

CHAPTER

4

Physical Violence



Myths and Realities

Myth: Given the long history of discrimination and prejudice by whites, African Americans are understandably more likely to kill whites than other blacks.

Reality: Most killings are intraracial, with blacks more likely to kill other blacks than whites, just like whites are more likely to do away with other whites than blacks (p. 60).

Myth: Because of their larger population, small cities, which have as many as 50,000 residents, generally have higher rates of homicide than do rural areas.

Reality: Rural areas have more homicides than small cities because they have less community integration brought about by the population dispersion in the country (p. 60).

Myth: When women kill their husbands, it is mostly because their victims have cheated on them.

Reality: Women rarely kill in response to their husbands' infidelity. They usually send their husbands to the hereafter as a desperate attempt to get out of an abusive relationship (p. 61).

Myth: Teenagers in poor inner cities often carry guns in order to seek status among their peers or make an impression on others as being tough.

Reality: The primary reason they carry guns is to protect themselves in their dangerous, high-crime neighborhoods (p. 62).

Myth: As everyone knows "guns don't kill; people do." So it is futile to outlaw the possession of guns.

Reality: Of course, guns by themselves cannot kill, nor can their absence reduce the motivation to kill. But were guns less available, potential killers would use less lethal weapons, which would result in fewer deaths (p. 64).

Myth: Strangers don't care about us as much as our family, friends, and acquaintances do; so it is not surprising that most murder victims are killed by strangers.

Reality: The majority of murder victims are related to or know their killers (p. 66).

Myth: Given the shocking nature of their crimes, most mass murderers, who kill many people at about the same time and place, must be and are somehow emotionally disturbed.

Reality: The majority of mass murderers are far from mentally ill. They appear to be extraordinarily ordinary, indistinguishable from everybody else (p. 69).

Myth: Genocide perpetrators, who kill hundreds or thousands of people, are mostly abnormal because they get a great deal of pleasure from making many others suffer.

Reality: They are mostly normal, like you and me, except that they have the job of killing others under the order of their superiors (p. 75).

Myth: The U.S. war against al Qaeda as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been a total failure.

Reality: There have been both successes and failures. Over half of al Qaeda's key leaders have been killed or captured but the terrorists continue to threaten the United States. Iraq and Afghanistan seem to be on the way to democracy, but many U.S. soldiers have died and still nobody knows when the Iraqi government will be able to take care of its country's security without American military assistance (p. 77).

Myth: If people know that if they kill somebody they will be executed, they will think twice and decide against committing murder. It can thus be concluded that the death penalty deters murder.

Reality: The death penalty does not seem to deter murder, as suggested by, for example, the fact that many states that still practice the death penalty have higher murder rates than do other states that have abolished the death penalty (p. 80).

In 2008, Abu Dhaim, a 25-year-old Palestinian, filled a cardboard television box with a semiautomatic rifle, two pistols, and plenty of ammunition. He then called his girlfriend, 17, and discussed their plan to go shopping the next day in Jerusalem. They were going to get married soon and hoped to honeymoon in Turkey. After he hanged up the phone, Abu Dhaim drove to a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem. He went into a library, where he killed

eight students and wounded ten before he himself was shot dead. His girlfriend was totally surprised. She could not have imagined him as a suicide terrorist. After all, she had known him to be cheerful and gentle. Furthermore, he came from a relatively wealthy and well-educated family (McGirk, 2008).

Actually, contrary to his girlfriend's preconceptions, Abu Dhaim fits the typical profile of a suicide terrorist. Instead of being poor and uneducated, most suicide terrorists come from families with money and education, as we will see in this chapter. We will also examine other types of violence including assault, homicide, mass and serial murder, school violence, hate-motivated killing, and genocide, along with stalking as a threat of violence.

Assault and Aggravated Assault

Considerably less serious than homicide, assault is understandably far more prevalent. Assault involves the unlawful use of physical force against another person. It can be legally divided into two types: aggravated and simple. Aggravated assault involves an atrocious attack with the intent to seriously harm or the use of a deadly weapon. It is considered a felony carrying a relatively severe penalty. All other forms of assault are simple, hence considered a misdemeanor, for which the punishment is less severe. As an act, aggravated assault is basically similar to homicide. Aggravated assault differs mostly in consequence: The victim survives rather than dies.

Since assault is behaviorally similar in some ways to homicide, most of the research findings about homicide that we will discuss also hold true for assault. Thus, like murderers, assaulters are more likely to be poor than nonpoor, to be black than white, to victimize people of the same race than of a different race, to live in the South than other regions, to reside in large cities than small towns, to be men than women, to have a violent past than not, to commit the crime during the weekend than during the weekday, and so on. At the same time, research has suggested at least two ways in which assault differs from homicide.

First, for obvious reasons, assaulters are less likely than murderers to use firearms in committing the crime. Second, in the summer, the number of homicides increases only slightly, but assault rises significantly. In the hot season, people tend to go out more, especially the poor whose homes are not comfortably air-conditioned. Going out increases social interaction, especially among strangers, who are likely to get involved in assault. Heat stress and increased consumption of alcoholic beverages further heighten aggression. A combination of all these factors enhances the likelihood of assault (Harries, 1990; Livingston, 2008; Parker with Rebhun, 1995).

Who Is More Likely to Kill?

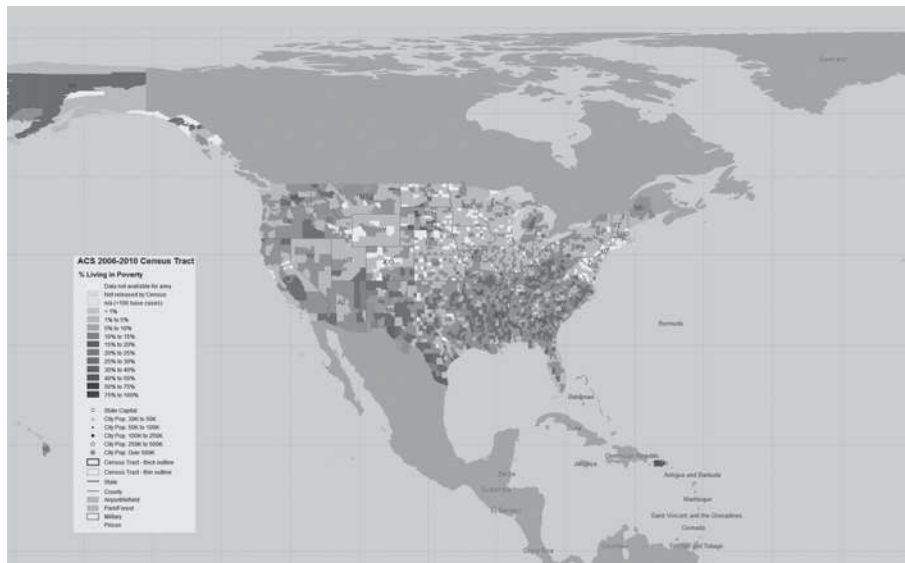
The most striking thing about killers is that they are mostly poor. Not surprisingly, blacks, being generally poorer than whites, are more likely than whites to commit homicide. Poor countries have higher rates of homicide than rich nations. Similarly, societies and individuals with violent pasts have relatively high rates of homicides. The South has more homicides than any other region in the United States. Here and abroad large cities have

more killings than smaller cities. Men are far more likely than women to kill, and young men (aged 18–24) are more likely than other age groups to commit murder. Let us take a closer look at each of these facts.

Class and Race

Various studies have clearly indicated that homicides are concentrated heavily in the lower class. Over 90 percent of the murderers in the United States are semiskilled workers, unskilled laborers, and welfare recipients. Poverty is definitely a factor in homicide. As such, poverty crosses racial lines: Poor whites have higher murder rates than better-off whites, and poor blacks have higher rates than richer blacks. There are several reasons for the strong link between poverty and murder. Compared with people of the higher classes, the poor are more likely to have financial, marital, and other stressful problems, which in turn tend to cause interpersonal conflict. The poor also tend more to resort to physical violence as a way of dealing with interpersonal conflict. Violence is, in effect, a mechanism for getting respect, because the poor generally consider violence a badge of toughness and masculinity (Hannon, 2005; Parker, 1989; Parker with Rebhun, 1995; Pridemore, 2008).

Poverty and Wealth in the United States



This map reflects the high concentration of the poorest counties throughout the United States. The poorest counties have a poverty rate of more than twice the national average, and are overrepresented in the Deep South, Appalachia, South Dakota, the South East, and the American side of the Mexican border.

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2010 American Community Survey.

Blacks generally have a much higher rate of homicide than whites. This fact makes it appear as if race plays an important role in homicide. Actually, though, being black has nothing to do with such violence. Instead, African Americans' higher rate of homicide simply reflects their higher rate of poverty, which, along with racial discrimination, generates greater frustration and alienation. In expressing their frustration, however, blacks tend more to kill their fellow blacks than to kill whites. In fact, most killings are *intra* racial, for whites also do away with whites more than blacks. *Interracial* murders—in which blacks kill whites and vice versa—are rare because racial discrimination discourages interaction between blacks and whites (Greenberg and Schneider, 1994; Rose and McClain, 1990; Shihadeh and Flynn, 1996; Strom and MacDonald, 2007).

Regions, Large Cities, and Rural Areas

Generally, the southern region has the highest murder rate, the western region has the next highest rate, and the northeastern and midwestern states have the lowest rate (FBI, 2008). There is nothing new about these regional differences; they have been around for a long time. What accounts for the southern leadership in homicide rates? Some sociologists have attributed it to the “culture of violence” in the South, where violent behavior seems more acceptable than in other regions. For example, gun ownership and execution of murderers, along with the history of lynching, which are assumed to reflect a violent culture, are the most common in the South (Lee, Hayes, and Thomas, 2008; Messner, Baller, and Zevenbergen, 2005). Another reason could be the greater prevalence of rurality in the South. A study by Kenneth Wilkinson (1984) shows that the average murder rate in rural areas exceeds the rate in most cities. According to Wilkinson, the dispersion of people in rural areas (as contrasted with the congestion of people in most cities) reduces community integration, thereby forcing family members, friends, and acquaintances to spend too much time with each other. This enhances the opportunity for violent disruption in primary relationships (among relatives and acquaintances), and it is in such relationships that most homicides take place, a strange fact that we will discuss in another section.

The rurality–homicide connection, however, seems to run counter to the popular belief that there are more killings in *large* cities. Actually, it does not; large cities do have more killings. Rurality is related to homicide only if we compare the homicide rates of rural areas with those of *most* cities, which are relatively *small*, having populations of fewer than 50,000 people. Rural areas do have higher homicide rates than these small cities. However, larger cities, with populations exceeding 100,000, have significantly higher murder rates than those for small cities and rural areas (see Table 4.1).

Paradoxically, like rurality, large city size encourages homicides by reducing community integration. But unlike rurality, which reduces community integration through *population dispersion*, large city size diminishes community integration via *population heterogeneity*. However it comes about, the lack of community integration drives individuals—anonymous urbanites as much as isolated ruralites—into the same matrix of interactions among relatives and acquaintances that is likely to lead to homicides. Although there are many more relatives and acquaintances than strangers killed in both urban and rural areas, anonymous urbanites are more likely than isolated ruralites to kill strangers while isolated ruralites tend more to kill family members or intimate partners (Gallup-Black, 2005).

TABLE 4.1 How Urban and Rural Murder Rates Differ

Where People Live	Murder Rate in 2009 (per 100,000 population)
Large cities with population of	
250,000 or more	10.2
100,000 to 249,999	6.6
50,000 to 99,999	4.1
Rural areas	4.1
Small cities with population of	
25,000 to 49,999	3.3
10,000 to 24,999	2.7
Fewer than 10,000	2.8

Source: FBI, *Crime in the United States*, 2010.

Gender and Age

Those homicidal interactions are far more likely to cause men than women to kill because men are far more concerned about defending their manhood. Most of the killings involve a man doing away with another man. If a man and a woman are caught up in a homicidal interaction, he is more likely to be the offender and she the victim. Men who kill their wives or girlfriends do so mostly because they have persistently tried to *keep their victims in an abusive relationship*. Such killing, then, is the culmination of a long series of physically violent acts perpetrated by the men against their female victims. Moreover, men tend to kill in response to their wives' infidelity. Men would also kill their wives as part of a murder-suicide or a family massacre (Wilson and Daly, 1992).

In the fewer cases in which women kill, they differ from their male counterparts in the choice of victims. Unlike male offenders, who are more likely to kill others of the *same sex*, female offenders are more likely to kill members of the *opposite sex*. In these opposite-sex killings, the female and male murderers usually commit the crime for different reasons. The women rarely kill in response to their husbands' infidelity even if their husbands are extremely adulterous. They usually send their husbands to the hereafter as a desperate attempt to *get out of an abusive relationship*. The women basically kill for self-preservation or in self-defense. Violence by women, then, is primarily defensive, in contrast to violence by men, which is distinctly offensive. Such defensive killing serves as "self-help social control" against abusive husbands. Not surprisingly, it often takes place in states where there are no laws requiring mandatory arrests for domestic violence (Gauthier and Bankston, 2004; Goetting, 1989; Mann, 1996; Peterson, 1999; Wilson and Daly, 1992).

Males also kill at a younger age than females. When killing, people are more likely to target others of the same age group than older or younger victims. This is largely because people of about the same age spend more time interacting with one another than

with others of a different age. In the few cases in which older persons quarrel with younger ones, the older persons are more likely to end up dead, because the younger persons are more impulsive and hence quicker to shoot. While most homicides involve relatives and acquaintances, the younger killers are more likely than their older peers to target strangers and commit murder and robbery together (Eigen, 1981; Mulvihill and Tumin with Curtis, 1969; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

The homicide rate in the United States is lower today than ten years ago. But, from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, there was a stunning upsurge in murders committed by *teenagers*. Most of these killings took place in large cities' poor neighborhoods, where gang violence, drive-by shootings, and crack cocaine were relatively common. More important, many teenagers in poor inner cities carried guns, a new phenomenon in those years. Contrary to popular belief, the primary reason for carrying guns was not seeking status among one's peers or trying to make an impression on others. Teenagers carried guns to protect themselves in their dangerous, high-crime neighborhoods (Blumstein, 1995; Fox, 1996; Wright, Sheley, and Smith, 1992). All the same, the increased possession of guns contributed to the surge in teen murders. Other contributing factors included the larger number of dysfunctional families, the greater prevalence of drugs among the urban poor, the lower quality of public schools, and the increased glorification of violence on television, in the movies, and in video games. Since 1994, however, the teen murder rate has declined, largely as a result of the falloff in the crack market and increased confiscation of handguns from juveniles by police departments (FBI, 2005; Kleck and Hogan, 1999; Magdalena et al., 2010; Steinberg, 1999).

Patterns of Killing

Various studies have found certain patterns in the majority of murder cases. However, these patterns mainly involve murders committed by lower-class people, not by middle- and upper-class persons. Traditionally, researchers have concentrated on lower-class homicides simply because they make up the overwhelming majority of murders. Thus, in this section, we will focus on the patterns of lower-class homicides, but will also note the characteristics of higher-class murders in cases in which they differ.

Time of Killing

Most murders are committed in the heat of passion, and there does seem to be some, though relatively weak, connection between season of the year and murder. The number of homicides increases slightly during the hot late spring and summer, peaking in July and August, during which potential killers and victims, who are relatives, friends, and acquaintances rather than strangers, tend most to get together and drink cold beer in public places such as restaurants and taverns. Homicide decreases during the cool autumn and early spring, and drops even more during the winter months of January and February (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Wolfgang, 1958). But the number of homicides peaks again during the cold month of December, primarily due to its being a holiday season, which, like July and August, brings together the kinds of people who are more likely to get involved in homicide (Anderson, 1989).

Far stronger than the association between homicide and season is the link between homicide and days of the week as well as hours of the day. Homicide occurs most frequently during the weekend evenings, particularly on Saturday night. This may explain why the handgun most often used in homicide is popularly called a Saturday night special. These weekend killings are more likely to involve family members than the homicides occurring during the weekdays—the weekday homicides tend more to involve strangers. The reason is that people usually spend more time at home on weekends (Messner and Tardiff, 1985).

All this does not, however, hold true for the minority of cases involving middle-class and upper-class offenders. These relatively affluent offenders are likely to kill on any day of the week while poor offenders tend more to kill during the weekend. Why this class difference? Because murders in the middle and upper classes are more likely to be *calculative* or *premeditated*, while lower-class killings are more often carried out in a burst of rage, usually after some heavy drinking during the weekend (Green and Wakefield, 1979; Parker with Rebhun, 1995).

What about the evening when the moon is full? Does the popularly believed lunar effect on homicide exist? Is it true, as “every policeman, bartender, and emergency-room attendant knows, that people tend to act crazy and become more violent when the moon is full”? One psychiatrist claimed to have found a higher incidence of homicides in Cleveland and Miami at the times of new and full moons. However, in analyzing the same data and other relevant studies, an astronomer found no correlation between lunar phases and homicide rates (Sky and Telescope, 1985).

Place of Killing

Men are more likely to kill at public places, but women are far more likely to kill in the home (Miethe and Regoeczi with Drass, 2004). In the past women most often did the killing in the kitchen, apparently because it is the place where women traditionally were accustomed to handling a knife—which can turn into a dangerous weapon when a quarrel flares up (Wolfgang, 1958). But nowadays, less likely to be confined to the kitchen as a result of greater gender equality, women tend more to kill in the living room (Mann, 1996). However, the bedroom is a more dangerous place for women than for men, as women are more frequently killed there by their husbands, boyfriends, or exes (Totman, 1978). Perhaps men have been socially conditioned to use the bedroom as a place for demonstrating their “manliness” by sexually conquering women and end up using it as a place for physically subjugating them to death.

While women are more likely to kill at home, they are also more likely to be killed at home. A major reason is simply that they spend more time at home. Other types of people who spend more time at home are also more likely to have the same fate. These include the very young, the very old, minority groups, the married, and the unemployed (Messner and Tardiff, 1985).

Method of Killing

Killing a human may appear extraordinary when compared with, say, killing a rabbit. This consequently fires the imagination of many mystery writers, who help spread the popular notion that murderers often use mysterious, exotic, ingenious, or superclever methods to

get rid of their victims. Yet research often shows that there is nothing special about the methods of killing. Most objects can be readily turned into murder weapons, as long as they are conveniently accessible when the murderous anger erupts. In our society firearms are easily available, and so they are most often used as murder weapons (Kristof, 1996b; Luo, 2011; Miller et al., 2007). Perhaps, seeing a gun while embroiled in a heated argument may incite a violent person to murderous action. As Shakespeare has it, “How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds, makes ill deeds done.”

Of course, firearms in themselves cannot cause homicide, nor can their absence reduce the motivation to kill. It is true that “guns don’t kill people, people do.” Still, were guns less available, many heated arguments would have resulted in aggravated assaults rather than murders, thereby reducing the number of fatalities. An analysis of over 20,000 homicides and aggravated assaults in Chicago suggests that attacks with knives are five times *less* likely to result in death than attacks with guns (Wright, Rossi, and Daly, 1983). An enormous number of guns are in private hands: Half of all U.S. households own firearms of some kind, and a quarter of all families have handguns. It is, therefore, not surprising that many deaths in the United States result from gun homicides. Every year, our country has over 15,000 handgun homicides compared with less than 100 in other industrialized nations such as Canada, England, and Japan, where guns are much harder to get (Cook and Moore, 1999; Wright, 1995).

The easy availability of guns in the United States appears to be a great equalizer for the poor. It gives power to the powerless. This may explain why lower-class people are more likely to use firearms than any other weapon when they kill. Shooting is also the most popular mode of murder among people of the higher classes. However, higher-class killers are much more likely than their lower-class peers to use more refined techniques of killing, such as poisoning, staging a hit-and-run car death, and hiring somebody else to do the killing (Green and Wakefield, 1979).

Characteristics of Homicide

Most killings are carried out against family members, friends, or acquaintances rather than strangers. Some killings happen as if the victim asks to be put to death. Some involve an attempt to win a seemingly trivial argument. Some serve as an adjunct to suicide. Let us take a closer look at each characteristic of killing.

Warm-Blooded Murder

Many people are apparently afraid of getting attacked and killed by strangers, particularly in big cities. Such fear came through clearly in the mid-1980s when Bernhard Goetz, the so-called Subway Vigilante, shot four young African Americans on a subway car in New York, though they allegedly had merely approached and asked him for money. It was also the same fear that drove many people to hail him as a hero. The fear that strangers will kill us unless we kill them first does not reflect reality. Compared with other major crimes, such as robbery, rape, and assault, homicide is the least likely to involve strangers. Of all the murders that occur every year, only a small percentage are committed by strangers

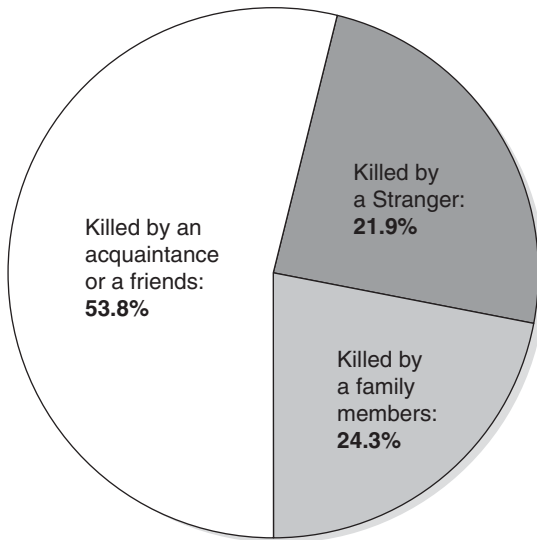


FIGURE 4.1 Most Victims Know Their Killers

Source: FBI, *Crime in the United States*, 2010.

(Baker, 2007). In fact, the majority of the murders involve relatives, friends, or acquaintances, as Figure 4.1 indicates. This situation is not unique to our society. It exists in many other countries as well.

It seems incredible that the people we know or even love are more likely to kill us than are total strangers. But, as three sociologists have explained,

This should really not be very surprising. Everyone is within easy striking distance of intimates for a large part of time. Although friends, lovers, spouses, and the like are a main source of pleasure in one's life, they are equally a main source of frustration and hurt. Few others can anger one so much. (Mulvihill and Tumin with Curtis, 1969)

Ordinarily, killing requires a great deal of emotion. Therefore, it may be more difficult to kill a stranger about whom we don't have much feeling—unless we are professional killers, who typically dispatch their victims in a cold-blooded, unemotional manner. In sum, we are far less likely to become victims of cold-blooded murders carried out by strangers but more likely to die from warm-blooded, emotional murders at the hands of our relatives, friends, or acquaintances.

Doing the Victim a Favor

The general public often sympathizes with the murder victim but not with the offender at all. The public assumes that the murder victim is weak and meek, helplessly slain by the strong and aggressive offender. This assumption is not always correct. In at least one out of four homicides, the victim has first attacked the subsequent slayer, and such murder has

been called *victim-precipitated homicide* (Felson and Steadman, 1983; Wilbanks, 1984). The following are typical cases of victim precipitation:

- A drunken man gets into an argument in a bar one very late night. He grabs a beer bottle and breaks it on the bar, giving him a long necked handle with jagged glass as a very dangerous weapon. He announces that he is going to tear open the victim's throat and lunges for him. The victim, however, has pulled a gun and shoots, killing the bottle-wielding attacker. Thus, the "victim" becomes the killer, and the attacker becomes the victim.
- A very large gang member has been picking on a smaller, younger neighborhood boy for years, stealing his lunch money and beating him up regularly. Showing off in front of his friends, he insists that the kid is a wimp and a chicken. Warming to the theme, he hands the kid his gun, insisting that the kid is too weak to even pull the trigger, which does in fact require some strength. Then he continues to taunt the boy, slapping and punching him, to prove that he is a complete wimp. Finally, the boy squeezes the trigger, killing his assailant.
- The police have the house surrounded and are shouting for the inhabitants to surrender. Bob tells his partners that he will never be taken alive. He will find a way to break out, or die trying. After a couple of tense hours of stand-off, Bob suddenly grabs a huge kitchen carving knife and runs out the front door screaming with the knife held over his head in an attack position. He is gunned down by the police before he can reach them.

Because they provoke another person to kill them, Marvin Wolfgang (1967) assumes that these self-precipitated murder victims may have secretly wanted to kill *themselves*. This assumption may well be correct. But if they have suicide wishes, why do they not take it on themselves to end their own lives? Perhaps they have been influenced by what may be considered a culture of *showy masculinity*, characteristic of a sexist society. This culture encourages males to show off their toughness and hide their tenderness, to act like a "man" and avoid acting like a "woman," or to engage in "manly" braggadocio and shun "feminine" quietism. Under the pressure of this culture, suicidally inclined men may *avoid* revealing their "sissy cowardice" or pleading for condescending sympathy from others by quietly ending their own lives. Instead, they are inclined to display masculine bravado and earn from others some "respect" as the worst person imaginable, by making an ostentatious assault on another person that is secretly designed for their own annihilation—the result being a victim-precipitated murder.

Winning a Trivial Argument

Murder is an extremely serious human act, yet the motive for committing it often appears downright trivial. Ordinary quarrels, which often seem to be over nothing, are the most common reason for poor people to kill. As a retired homicide detective in New York reports, "When you get a guy to 'fess up as to why he did it, you get very shoddy answers: 'He took my coat,' 'He stepped on my girlfriend's foot' " (Wilentz, 1985). Similar examples follow (Mulvihill and Tumin with Curtis, 1969):

- A man was fatally shot in front of a tavern because he had refused to lend his assailant \$1.
- Two men were arguing over a \$5 bet and became involved in a scuffle. One then took out a gun and pulled the trigger on the other.
- Two fellow workers were drinking beer; they argued over a \$1 pool bet. One wound up in a morgue.
- A man was drunk when he came home. He told his uncle to move over in bed. Seeing that his uncle would not, he stabbed him to death.
- “Hey, you’re lookin’ at me.”
 “No, I ain’t.”
 “Yes, you are. Why you lookin’ at me?”
 Minutes later one of them lay still in a puddle of blood.

Murder, then, is apparently a quick and effective way for the poor to win an argument—over trifles. Middle-class people usually use a much less drastic means, such as verbal or intellectual ability, to settle an argument. But the poor tend more to suffer from lack of such ability, and thus they are more often compelled to use their physical strength to end an argument with—and sometimes the life of—another person.

We may also note that arguments such as those illustrated above may appear trivial to us. Yet the same arguments are apparently taken by poor males as reasons for defending their dignity or honor as men. A dirty look, a little insult, or a jostle would not usually get middle-class people into an argument, let alone impel them to spill another person’s blood. The same triviality may be perceived differently by the poor. Why would the poor make such a mountain out of a molehill, and with such deadly consequences for themselves?

The explanation can be found in the economic and social oppression of the poor. The poor man’s dignity as a man—or, for that matter, as simply a human being—has been substantially diminished by the frustrating and humiliating forces in his life. Some of these forces are impersonal, such as the general condition of poverty, so that the poor man cannot fight back against them. Other humiliating forces can be found in people, such as the police, bureaucrats in a welfare or unemployment office, and employers—who usually treat him with far less respect than they do the more successful, higher-status persons. But since these people are more powerful, the poor man cannot fight back at them either.

As a consequence, he has extremely little dignity left in him, and so, in order to live with at least more worth than an animal, he dearly hangs on to it. Although he cannot maintain this fragile dignity in the larger society or in the presence of those more powerful than himself, he certainly can at his own home and in his neighborhood, among his equally dignity-deprived family members, friends, and acquaintances. Because his dignity as a man is already extremely fragile, the pressure of daily frustration and tension can easily crush it. Thus even a small insult from his relatives, friends, or acquaintances (who are, after all, his last strand of hope for keeping his dignity) can mean, to him, the threat that all his dignity will be taken away. With such a perception, he will very likely fight like mad to defend his dignity, even to the extent of killing the person who has “dissed” him. In fact, as many researchers have found, most homicides result from what they call character contests, in which the offender and victim try to defend their honor after it has been threatened by the other (Athens, 1985; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Mullins, 2006).

Homicide Followed by Suicide

We have speculated that the so-called victims of victim-precipitated homicide may have wanted to die and contributed greatly to their own deaths. There is yet a different group of offenders with the same suicidal tendency. They are homicide-suicide offenders, who first kill another person and then finish themselves off. The difference between these two types of offenders is obvious. While the “victim” of victim-precipitated homicide conceals his or her suicidal wishes, the homicide-suicide offender reveals them.

Homicide-suicide is relatively rare, no more than 3 or 4 percent of all murders in the United States and approximately 10 percent in Canada. Virtually all homicide-suicides are male and their victims female. The perpetrators are extremely frustrated, depressed, and violent, killing their wives and, often, their children as a way of expressing their dominance or control over them (Gillespie, Hearn, and Silverman, 1998; Harper and Voigt, 2007; Warren-Gordon et al., 2010).

Two conflicting views can be found on the nature of homicide-suicide: one sociological, seeing homicide-suicide as a form of *normality*; the other, psychiatric, viewing it as a symptom of *abnormality*. According to the sociological view, the murderer-suicide is a normal person because, after killing the loved one, he is able to feel remorse, just as we would expect normal people to feel after they had done such a horrible thing. By contrast, the psychiatrist sees the murderer-suicide as a psychotic, believing that, instead of feeling remorse, the offender anticipates a reunion with the victim in another world, and, therefore, kills himself in order to achieve that goal.

These two conflicting views can be reconciled. It is true that some murderer-suicides are “normal.” It is also true that other murderer-suicides are “psychotic.” But these two types of murderer-suicides may have one thing in common—both are unaffected by the culture of showy masculinity discussed before. Instead of acting like “tough guys,” as required by that culture, both behave like “weaklings.” In effect, the normal one begs the mortally wronged victim (who is usually his wife or girlfriend) for pardon, and the psychotic one dreams for some happy reconciliation in another world. Both behave like—when seen from the standpoint of the “tough guy” culture—mushy characters in a tear-jerking love story.

Sociologist David Phillips (1980a, 1981) has discovered homicide-suicides of a third kind. They resemble the so-called victims of victim-precipitated murder in that they conceal their suicidal wishes, but they carry out these wishes with more ingenuity. They “disguise their homicide-suicides as accidents to protect their survivors from insurance problems and from social stigma.” One example of these disguised homicide-suicides is an airline pilot who deliberately crashes his plane with passengers onboard, but who makes the crash appear convincingly like an accident. Phillips argues that many plane crashes actually involve the pilots committing murder-suicides. This argument is based on his finding that after a murder-suicide is publicized in the mass media there is an increase in both noncommercial and commercial plane crashes, a trend that persists for approximately nine days. Phillips assumed that the mass media encourage those suicidal pilots to commit murder-suicides.

Mass and Serial Murder

In 2011 Jared Loughner went to a grocery store in Tucson, Arizona, and killed 6 people and wounded 14 others including U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords. In 1997 Andrew Cunanan killed the famous fashion designer Gianni Versace in Miami Beach after having murdered four other men in other cities. In 1992 Jeffrey Dahmer of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, pleaded guilty to killing 15 young men, one after another. He reportedly had sex with some of the corpses, dismembered some of the bodies, and kept in his refrigerator a severed head as well as a heart that he planned to eat later. Earlier, in 1985, another serial killer struck terror in the Los Angeles area. Called the Night Stalker, he sneaked into the homes of 19 people at night and killed them as they slept. Just a year before, a mass murderer walked into a McDonald's restaurant in San Diego carrying a rifle, a shotgun, and a pistol with hundreds of rounds of ammunition. He opened fire on everybody, killing 21 people—mostly children—and wounding 19 others. These types of killing—mass and serial murders—attract considerable attention from the media and public. Just the same, they are extremely rare.

Mass murder involves killing a number of people at about the same time and place. It usually ends with the murderer dying at the scene of the carnage. The murderer's death results from either committing suicide or forcing the police to take lethal action. Despite the shocking nature of their crime, most mass murderers are not mentally ill. As sociologists Jack Levin and James Fox (1985) conclude after studying mass murderers, "The mass killer appears to be *extraordinarily ordinary*. He is indistinguishable from everyone else. Indeed, he may be the neighbor next door, a coworker at the next desk, or a member of the family."

Some mass murderers are *disgruntled employees* who want to get even with their boss who has wronged them in some way, by firing them, for example. But in the process of killing their boss, they end up murdering their coworkers as well. Other mass murderers are *heads of family* who kill their wives and children after having long felt alone, alienated, helpless, and depressed, aggravated by heavy drinking. Some mass murderers are *pseudo-commandos*, who turn their home into an arsenal and then lash out at what they consider to be an unjust or evil world. Finally, some mass murderers *work as a team under the direction of a charismatic leader*, such as the September 11 suicide bombers who attacked the United States under the direction of their leader, Osama bin Laden (Holmes and Holmes, 1992; Meloy et al., 2004).

Slightly more common than mass murder is serial murder, which involves killing a number of people one at a time. But the media have wildly exaggerated the incidence of serial murder by calling it an "epidemic." This exaggeration originated from the claim by a Justice Department official that serial murder accounts for about 20 percent of all homicides. Actually, the most credible figure, based on careful analysis by sociologists, is only 2 or 3 percent. Another myth about serial murder is that its perpetrators roam from one city to another to carry out their killing. The fact is that most (70 to 75 percent) serial murderers commit their crime in one city alone (Kappeler, Blumberg, and Potter, 1993).

While mass murderers are nearly always caught, serial killers are far more elusive because they are practiced and accomplished at what they do. First, they stalk their victims from a distance, studying the victims' routine activities and habits. They then win the victims' confidence by befriending them, or gain entry into the victims' house that they have staked out for days. Next, they lure the victims into a trap or simply hold them captive by closing off all possibility of escape. Finally, they kill the victims. In the process of killing, they "often torture their victims, taking delight in the victims' agonies, expressions of terror, cries of despair, and reactions to pain" (Norris, 1989). This should not be surprising, because most serial killers have in their childhood tortured dogs and cats for the thrill of watching them suffer. They have also been subjected to a lot of physical and emotional abuse by their parents. Such experiences have apparently taught the serial killer to become a sociopath, incapable of feeling remorse or guilt for hurting others. Nonetheless, the vast majority of serial killers are not mentally ill. They appear as normal people who go to school or work, come home, and blend into their immediate neighborhood (Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2005; Zelda G. Knight, 2006). For more on serial killers, see the following Social Profile.

A Social Profile of Serial Killers

According to one popular myth, serial killers are monsters. You would think so too if you had seen many movies like *Friday the 13th*, which portray serial killers as glassy-eyed lunatics bent on getting their kicks from inflicting human destruction. Another myth is just the opposite, regarding serial killers as unusually handsome and charming. This myth may stem from a few well-known cases, such as those involving the debonair "lady-killer," Theodore Bundy, who murdered dozens of women, and the "Los Angeles Night Stalker," Richard Rameriz, who attracted many women even after he was in prison and married there. A third myth presents serial killers as extremely brilliant, like Hannibal Lecter, the character in the novel and movie, *The Silence of the Lambs*. Contrary to these myths, most serial killers are unusually ordinary.

In one study of 107 serial killers, only 16 percent attended college and only 4 percent graduated with a bachelor's degree; the majority had blue-collar jobs. Despite their relatively low level of education and employment, most serial killers do possess a certain amount of cunning and are especially skillful in presenting themselves as friendly and trustworthy (Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2005).

Most serial killers are white men in their late twenties or early thirties. In one study of nearly 400 serial killers, 84 percent were found to be male and 80 percent white, with an average age of 28 when their first murder was committed. All this distinguishes serial killings from single-victim homicides, which are more likely to be carried out by nonwhites. Also, while murderers with a single victim tend to target people whom they know, serial killers are more likely to kill strangers—especially vulnerable ones such as children, prostitutes, and the elderly (Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2005).

The motive behind most serial murders is an intense desire for power and sadism. Serial murderers typically kill for the fun of it, not for love, money, or revenge. It makes them feel good to kill while also being able to torture the victim in the process.

A Global Perspective on Homicide

The influence of poverty on homicide shows up in comparison between rich and poor countries. In general, developing countries such as those in Latin America, Asia, and Africa have higher homicide rates than do developed countries such as those in North America and Western Europe.

Among the developed countries, however, the United States has by far the highest rate. This is largely due to the greater amount of poverty—and economic inequality—in our society compared to the other developed areas, namely, Western Europe and Japan. If Russia is considered a developed country, it has an even higher homicide rate than the United States, because it has much more poverty. The prevalence of guns can also explain why the homicide rate in the United States is much higher than in Western Europe and Japan. Within Western Europe, countries such as Finland, where many private citizens own guns, have higher homicide rates than those such as England, where guns are scarcer (Chamlin and Cochran, 2005; LaFree, 1999; Moniruzzaman and Andersson, 2005).

But among the poor, developing countries, those in Latin America have unusually high homicide rates, apparently the highest in the world. Some sociologists have attributed these high rates to a “culture of violence,” which encourages the use of violence to deal with unbearable interpersonal conflict. This culture seems to have a powerful element of machismo, the belief that men should be concerned about their manhood. In such a culture, men are encouraged to respond aggressively to an insult about their manhood. If they do not respond aggressively, they are made to feel like cowards. In any country, however, killers seem to have developed a similarly tough, macho attitude from a violent past. A killer’s violence usually begins with minor assaults against others, gradually escalates to more and more serious assaults, and finally culminates in homicide. Also in every country in the world, men are much more likely than women to kill, which apparently reflects the influence of machismo, though to a lesser degree than in Latin America. In highly patriarchal societies in the Middle East, women are likely to fall victim to “honor killings” by their male relatives, like their father or brother, if they engage in premarital or extramarital sex even as rape victims. The woman is considered to have shamed the family and the killing is meant to bring back the family honor (Baron, 2006; LaFree, 1999; Moniruzzaman and Andersson, 2005).

School Violence

In the late 1990s, boys as young as 11 gunned down classmates or teachers in the public schools of such little-known places as Littleton, Colorado; Edinboro, Pennsylvania; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Pearl, Mississippi; West Paducah, Kentucky; and Stamps, Arkansas. It appears that school violence, long known as a phenomenon of large and noisy cities, has now spread to small and tranquil towns, suburbs, and rural areas. More recently, similar violence has also taken place at Virginia Tech University and Northern Illinois University.

Following the massacre of 32 students and professors at Virginia Tech in 2007, many people wondered what had brought about such a violent act. The media tried to explain

the carnage largely by focusing on the killer's mental problems. Through interviews with students who knew the killer, he was said to be a loner, never talking to anybody. One teacher called him a bully, declaring that "there was something mean about this boy." He was once caught using his cell phone to take pictures of female classmates under the desks. Another teacher found him so angry and sad that she conveyed her concerns to campus police and counselors. An acquaintance also found him to be suicidal. When police requested a temporary detention order after he stalked two female students, he was evaluated at a psychiatric facility, and a judge wrote on a court document that he "is mentally ill and in need of hospitalization, and presents an imminent danger to self or others as a result of mental illness" (Gibbs, 2007).

It is true that mental illness plays a role in school shootings, as more than half of the shooters have experienced severe depression. But only an extremely small number of even the most depressed persons turn into murderers. Depression, then, cannot by itself cause the killing. Other factors are also likely to be implicated, such as having been abused by parents and rejected, ostracized, or taunted by peers. All these personal experiences are especially likely to lead to violence if they occur under the influence of some larger social forces. One is the easy availability of *guns*, without which depressed and angry young men would have difficulty acting out a lethally violent tendency. Another social force is the glamorization of violence in such *media* as movies, television, and video games. Media violence cannot cause actual violence among the overwhelming majority of young men, but it is likely to turn a few susceptible, violence-prone young men to violence. A third social force is the *culture* of violence, which favors the possession of firearms and accepts the use of force for settling interpersonal conflict (Newman, 2004).

One problem with this entire set of explanations as propounded by numerous pundits and media outlets is that it ignores the gendered nature of the violence. All of the killers in these episodes have been male. The victims have been predominantly female in many cases. We talk about violent movies, rap songs, bullying, day care, and video games as if girls live in a different society where they are not exposed to movies, games, or music, and where girls are never bullied, harassed, or made fun of. As Jackson Katz (2006) suggests, if these shootings had been done by girls, could anyone in the country miss out on the anguish of the cries about violent girls? Why is there little call for discussions about why boys are committing this violence?

Despite its horror, school killing is extremely rare. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), less than 1 percent of all youthful homicides take place in or around the school. Although you might not know it from the media attention, school shooting has, along with weapon carrying and physical fighting, gone down in recent years (Brener et al., 2004; CDC, 2008; Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2005; Stolberg, 1999).

Stalking

Stalking is pursuing someone in a way that creates the fear of being assaulted or killed. The offenders may follow or spy on the victims; send them unsolicited letters; make unsolicited phone calls; stand outside their homes, schools, or workplaces; show up at places where they are present; give them unwanted items; vandalize their property; or kill their

pets. Stalkers, if not stopped, may end up assaulting and killing the victim; even if they do not, the stalking may be nearly as bad as being attacked and killed. The ordeal of assault or murder usually lasts only a few minutes, but victims of stalking endure their tormentors' cruelty for nearly two years, the average duration of stalking. Stalking is also more prevalent than nearly all other forms of physical violence discussed in this chapter. According to a survey by the National Institute of Justice, 8 percent of women and 2 percent of men in the United States encounter stalking at some time in their lives (Moffatt, 2000; Mullen et al., 2000).

The majority of stalkers know their victims as ex-intimates, fellow employees, and acquaintances. The following are typical cases:

- A female graduate student gets drunk at a holiday function and makes out with another student. She doesn't return his advances (calls, e-mails, text messages, flowers) in the days and weeks to come. He later stalks her, and on a night that he witnesses her getting drunk in a bar, he offers her a ride home, rapes, and kills her.
- A teenage girl's long-time boyfriend gets drunk and strangles her after she breaks up with him for another boy and refuses repeatedly to see him. He waits until her guardians are away, sneaks into her house, and tries to initiate sex; she refuses, and he chokes her.
- A husband who has physically abusive toward his wife stalks and kills her when he finds she's dating new people.
- An ex-husband is long-delinquent in court-ordered alimony and child support payments. The ex-wife sues for full custody of the two children and wins. The ex-husband plans to retaliate, waits until his ex-wife and children are home, sneaks into the house, shoots the wife and two kids, and kills himself as a murder-suicide.

A few stalkers victimize strangers, especially celebrities. The most well known is probably John Hinckley. Infatuated with movie actress Jodie Foster, he repeatedly sent her letters with poems and messages to get her interested in him. Finally, in 1981, in order to attract her attention, he tried to assassinate the then president Ronald Reagan, wounding him and two other people. In 1989, Robert Bardo was obsessed with TV actress Rebecca Schaeffer, videotaping every episode of her show *My Sister Sam*. He repeatedly wrote to her, and after seeing her in bed with another actor in one episode, he flew into a rage. He went to her apartment and shot her to death. He later told a court-appointed psychiatrist, "She was a whore, and God appointed me to punish her." Most recently, in 2008, Jack Jordan was convicted of stalking movie star Uma Thurman on and off for two and a half years, sending her love letters and on one occasion ringing her doorbell from early in the morning to late at night (Moffatt, 2000; Steel, 2008).

Most of the stalkers are male, and most of the victims are female. There is no racial difference in stalking—stalkers are as likely to be white as black. Stalkers are generally older than their victims. The majority of stalkers are loners, mentally unhealthy, and socially incompetent. They are most likely to inflict violence on persons with whom they have had an intimate relationship (Moffatt, 2000; Mullen et al., 2000; Wondrak and Hoffmann, 2007).

Hate Killing

According to the FBI, every year more than 9,000 Americans fall victim to hate crimes, offenses committed because of the victim's race, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Slightly more than half of these victims were only intimidated. Nearly half are assaulted and less than 1 percent murdered. Hate-motivated homicides are comparatively rare, but they have received great attention from the media, which presumably reflect the profound concern of many Americans on this issue (Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2005).

African Americans and gay Americans are more likely than any other group to be victims of hate homicide. Such killing is targeted not only at the particular person but also at all the other members of that person's group. In June 1998, when three white men in Jasper, Texas, dragged James Byrd, an African American, behind their pickup truck to his death, they were in effect telling every black person in town to get out or suffer the same fate as Byrd. Similarly, in October 1998, when two young men in Laramie, Wyoming, beat gay college student Matthew Shepard into a coma and left him to die tied to a fence in the desert, they were effectively warning all gay people that they too could suffer the same fate.

Hate-motivated killers are also more likely than perpetrators of other, less serious hate crimes to have joined an organized hate group. James Byrd's three killers, for example, had met each other in prison and joined the Aryan Brotherhood, a white supremacist group. For someone filled with hate, membership in such a group assures them that they are not alone in their bigotry. They are also likely to feel bolder and more willing to take risks when encouraged by the group to attack the victim of their hate.

In their research on hate killers, James Fox, Jack Levin, and Kenna Quinet (2005) found that the killers can be divided into three types. First are the *thrill* hate killers, who, being young, bored, and idle, are seized with the idea of going out together to look for someone to attack. As marginalized and alienated youngsters, these offenders often feel important and powerful from the thrill attacks. Then, there are the *defensive* hate killers, who feel the need to defend what they consider to be their birthright. A black family moving into a white neighborhood or a gay man attending a predominantly heterosexual party, for example, is seen as encroaching on the hater's birthright of being white or straight. Finally, there are the *mission* hate killers. These are the rarest but the most dangerous of the three types. While the thrill and defensive killers usually target a single victim, the mission killers seek to destroy all members of a hated group. Thus, they may kill members of a group indiscriminately, target many people simultaneously, and carry on a killing spree in various places. Their mission is to eliminate or weaken an entire group of people so that they themselves can attain the most powerful position in society.

Genocide

If the mission hate killers turn out to be the political leaders of a state, they are able to carry out their mission by committing *genocide*, the wholesale killing of members of a racial or ethnic group. There have been numerous cases of genocide around the world. During

the nineteenth century, Dutch settlers in South Africa exterminated the native Hottentots, and British settlers on the island of Tasmania, near Australia, wiped out the entire native population, hunting them like wild animals. During the pioneer days of the United States, white settlers from Europe slaughtered many Native American tribes. In the early part of the twentieth century, the Turks massacred more than 1 million Armenians. Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazi Germans systematically murdered 6 million Jews. More recently, in the early 1990s, the Serbs in Bosnia killed and tortured numerous Muslims and Croats as part of an “ethnic cleansing” campaign. From 1993 to 1996, over half a million Tutsis were eliminated by Hutus in Rwanda, Africa. In 2004 and 2005 the Arab government in Sudan killed more than 200,000 of its non-Arab citizens in the Darfur region of western Sudan. In the twentieth century as a whole, the victims of genocide were four times more numerous than the victims of all the wars and revolutions. Since 1968, the number of genocide victims throughout the world has *tripled* (Alvarez, 2001; Leaning, 2004; Morrison, 2006).

One way to grasp the nature of genocide is to take a look at the people who are involved in it as victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. The victims are killed, “not for what they have done, but for who they are.” They are, however, seen not as individuals, but as members of a stigmatized category of people. Thus, even if friends and neighbors happen to belong to a despised group, they are perceived as deserving to be killed. This is why many Muslims in Bosnia were killed by their Serbian friends (Alvarez, 2001; Weitz, 2003).

As for the perpetrators of genocide, common sense would suggest that they are monsters, sadists, and psychopaths, who derive great pleasure from making others suffer. But in reality they are mostly normal, like you and me, except that they have the job of killing others under the order of their superiors. The people who participated in the Holocaust, for example, came from a cross section of German society, representing a variety of careers, religious backgrounds, and socioeconomic classes. They lived normal, law-abiding, family-centered lives before and after the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, many suffered from stress, insomnia, nervous breakdown, or even committed suicide, because they were not psychopathic killers but ordinary people unaccustomed to killing human beings.

Finally, average citizens play the role of bystanders by doing nothing. In virtually all cases of genocide, the majority of citizens stay quiet and let their genocidal government carry out its campaign of exterminating the victims. A typical example is a high official of a university in Rwanda: He closed his eyes to the killing of tens of thousands and turned a deaf ear to the screams of dying people around him. Similarly, many nations play the role of bystanders by ignoring the genocide in the African countries of Rwanda and Sudan (Alvarez, 2001; Cose, 2008; Snyder, 2008).

Scholars from various disciplines have offered a number of theories to explain genocide. One theory says that the cause of genocide is the *physical and psychological separation* between perpetrators and victims, which makes it easy for the former to kill the latter. A second theory attributes genocide to the *dehumanization* of the victims, who are treated as objects rather than persons. A third theory argues that the syndrome of *obedience to authority*, which is widespread in society, causes people to participate in genocide when ordered to do so by the government. A fourth theory traces genocide to the perpetrators’ *psychological ability to dissociate* their normal selves from the insanity of mass killing as if the killing is done by somebody else. And a fifth theory blames genocide on *power*, in

that the more power the government has, the more able and willing it is to kill on a massive scale, which may explain why genocide occurs far more frequently in authoritarian and totalitarian states than in democratic nations (Alvarez, 2001; Valentino, 2004).

Terrorism

Terrorism is extreme violence aimed at a government, though the victims are usually innocent citizens. Some of the people who engage in this kind of behavior are domestic terrorists, who fight their own government. An example is Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the Murrah federal office building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Others are international terrorists, who leave their country to attack a foreign government. The Islamic radicals from the Middle East who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, are a more recent example.

The September 11 Attacks

On September 11, 2001, 19 Muslim terrorists from the Middle East first hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners. Then they intentionally crashed two of the airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing everyone on board and many others in the buildings. They also crashed a third airliner into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field in rural Pennsylvania after some of its passengers and flight crew fought with the hijackers in an attempt to retake control of the plane, which was on its way to Washington, D.C. There were no survivors from any of the flights. A total of about 3,000 people were killed. It was far and away the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil, the most devastating terrorism in human history. Why did the terrorists commit this heinous crime with the certain knowledge that they themselves would die, too? Were they insane?

The suicide terrorists were far from insane. They believed that they were waging a holy war against the infidels, calling the United States “the Great Satan.” Like the Palestinian suicide bombers who blow themselves up along with innocent Israeli citizens, the September 11 attackers were members of a terrorist organization. But unlike the Palestinians, who belong to local groups, the September 11 terrorists belonged to an international organization called al Qaeda (“the base”), with members spread out all over the world. The September 11 attacks were part of al Qaeda’s mission to destroy the United States and its interests abroad. The terrorists were following the orders of their organization’s leader, Osama bin Laden.

According to bin Laden, the U.S. culture of secularism, materialism, and free immorality threatens the traditional Islamic way of life. Moreover, U.S. foreign policy—including support for Israel, the stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia, and the war and blockade against Iraq—was believed to destroy Muslim lives and wound the dignity of Muslims as proud inheritors of a great religion. To redress these wrongs, bin Laden told his followers to engage in a holy war against the United States. He further mesmerized them with the seductive message that should they die as martyrs, they would go to heaven, where they each would be rewarded with 72 virgins (MacFarquhar, 2001).

All this apparently resonated well with the young and unattached suicide terrorists who were already intensely religious and patriotic. It should not be surprising, then, that they carried out the horrendous crime on September 11, 2001.

The U.S. government has tried to fight the war against the terrorists with some success. The Taliban rulers of Afghanistan, who used to provide sanctuary to Islamic terrorists, have been eliminated. With cooperation from other governments, the United States has hacked into foreign banks' computer systems to find people who finance terrorist activities. The Americans also have obtained assistance from friendly Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in tracking down terrorists. Most Muslim publics express less support for terrorism than in the past, and fewer Muslims believe that suicide bombings are justified in the defense of Islam. Over half of al Qaeda's key operational leaders have been killed or captured, along with some 3,000 of their associates. But al Qaeda has changed from an organization to a movement, made up of a loosely affiliated network joined together by local terrorists in many different countries, the Internet, and a shared hatred of Western governments. Moreover, more than 4,000 U.S. soldiers have died in Iraq and more than 1,000 in Afghanistan. The insurgency continues to threaten U.S., Iraqi, and Afghan forces along with innocent civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan, and nobody knows for sure when American troops can come home. But most Americans (69 percent) believe that the U.S. government is doing very or fairly well in reducing the threat of terrorism within the United States (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Myths about Terrorism

Terrorism is widely believed to originate from two major social and political conditions. One is poverty, and the other the absence of democracy. The reasoning behind these popular beliefs is that poor people find their lives so frustrating that they will turn to terrorist violence and that citizens will also turn to violence if they are deprived of individual freedom. This reasoning appears to make sense, but it does not jibe with reality.

Consider the poorest countries in the world, those in sub-Saharan Africa. They suffer from many problems, especially horrendous living conditions, but terrorist violence is very unlikely to occur. Terrorism is also rare in the impoverished regions of wealthier countries. In Italy, when revolutionary activities were rampant during the 1970s, most of the terrorist operations took place in the prosperous northern cities, but rarely did terrorist attacks occur in the impoverished south of the country. The same is true of the Basque militancy in Spain. Most of the militants come from the most prosperous parts of the country. There is virtually no terrorist violence in the poorest regions (Weinberg, 2008).

Evidence also fails to support the belief that the lack of democracy causes terrorism. In 1989, students in China were prevented from having the freedom to protest in Tiananmen Square, but terrorism did not break out. Similarly, in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1991, all forms of popular opposition to the government were suppressed, and yet terrorism did not occur. Only after the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, enabling the states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to become independent and free, did terrorism erupt in these states. A similar situation has taken place in Indonesia. For many years when this country was ruled by a military dictatorship, there was relatively little terrorism. But after the dictatorship gave way to democracy, a series of terrorist incidents

appeared, with the most dramatic being the nightclub bombings on the Indonesian island of Bali. All these suggest that democracy, rather than the absence of it, could well be a cause of terrorism (Weinberg, 2008).

Why Do People Kill?

Some sociologists have used positivist theories of deviance such as anomie-strain, control, and social learning to explain why people commit homicide (see, for example, Fox, Levin, and Quinet, 2005). The assumption is that whatever causes deviance in general also causes homicide in particular. But here we will discuss two positivist theories that are specifically designed to explain the causes of homicide, theories that are derived from studies on homicide as opposed to other forms of deviance.

External Restraint Theory

Developed by Andrew Henry and James Short (1954), the external restraint theory is intended to explain why some people who are extremely frustrated commit suicide and others who are just as frustrated turn to homicide instead. Henry and Short consider suicide and homicide to be basically the same—both are acts of aggression fueled by frustration. Yet, these sociologists point out, the two acts differ in that suicide is aggression directed inward against oneself, while homicide is aggression directed outward against another person. This theory attempts to explain why intensely frustrated people are likely to choose one type of aggression rather than the other. The explanation is that intensely frustrated people would choose *self*-directed aggression (suicide) if they experience *weak* external restraint, but would choose *other*-directed aggression (homicide) if they suffer *strong* external restraint.

Henry and Short define the *strength of external restraint* as “the degree to which behavior is required to conform to the demands and expectations of other persons.” In other words, the strength of external restraint is the amount of social control imposed on people so as to limit their freedom and range of behaviors. According to the theory, people who suffer a great amount of that kind of social control are more inclined toward homicide than suicide because they can legitimately blame others for their frustration.

Martin Gold (1958) has extended the theory of external restraint to include a factor that mediates between strong external restraint and murder. The mediating factor is the *socialization in aggression by physical punishment*. Gold believes that there are two types of socialization—that is, techniques of bringing up a child. One involves the parents using *physical* punishment (e.g., spanking, slapping, hitting, or punching) to deter their misbehaving child from further misbehavior. The other involves the parents employing *psychological* punishment (e.g., threatening withdrawal of love, or lecturing to induce guilt) to correct their child’s misconduct. Gold theorizes that physical punishment leads to outward aggression against another person, while children psychologically punished turn their aggression against themselves. When they become frustrated adults ready for aggressive action, those who have been physically punished will likely choose murder over suicide, while those who have undergone psychological punishment would choose suicide.

There is some evidence to suggest that strong external restraint is associated with homicide. As we have observed, the lower classes and blacks have significantly higher homicide rates than do the middle classes and whites. Such a finding can be said to support the theory because the lower classes and blacks suffer stronger external restraint. There is also evidence to support Gold's theory that physical punishment received in childhood increases the likelihood of homicide in adulthood (Straus, 1991). Still, all this does not mean, as the theories imply, that external restraint or physical punishment has a direct, causal impact on homicide. Instead, as more recent studies suggest, external restraint can lead to homicide only through a third variable called "external attribution of blame"—blaming others rather than oneself for one's own frustration (Unnithan et al., 1994). In other words, excessive external restraint or physical punishment encourages people to blame others rather than themselves for their own problems in life, which in turn causes them to engage in physical violence against others.

Subculture of Violence Theory

After analyzing his abundant data on homicide, Marvin Wolfgang (1958) concludes,

There may be a subculture of violence which does not define personal assaults as wrong or antisocial; in which quick resort to physical aggression is a socially approved and expected concomitant of certain stimuli; and in which violence has become a familiar but often deadly partner in life's struggles.

Wolfgang then theorizes that the subculture of violence is the basic cause of high homicide rates in poor neighborhoods.

According to Wolfgang, the violent subculture has such a grip on the poor that they engage in a wider range of violent behavior than the nonpoor. This is because they associate and identify with the model of violence as provided by their parents, peers, and others in the poor neighborhood. At the same time they are discouraged from following the countermodel of nonviolence from the larger society. Consequently, violence becomes a part of their lifestyles and their way of solving interpersonal problems. Not surprisingly, they consider the use of violence not only normal but necessary for survival. They do not feel guilty about their aggression at all (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967).

Critics, however, have questioned the implication that a violent act necessarily reflects the actor's placing a high value on violence. In fact, studies have shown that people who engage in violence do not value violence any more than those who refrain from violence, and that prisoners convicted of murder and other violent crimes do not value violence any more than other inmates convicted of burglary and other nonviolent crimes (Ball-Rokeach, 1973; Erlanger, 1974). Other studies have suggested that the cause of high homicide rates among the poor and African Americans is not the subculture of violence but rather poverty, relative deprivation, or social inequality (Messner, 1982; Williams, 1984). Nevertheless, as it propagates the belief in using violence to solve interpersonal problems, the subculture of violence does encourage—though not cause—homicide, especially among those frustrated by the structural problems of poverty and inequality (Corzine, Huff-Corzine, and Whitt, 1999; Messner, 1983).

Does the Death Penalty Deter Murder?

Nowadays, many people believe that the death penalty is an effective deterrent to murder. Not surprisingly, to win an election, most politicians vow that convicted killers shall be put to death. Many sociologists, however, have observed that the death penalty does not have its hoped-for effect. The evidence supporting this observation has come in several forms.

The first indication is the homicide rates in *states that have retained* the death penalty law are generally much higher than in *states that have abolished* it. (See examples in Figure 4.2.) This clearly suggests that the death penalty does not deter homicide. It might even suggest to some observers that the death penalty causes more homicides. It could be

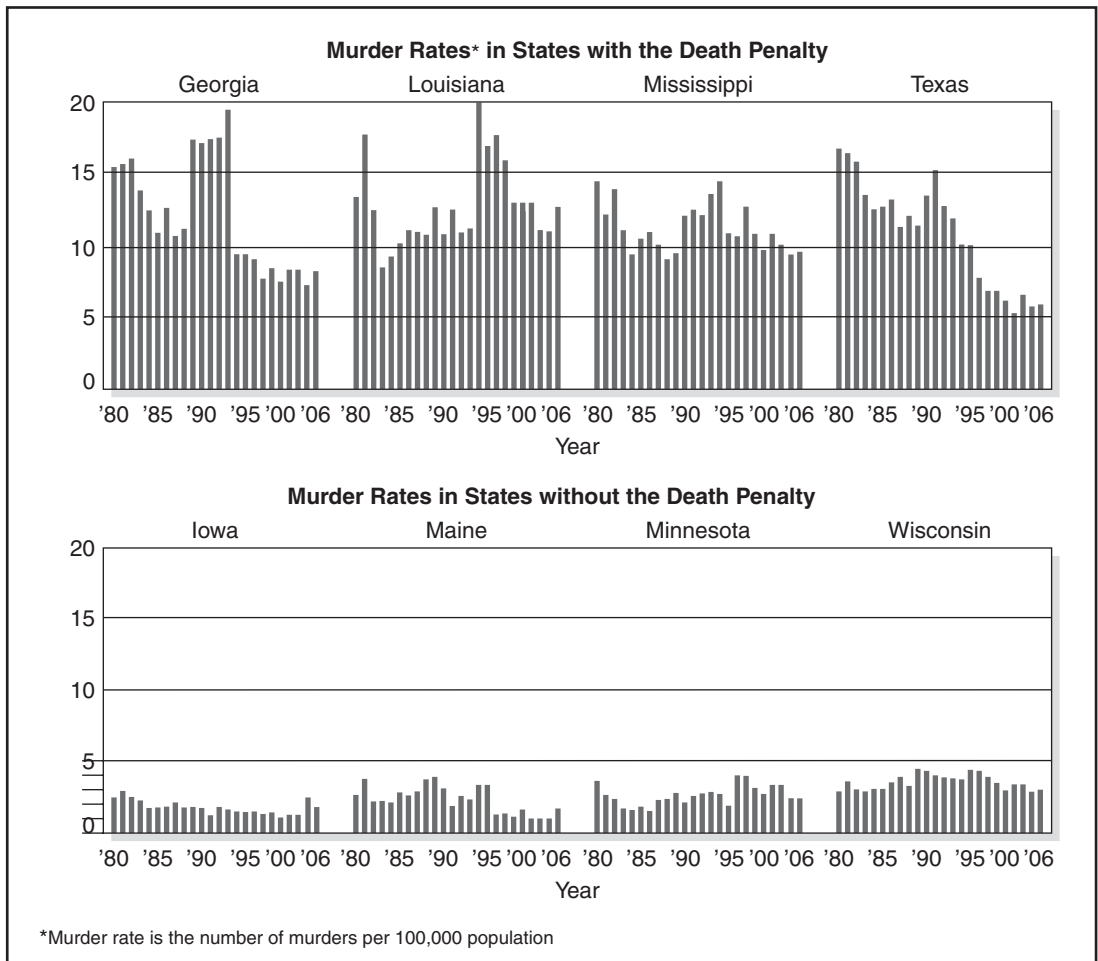


FIGURE 4.2 The Death Penalty and Murder. Murder rates are generally much higher in the 38 states that still retain the death penalty than in the 12 states that have abolished it, as exemplified above.

Source: FBI, *Crime in the United States*, 2010.

the other way around: That is, the higher homicide rates cause the states to bring back the death penalty. Moreover, the South, where all the states practice the death penalty, has a very large black population and a culture of violence, as reflected by its traditionally high rate of criminal violence and high level of gun ownership. Thus the distinctive population and cultural characteristics of the South, rather than its death penalty, may be responsible for its higher homicide rate.

In view of this, some sociologists have excluded the southern states from analysis of the relationship between capital punishment and murder. Instead, they focused on northern and western states that have about the same population composition and cultural tradition. The result has consistently shown that the death penalty states still have higher homicide rates than their neighboring states without the death penalty. Although this finding does not prove that capital punishment encourages murder, it does show that the death penalty does not deter murder.

A second type of evidence comes from comparing the homicide rates that occurred *before and after abolition* of the death penalty within the same states. Such comparisons have shown no significant difference in homicide rates before and after the states abolished capital punishment. Furthermore, the *restoration* of the death penalty in states that had earlier abolished it had *not* led to any significant decrease in homicides. This further suggests that the death penalty does not deter people from committing murder.

A final piece of evidence comes from comparing the numbers of homicides *shortly before and shortly after executions* of convicted murderers that have been widely publicized. If the death penalty has a deterrent effect, the execution should so scare potential killers that they would refrain from killing, and the number of homicides in the area should decrease. Apparently, this is not the case. In Philadelphia during the 1930s, for example, the number of homicides remained about the same in the period from 60 days before to 60 days after a widely publicized execution of five murderers. This finding, among others, suggests that the death penalty, even when the state shows people that it means business with it, apparently does not frighten potential killers from killing.

In fact, publicized executions may have the opposite, *brutalizing effect* on potential murderers, indirectly encouraging them to kill, possibly by diminishing respect for human life or by stimulating imitative violence. In California between 1946 and 1955, the state always chose Friday mornings to carry out executions, and there were more murders during the weekends following executions than during the weekends without the Friday morning executions. Also, in New York between 1907 and 1963, there was an average increase of two homicides in the month after each execution (Bailey, 1998; Bowers and Pierce, 1980). In a few other cases, the brutalizing effect did not exist, but there was no indication of the deterrent effect either, because the number of homicides remained about the same whether there was a publicized execution or not (King, 1978).

What we have discussed can be summed up by the conclusion from a 14-nation analysis of the death penalty:

If capital punishment is a more effective deterrent than the alternative punishment of long imprisonment, its abolition ought to be followed by homicide rate increases. The evidence examined here fails to support and, indeed, repeatedly contradicts this proposition. In this cross-national sample, abolition was followed more often than not by absolute *decreases* in homicide rates, not by the increases predicted by deterrence theory. (Archer and Gartner, 1984; also see Simon and Blaskovich, 2002)

Nevertheless, a few studies appear every now and then to challenge that conclusion. The most well known is economist Isaac Ehrlich's (1975) conclusion from his statistical analysis that one execution can prevent about eight murders. This particular analysis has been criticized for its methodological problems, such as the use of unreliable data on homicides. More devastating to Ehrlich's conclusion is another economist's analysis that uses the same statistical method as Ehrlich's but produces essentially contrary results (Avio, 1979). Like Ehrlich, a number of other economists also claim to have found the deterrent effect of the death penalty, but again they have been criticized for using flawed methodologies or insufficient data (Liptak, 2007).

We may conclude that the death penalty does not deter murder. But why not? One reason is that murder is mostly a crime of passion, carried out under the overwhelming pressure of a volcanic emotion, which makes it difficult for the individual involved to stop and think that he or she will end up being executed for killing the victim. Another reason is that the causal forces of homicide, such as the experiences of abuse, brutality, and poverty, are so powerful that the threat of capital punishment could not stop the homicide-prone person from committing the crime.

Summary

1. How do assaults differ from homicide? In assaults the victim survives, and compared to killers, the assaulters are less likely to use firearms and more likely to commit the offense in the summer.

2. What kinds of people are more likely than others to commit homicide? They include the poor, African Americans, men, and young adults. They are also more likely to live in the southern region of the United States, and in large cities and in rural areas rather than in small towns.

3. Are there any patterns to the occurrence of homicide? Yes. Homicides are somewhat more likely to occur during the hot summer months than the cold month of February. They are most likely to occur on Saturday night. They are likely to take place outside the home if the killers are male, but tend more to occur at home if the offenders are female. Firearms are more often used than any other weapon.

4. What are the characteristics of homicide? First, homicide is generally warm-blooded killing, involving a relative, a friend, or an acquaintance. Second, it may involve the victim helping to bring

about the killing. Third, it often involves killing for trivial reasons. And fourth, it sometimes involves the killer first doing away with the victim and then finishing himself off.

5. What is the nature of mass and serial murders? In mass murder a number of people are killed at the same time, while in serial murder the victims are killed at different times and places. Mass murderers are mostly ordinary people who are disgruntled employees, heads of family, pseudocommandos, and followers of a charismatic leader. Serial murderers are more clever in eluding the police and more likely to torture their victims before killing them. **What is the social profile of serial killers?** Most serial killers have not attended college but are cunning and able to present themselves as friendly and trustworthy. They are mostly white men, generally kill strangers, and are motivated to kill by sadism and a desire for power. **What does homicide look like from the global perspective?** Homicide appears associated with poverty, as shown by its greater prevalence in developing countries than in developed countries. It also has to do with a culture of violence,

which characterizes Latin America more than other poor regions in the world.

6. What causes school violence? Contributing factors include the easy availability of guns, the media glamorization of violence, and the culture of violence, the last of which favors the use of force to settle interpersonal problems. Given this environment, youngsters who are emotionally troubled or have been abused by parents or rejected by peers may engage in school violence.

7. What are stalkers like? Most stalkers target ex-intimates, fellow employees, and acquaintances, although a few go after celebrities. Stalkers are more likely to be male than female, and their victims are mostly female. A majority of stalkers are loners, mentally unhealthy, and socially incompetent.

8. How do hate-motivated killers act? They are more likely to target gays and African Americans than any other group. They use their killing to intimidate the entire group of which the victim is a member, and they usually belong to a hate group. They may kill for thrill, for defense of their birthright, or for the mission of eliminating the groups they hate.

9. What kinds of people are involved in genocide? The victims of genocide are members

of a stigmatized group, the perpetrators are normal people following orders to kill, and the bystanders are average citizens who do nothing to stop the killing. **What causes genocide?** According to various theories, the causes include the physical and psychological separation between offenders and victims, dehumanization of the victims, widespread obedience to authority, psychological dissociation between the normal self and the insane act of genocidal killing, and the immense power of the state.

10. What caused the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001? The attacks were directed by Osama bin Laden, the leader of the terrorist organization al Qaeda, who told its extremely religious and patriotic young members to attack the United States as “the Great Satan.” **What are the popular myths about terrorism?** One myth attributes terrorism to poverty and another blames terrorism on the lack of democracy.

11. Why do some people kill? One sociological theory points to strong external restraint as the cause of homicide, while another indicates the subculture of violence as a breeding ground of homicides. **Is the death penalty an effective deterrent to murder?** Sociologists usually say “no,” though economists tend to say “yes.”

FURTHER READING

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- Baker, Jean A. 1998. “Are we missing the forest for the trees? Considering the social context of school violence.” *Journal of School Psychology*, 36 (Spring), 29–44. Showing how school violence derives from a breakdown of community in schools where students do not feel a sense of belonging.
- Beeghly, Leonard. 2003. *Homicide: A Sociological Explanation*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield. Discusses the connection of homicide to gun availability, illegal drugs, violence history, racial discrimination, and economic inequality.
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- Combs, Cindy C. 2010. *Terrorism in the Twentieth-First Century*, 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall. A systematic discussion of many aspects of terrorism, ranging from terrorist ideology and terrorist organizations to counterterrorist measures.
- Dunn, Jennifer L. 2002. *Courting Disaster: Intimate Stalking, Culture, and Criminal Justice*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. Provides an intimate look at the nature of stalking through the victims’ experiences.

- Fox, James Alan, Jack Levin, and Kenna Quinet. 2007. *The Will to Kill: Making Sense of Senseless Murder*, 3rd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Analyzes the nature of various forms of murder, including serial murder, school shootings, mass murder, and cult killings.
- Holmes, Ronald M., and Stephen T. Holmes. 2009. *Serial Murder*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications. Presents various types of serial killers, their behavioral patterns, and the motivations behind their killings.
- Levin, Jack, and James Alan Fox. 2002. *Dead Lines: Essays in Murder and Mayhem*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. A series of essays about homicide, school shootings, workplace violence, hate crimes, serial murder, the culture of killing, guns, official responses to murder, capital punishment, and crime victims.
- Levin, Jack, and Gordana Rabrenovic. 2004. *Why We Hate*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books. Discusses the various sources of hate crime and ways of combating it.
- Mann, Coramae Richey. 1996. *When Women Kill*. Albany: State University of New York Press. An analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data on nearly 300 women arrested for homicide in six large U.S. cities.
- Martinez, J. Michael, William D. Richardson, and D. Brandon Hornsby (eds.). 2002. *The Leviathan's Choice: Capital Punishment in the Twentieth Century*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield. A collection of articles presenting various perspectives on the death penalty, including the philosophical, theological, social science, and legal perspectives.
- Miethe, Terance D., and Wendy C. Regoeczi, with Kriss A. Drass. 2004. *Rethinking Homicide: Exploring the Structure and Process Underlying Deadly Situations*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. An empirical analysis of homicide as a nexus of offender and victim characteristics and social situations, showing homicide, for example, as an expressive act of violence that men carry out with guns in large cities against acquaintances of a similar race, gender, and age during a heated argument.
- Mullen, Paul E., Michele Pathe, and Rosemary Purcell. 2008. *Stalkers and Their Victims*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. Discusses numerous aspects of stalking, from the epidemiology of stalking to various types of stalkers and stalking situations.
- Mullins, Christopher W. 2006. *Holding Your Square: Masculinities, Streetlife, and Violence*. Portland, Ore.: Willan. An analysis of how threat to masculinity often triggers street violence.
- Newman, Katherine S., with Cybelle Fox, David Harding, Jal Mehta, and Wendy Roth. 2004. *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*. New York: Basic Books. Research report on how school shootings usually erupt from a combination of five factors: social marginality, emotional problems, cultural scripts, failed surveillance, and gun availability.
- Petro, Jim, and Nancy Petro. 2011. *False Justice: Eight Myths That Convict the Innocent*. New York: Kaplan. A former Republican Attorney General of Ohio and prosecutor explains how DNA evidence changed his mind about how many innocents are convicted. Extensive examples and recommendations.
- Reuter, Christoph. 2006. *My Life as a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. An analysis of suicide bombings in different parts of the world.
- Sageman, Marc. 2004. *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Based on the biographies of Osama bin Laden and 171 other terrorists, this analysis shows how alienated young men turned into fanatics eager to kill and to become martyrs and then got together to form a global network of terrorism.
- Simon, Rita J., and Dagny A. Blaskovich. 2007. *A Comparative Analysis of Capital Punishment: Statutes, Policies, Frequencies, and Public Attitudes the World Over*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books. A brief historical survey of the views and practices of the death penalty in various countries.
- Smith, M. Dwayne, and Margaret A. Zahn (eds.). 1999. *Homicide: A Sourcebook of Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications. A collection of detailed analyses of the theories, methodologies, substantive studies, and prevention of homicide.
- Vanden Heuvel, Katrina. 2002. *A Just Response: The Nation on Terrorism, Democracy, and September 11, 2001*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books. A collection of essays on the meanings and implications of the September 11 terrorist attacks.
- Waters, Tony. 2007. *When Killing Is a Crime*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner. Illustrates how killing is socially constructed so that it is not always and everywhere viewed as a crime.
- Weitz, Eric D. 2003. *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. Shows how the zealous attempt to create a homogeneous utopia led the leaders of nations as well as the masses of ordinary people to genocide.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the various forms of homicide discussed in this chapter. What are the similarities and differences among them?
2. Genocide is the most horrendous kind of killing. What are contributing social factors?

INTERNET RESOURCES

The FBI's UCR (Uniform Crime Reports) (<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>) is a list of all official arrests compiled annually by the FBI from arrest data reported by all criminal justice agencies in the United States (which number close to 17,000). Through this site, you can track all forms of violent and property crime.

The Hate Crime Statistics Report (<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#hate>) This report presents crime data regarding reported crimes that were in some way motivated by an established bias against the victim's perceived race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability.

The Innocence Project (<http://www.innocenceproject.org/>) is a national organization seeking to exonerate those who are wrongfully convicted through improved criminal justice procedures and further

analysis of physical evidence, such as DNA. The organization also provides detailed and current facts and figures on the use of the death penalty, cases under review, and testimonials of those exonerated as a result of this project (currently more than 175 individuals).

The U.S. Department of Justice Houses the Official Bureau of Justice Statistics Reports (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>) A variety of reports and statistics on homicide trends, drug crimes, intimate partner violence, and other forms of violent crime for both adults and juveniles can be navigated from this link. The topics covered include a wide range of information pertaining to specific crimes, criminals, and victims. Take some time and explore. If you have any interest in topics pertaining to violence, you will find something of interest at this site.