfy these needs due to a fearful/angry attachment style and a tendency to externalize blame and attribute relationship conflicts to traits in the other person (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008; Dutton, 1999). The accompanying dysphoric feelings included a major clinical depression. The offender reported feeling empty and lacking initiative in all areas; he suffered from the incapacity to be alone, mood tempers, a very low self perception, a diminished interest in all activities,

psychomotor agitation, brooding and indecisiveness during a period of several weeks (APA, 1997a, 1997b; 2000). He asked himself “What am I doing here?” and considered that, “In the end, I was better off in jail, where I knew people and where I was respected as a sports monitor.” The officers in charge of the interrogation later asked him what got into him, since he had a job, a relationship, a place to live and a hobby (sports). He answered that he “felt very much alone and empty, even among people.” Along with this depressive mood, the offender felt himself to be a victim of the justice system; the jury; his wife, partner, and children; women because they were perceived as no good.

#### 4.4. Obsessive ruminations

Also in line with the typologies and models, is the fact that the mass murder studied here follows a period of obsessive ruminations about revenge (Fox & Levin, 2003; Palermo, 1997). However, the nature and dynamics of these ruminations are not always described with precision in the literature. Some mass murderers, adolescents as well as adults, have been described as having grandiose fantasies centering on authority and omnipotence and identifying themselves with violent characters. In these cases, the grandiose revenge fantasies appear to be ego-syntonic and are assumed to emotionally fuel the subject's pathological narcissism (Dietz, 1986; Langman, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2009; Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, & Gray, 2001; Mullen, 2004). Closely related to that, many mass murderers, adolescent as well as adults, have also been found to be fascinated with weapons and war fatigues (Dietz, 1986; Langman, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2009; Mullen, 2004).

In the present case, though, the ruminations were instead ego-dystonic and compulsive, as they imposed themselves on the offender's mind rather than being evoked. The latter was triggered by events or ideations that were related to the loss of his attachment figures and also aroused anxiety. During his first incarceration, the fantasies forced themselves into his mind when something reminded him of the loss of his wife and children. The same happened after serious conflicts with his second partner, namely when the offender feared for his relationship. Only then did the urge to kill overpower the offender's controls. Afterwards, he felt ashamed about these revenge thoughts and rejected them.

In line with the ego-dystonic nature of the ruminations, the offender studied here does not correspond with the pseudo-commando profile (Dietz, 1986), as he is not preoccupied with weapons and war regalia, and does not cherish fantasies centering on war and violence. As a matter of fact, he never possessed weapons until he obtained the rifle from a legitimate source with the specific aim of carrying out the planned mass murder. His wife later corroborated that his aversion to weapons was so extreme, that he would not allow his children to have toy weapons. The collateral information from employers, co-workers, friends, neighbors, environment, spouse, etc. are also at odds with the pathological narcissism that characterizes pseudo-commando mass murderers. Indeed, the collateral data converge into the profile of a person that is “gentle, caring, honest, helpful, and obliging to people.” In fact, he sometimes sacrificed himself for others, which sometimes got him into trouble. His former employers report being satisfied. He is described as being “honest, hard and well working, doing overtime without murmur, always on time, never missing work without reason and never having been observed being under the influence of alcohol or drugs”. “When he does not appreciate someone or is not appreciated by them, he is said to leave them. He is described as reserved and expressionless.” The adjunct governor of the penitentiary where he accomplished his sentence, describes him as “righteous, well disciplined and polite towards the personnel and the co-detainees. His work is always done well and he never lies.”

## 5. Violence mode

Mass murder, irrespective of the type (disciples, family annihilators, pseudo-commandos, disgruntled employees, etc.) (Holmes & Holmes, 1992, 2001), is generally of a predatory nature. In striking contrast with affective violence, which is typically an impulsive, emotionally charged reaction to a perceived threat, the violence of mass murder is in most cases planned, purposeful, and lacks an emotional display (Langman, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2009; Meloy, 1997; Mullen, 2004). The latter mode has been investigated both in animal and human behavior and has been termed as predatory (Meloy, 2002; Siegel & Brutus, 1990), pro-active (Crick & Dodge, 1996), and controlled or instrumental (Berkowitz, 1993; Cornell et al., 1996; Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Affective and predatory violence have been found to qualitatively differ both in terms of neurobiology as well as phenomenology (reviews by Mc Ellistrem, 2004; Weinschenker & Siegel, 2002). Yet, in some occurrences, predatory violence has been shown to be not necessarily a discrete act, but (the second) part of a sequence. The violence, then, is a response to a preceding phase of affective turmoil that is protracted and conflict-ridden. Therefore, its aim is not destruction as such, but relief. (Meloy, 2002, 2006; Schlesinger, 1996, 2007) In the present case, the killing was experienced by the offender as a necessary behavior. As it is a reaction against a complex of ideations connected to a distressing and coercive affect, the violent act can thus be clinically assessed as compulsive (Meloy, 2002, 2006; Schlesinger, 1996, 2007). Drawing upon Maier and Wertham's concept of (chronic) catathymia, Schlesinger (1996, 2007) structures this sequence over three stages: incubation, violence, and relief. We will discuss this particular case according to this threefold structure.

### 5.1. Incubation

During the incubation phase, the individual going through this type of crisis is under the rule of an emotional tension that is increasing over time because it cannot be catheted. Another characteristic of the catathymic crisis is that the individual progressively becomes persuaded that only suicide or homicide can end the unendurable tension. The incubation phase is frequently accompanied by dysphoria, withdrawal and isolation, egocentric thinking, and sometimes hallucinations and thought disorders. During his four-year incarceration, the offender already ruminated on murder and revenge, and when on leave, bought a rifle with the intention to carry out his plans once he was out. The onset of the first stage of the catathymic crisis *stricto sensu*, though, seems to situate itself a couple of months before the massacre. The offender's girlfriend noticed that, at that time, he started complaining about severe headaches and stomach cramps. He also asked his girlfriend to take his pulse once in a while (we saw that this preoccupation with his heart was an old one). The offender began to withdraw himself, “brooding, sweating, raging and walking around like a caged animal.” The brooding concerned thoughts like “nothing will ever be all right any more”; “I must take revenge against society”; “I have to do something.” According to his girlfriend, in the last weeks before the mass murder, he complained that despite medication, the headaches would no longer subside.

During this incubation phase, the individual ruminates on violent actions. In the beginning of the crisis, the violent ideations are ego-alien and rejected (Meloy, 2002, 2006; Schlesinger, 1996, 2007). At first, the offender was shocked and ashamed of his murderous ideations and rejected them. For a while, long walks in the woods and petty thefts brought him relief, as stealing gave him the feeling of settling scores. During this period, he also started making trips to the town where his trial took place, driving around with his rifle. When he returned home, the tension had sometimes subsided. He, thus, struggled against the diffuse tension and the murderous ideations, but eventually believed only murder could bring relief. The offender's

retrospective statement, that “like a alcoholic needs alcohol to find relief, I felt I had to kill in order to find peace,” illustrates the compulsive nature of the urge to commit murder.

The day of the mass murder his girlfriend rejected his request to spend the day with him. He felt abandoned and enraged and decided it was time for action.

### 5.2. Predatory violence

After making contact with his accomplice, the two set out for the place of the murders. The victims were unknown to the offender. The target was selected because the house was quite isolated. However, the fact that one of the victims was a salesman of a certain specialized item was not a coincidence. Indeed, the offender felt ripped off by a salesman of similar items. Also, a couple of weeks before the mass murder, the offender's item was vandalized. Both incidents will influence the choice of victims: e.g., a salesman of these items.

The predatory nature of the mass murder appears by the fact that it was intentional, consciously planned, purposeful, and lacking an affective display. Concerning the minimal or absent affective arousal, we saw that the offender interacted in a friendly and calm manner with the salesman and his wife before pulling his rifle. Also, the offender did not report nervousness, agitation, anger, shouting, nor did he report fatigue or exhaustion after the facts. The anxiety and anger the offender reports during his verbal exchange with the first victim in the garage do not seem to be overwhelming, since he's able to calmly end the conversation, make the victim look ahead, aim at the temple of the head, and hit the target with one clear shot. Further, all of the victims were killed in a cold-blooded manner. The crime scene is described as showing very little disorder and the killing is referred to by the experts as a “cold blooded execution”. The rampage was also planned and purposeful. The offender stated he had the clear intention of killing the victims before entering the house and carried a weapon he bought with that intention and which was modified in order to hide it from sight. The weapon was fully loaded and tested days before and a couple of hours before the event. A system for catching the shells was sought the day of the mass murder. In sum, the offender did what he was coming to do: kill everybody.

### 5.3. Relief

After the mass murder, the offender's headaches and stomach cramps disappeared. His girlfriend later corroborated that he did not complain of them and was no longer taking any medication. During his interrogation, he stated that after the mass murder, “The hate-feelings against society were gone.” He felt he “wasn't the same person anymore.”

The murders did not only function to relieve his symptoms, though. His girlfriend reported that on the night of the crimes, the offender was nervous, did not sleep well, and sighed deeply several times. When she asked him what was wrong the morning after the event, he burst out crying and said he would never steal again in his life. The day after, she noticed him crying again. He stated that he then realized what he had done and felt sorry about it. He felt he was not himself then and behaved like an animal.

## 6. Personality disorder

### 6.1. Borderline personality disorder

As typical of a borderline personality disorder, pervasive feelings of depression, emptiness, and loneliness since childhood could be noticed. A determining, underlying factor of these feelings has been found in the lack of availability or the feared loss of the attachment figure (Aaronsen, Bender, Skodol, & Gunderson, 2006; Dutton, 1999; Dutton & Starzomski, 1993). This is consistent with the offender's life

history, as he only knew his mother as seriously ill. She died from breast cancer when he was three and a half years old, so the only reminiscences of her are those of an invalid in need of help. As his father was an international truck driver working six days a week, he came home when the offender was already asleep and was gone before he awoke. His father was scarcely home, and when he was, he was described as exhausted and rather absent. The offender does not remember ever having played with his father. As his brother was 11 years older — during the interview, the offender stated his birth was unplanned — there was not a very close relationship with him either. The entire family is Caucasian. Nobody in his family ever had contact with the criminal justice system, except for traffic offenses. The offender himself was in his 30s when the mass murder took place. He had no history of offending or antisocial behavior as a minor, nor did he have contact with mental health services as a minor or as an adult. We already saw he encountered repeated stressful life events during his youth, which contributed to an unhappy childhood and adolescence. Five months after her death, his father remarried. For a brief period the offender rejected his stepmother, but soon after learned to accept her. The offender declared his stepmother raised him as her own child. Nevertheless, he reported the relationship with his stepmother always remained ambivalent. During his incarceration pronounced by the Assize Court, his stepmother never visited him and eventually gave up on him. They never saw each other again. His father and brother did visit him in jail; however, the offender described their relationship as rather distant, and his father died during his incarceration. His wife visited him with his children while he was in custody and he sent most of the money he earned to them. He also sent money for Christmas, birthdays, etc. to his children during his incarceration.

In the interpersonal realm, the offender is described as pliant, submissive, and shunting competition. His lifestyle prior to the murders was stable and predictable. He went to work every day and came home immediately after work. None of the common spur-of-the-moment acts or failures to plan ahead is mentioned. Within intimate relationships, the typical borderline shift of pervasive latent depressed mood to anxious agitation and intense anger can be noticed. Towards his wife (and later his girlfriend), the offender sometimes impulsively engaged in outbursts or actions that were later recognized as irrational and counter-productive. The aggressive outbursts were essentially verbal, sometimes physical, yet without requiring medical attention. No increase in seriousness and frequency of the battering was noticed. His second partner had a history of serious violence with a former spouse, which resulted in permanent sequels. She later confirmed the offender's statement that she was addicted to medication and alcohol, and even added that she was exasperating and belligerent when intoxicated, which resulted in occasional battering. Most of the time she started the fight by being mean to him. When she gave him her attention, though, such as by making a special meal for his birthday, the offender literally wept of happiness.

Three central assumptions have often been uncovered in therapy with borderline individuals: e.g., “The world is dangerous and malevolent,” “I am powerless and vulnerable,” and “I am inherently unacceptable” (Beck & Freeman, 1990). These basic assumptions are conspicuously present with the offender and play a determining role in his subjective functioning in general, and the genesis of the mass murder in particular. We already saw the offender that had very low self-esteem due to his insecure attachment pattern and his scars. Like many borderline individuals, he had experienced periods of loneliness and isolation in his quest for approval and security, which resulted in feelings of distrust and hostility towards others. His trial and his wife leaving him brought these cognitions to a paroxysm. The offender felt unjustly abandoned by his wife, because in his perception his thievery was meant to prevent them from having to live in poverty. Also, he felt he was unjustifiably condemned by the

jury. Moreover, “the jury would never have looked after me afterwards [e.g. when incarcerated]”. Being locked up only exacerbated the stress-related paranoid ideation that society was against him on the one hand, and his feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness on the other.

## 6.2. Psychopathy

The offender received a score of less than 15 on the PCL-R2. The latter provides both categorical and dimensional assessments of psychopathy, in that dichotomous classifications are defined by cut-off scores whereas continuous scores can be used to represent the extent to which an individual matches the “prototypic psychopath” (Hare, 1991, 2001). While the cut-off score is 30 in the U.S. and Canada, research findings suggest that 26 might be more appropriate within a European sample (Rasmussen, Storsaert, & Levander, 1999). Either way, the offender’s score falls below the categorical assessment cut-off score. However, the mild psychopathic dimension within a borderline personality disorder is consistent with a body of research having found overlap between psychopathy and borderline personality disorder. Indeed, studies have examined the relation between PCL-R factor scores and the diagnostic criteria for borderline personality disorder in various settings and have found evidence that PCL-R total scores were associated with measures of borderline personality disorder (Hart & Hare, 1989; Raine, 1986; Shine & Hobson, 1997; Stälenheim & von Knorring, 1996). This overlap may characterize the impulsive, anxious, angrily reactive secondary psychopath described by Blackburn (2006; Hart & Hare, 1989; Kernberg, 1975). The secondary psychopath might thus experience anxiety secondary to fear of abandonment or an inability to tolerate ambiguity, which is rather common with borderline personality disorder (Murphy & Vess, 2003). Further, the low psychopathy score is also consistent with the presence of a clinical depression. Indeed, studies that examined the association between the PCL-R and Axis I disorders have shown that psychopathy is rarely significantly associated with an Axis I pathology other than substance use disorders (Hart & Hare, 1989; Hildebrand & De Ruiter, 2004; Nedopil, Hollweg, Hartmann, & Jasper, 1998; Rice & Harris, 1995). In summary, the present offender corresponds to the mass murder with borderline personality profile with mild antisocial patterns of behavior (Palermo, 1997; Palermo & Ross, 1999).

## 6.3. Conclusions

As has frequently been observed with mass murderers, the offender was in his 30s, divorced, bullied at school, socially isolated, and had a history of (spousal) violence and criminal activities. The diagnosed borderline personality disorder is coherent with the loss and/or unavailability of his parents in childhood and the occurrence of “traumatic” and repetitive stressful events. Depression, loneliness, stress-related paranoid ideas, and the blaming of others also have often been found to be the central core of this personality disorder in general, and of mass murderers, in particular. During the incubation phase, a clinical depression and psychopathological symptoms could be assessed. As is frequently the case, the precipitating event concerned a disturbance in the realm of love. The typical borderline fear and intolerance of being alone gave rise to extreme ego-dystonic anger and revenge fantasies. The build-up of tension resulted in the subjective certitude that a homicidal act was the only way out. Emotional arousal and threat being absent, the killing was of a predatory nature. It was cognitively planned and enacted and its effect (relief) was anticipated by the offender. Afterwards, the psychopathological phenomena (depression, paranoid ideation, and symptoms) disappeared and the individual experienced a relief from the emotional tension.

## 7. Discussion

Evidently, social isolation, depression, a major setback, and ego-dystonic anger that cannot be catheted do not ineluctably lead to such extreme violence. Therefore, some authors have argued that pathological narcissism could function as a catalyst. Indeed, grandiosity, entitlement, and omnipotent control predispose individuals to predatory violence and such traits have, therefore, been frequently observed in mass murderers (Cantor et al., 2000; Dietz, 1986; Holmes & Holmes, 2001; Mullen, 2004; Palermo, 1997). In this context, Meloy (1997) described a mass murderer as dressed in a camouflage jacket, wearing a ‘No Fear’ brand T shirt, a black ammunition vest, a bandanna, sunglasses, etc. Similarly, the 17-year-old Columbine High School shooter E. Harris wrote “Ich binn Gott” [I’m God] in his school planner and the yearbook of his friends (Langman, 2009). Their sense of grandiosity can be so extreme that some mass murderers have even been reported as plaguing prison officials with demands and complaints about matters from food and prison hygiene to medical care and the available TV programs (Mullen, 2004).

However, this sense of grandiosity and entitlement (as assessed by means of the interpersonal facet of the PCL-R), and ego-syntonic fantasies that are frequently associated with these “pseudo-commandos”, were not discernable in the present mass murderer. Nor was there any evidence that he was preoccupied with violent fantasies, games, books, etc. Instead of pathological narcissism, it might be worth considering the hypothesis that the borderline functioning catalyzed the aforementioned variables. Indeed, borderline individuals frequently externalize responsibility for their personal distress and regard others as having malevolent intentions. The rejection of responsibility and the consideration of oneself as a victim, which is paramount with the studied offender, might actually have facilitated the turn to violence. Also, the seven year sentence and its correlate — the loss of his children and the desertion of his successive partners — might have reinforced and grounded these ideations in reality. From then on the offender might have found himself trapped in a vicious circle where his hate toward society, owing to his projective identification, was experienced as hate from society against him. As a result, the offender may have reached the conclusion that only killing could offer relief.

There are certain limitations to this study. A case study has advantages as well as disadvantages. One of the benefits of a phenomenal-descriptive approach is that it can be an appropriate first step in understanding a complex and largely unknown phenomenon such as mass murder. Second, case studies might be well-suited for developing areas that are difficult to investigate empirically. Finally, they show how statistically and empirically validated variables concretely interact with each other in order to cumulate into a dramatic event. The major disadvantage of case studies, however, is that their results cannot be extrapolated. The characteristics of the offender in this study have only a heuristic value, and could thus certainly not be considered as predictive factors.

However, a similar conglomeration of factors might alert law enforcement, probation/parole, and other officers as well as peers of the potential offender that there could be danger. Indeed, in this singular case, the offender gave some discrete signals to his latest partner and a co-worker and explicit ones to his accomplice. Indeed, months before the mass murder, he told a co-worker he owned a rifle and on two occasions he showed it to his girlfriend.<sup>8</sup> Using them as predictive elements would most probably result in a major number of false positives. However, taking them seriously under consideration might prevent tragedies. Further, as mass murder is fundamentally dissimilar from other forms of homicide, this constellation of variables

<sup>8</sup> This type of 22 mm rifle could be bought quite easily at the time. This is no longer the case under the present weapon legislation which requires permits.



might point toward the risk of mass murder instead of other forms of extreme violence.

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