Murderous Thoughts
The Macro, Micro, and Momentary in Theorizing the Causes and Consequences of Criminal Homicide

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Introduction

"Who shall heal murder? What is done, is done."

Lord Byron, "Cain: A Mystery" (1826: 433)

Our culture is replete with representations of murder as the prototypical crime. For as captured in the above quotation, there is an intrinsic, irrevocable, and irreversible sense of harm involved in the act of one person deliberately killing another. Stories of the causes and consequences of murder provide the basic ingredients for the kind of morality tales that anthropologists suggest are necessary conditions for the production of a sense of collective identity and belonging. Following Mary Douglas (1966), such narratives function as social devices through which "the pure" and "dangerous" are delineated, providing resources for many of the stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves in the ordering of social reality (Geertz 1973).

In contra-distinction to these cultural representations of criminal homicide, social research has consistently evidenced that the modal homicide is not the "cold-blooded" calculated act so beloved of fiction writers, but rather a "hot blooded" conflict most often involving protagonists well known to each other (e.g., Polk 1994; Collins 2008). In this sense, such incidents are the epitome of C. Wright-Mills's (1959) private troubles that travel to become public issues.

Our aim in this chapter is to discuss how social and criminological theory can help to illuminate and interpret such issues, explaining both how and why criminal homicides happen and the social implications that flow from these patterns.

To frame and organize this discussion, we draw a distinction between theoretical accounts that focus upon the causes of criminal homicides and those that attend more to the consequences of such actions. Cutting across this meta-distinction we argue that broadly speaking there are three principal theoretical frames applicable to such an endeavor: the macro, the micro, and the momentary.

The distinction between macro- and micro-theoretical approaches is well rehearsed across the social sciences (Giddens 1984). The former focus upon how structural forces shape and influence patterns of human behavior and action. Micro-accounts privilege and emphasize the ability of individuals and groups to exercise agency, power, and a degree of self-determination. One of the most influential movements in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century social theory was the derivation of positions that, in different ways, sought to bridge macro and microexplanations (Parker 2000; Mouzelis 2008). Following this lead, in this chapter we seek to advance the view that attending to key "moments" in a case of criminal homicide can shed unique insights that are unobtainable when the issues are perceived from either a "pure" macro or micro vantage point. The concept of the "moment" seeks to recognize that there are specific intersecting points in space and time where especially influential and consequential processes occur to construct and define the situation as homicide. Such processes directly configure how the events and situations associated with a specific case come to be constructed and reconstructed through sequences of differently oriented actions and reactions. Attending to these moments, where structure and agency intersect in interesting ways, can be extremely useful in distilling forms of cause and consequence that are of interest to the student of society.

Table 1.1 summarizes how we adopt these frames to organize our discussion of social theory and criminal homicide, enabling a structured analysis of a large amount of potentially relevant material according to whether their primary accent is upon accounting for the causes or consequences of murder. The cells in the table list the "headline" themes and issues to be addressed by the sections of this chapter.

Before expanding upon these issues, the chapter commences with a brief commentary on the status of theory in the social sciences. This is to recognize a range of different theoretical standpoints that can be, and have been, used to think about murder and criminal homicide. These are founded upon different epistemological foundations and values, and their very different disciplinary backgrounds need to be taken into account. The discussion then progresses on to consider several influential macrostructural positions on criminal homicide before attention then switches to the more "high resolution" focus of microsocial theories. The penultimate section turns to consider what unique insights can be obtained by attending to key moments.

Thinking about Theory

In seeking to account for how people think about and understand criminal homicide as a social problem, there is a critical point of separation in the literature between the more descriptive and more explanatory approaches. There are many

Table 1.1 Theoretical approaches applied to the causes and consequences of criminal homicide.

	Causes	*Consequences*
Macro "structural" How social forces structure situations	The civilizing process; Socioeconomic inequality and poverty; Gangs and gun culture; Anomie.	Crime Drop; Concentrated risk; Legislative and policing reform; Cultures of control and governing through crime.
Micro "processual" How individual-level processes are framed by situations to produce patterns of harmful behavior that can be generalized ("types of homicide")	Emotion and "forward panic"; Honor/respect; Interaction dynamics of types of homicide.	Aftermath and secondary victims; Shaming and perpetrator's families.
Momentary "post-event accounting processes" How post-event accounting processes applied in time and space to specific case studies construct and reconstruct its contributing factors	Police murder investigations; Retroactive social control; Legal scrutiny and definitional processes.	Moral panics; Signal crimes; Miscarriages of justice.

fine journalistic accounts of murder that shine lights on its causes and conditions, but remain in a more descriptive register (e.g., Simon 1991). What these do not possess is a theoretical imperative to reason from the particular to the general in some fashion. Other kinds of approaches do seek to engage with theoretical issues in more explicit ways and here we can distinguish between those where theory is an "input" and those where it is an "output"—and of course some studies seek to do both (Collins 2008).

Cast as an "input" to the study of criminal homicide, theory is used to frame and configure the epistemological standpoint that is adopted in approaching the subject itself. Different academic disciplines evidence different predilections in terms of the ways that they define the key issues to be investigated, interpreted, and explained. For example, studies emanating from a psychology background are more likely to focus upon individual behaviors as the key unit of analysis, where sociologists would tend to emphasize the collective components of behavior and action. Layered across these disciplinary frames, there are positions that key into particular social mechanics and dynamics. For example, feminist theory has insightfully looked at how patriarchal gender relations in society shape the prevalence and distribution of fatal violence (e.g., Hester, Kelly, and Radford 1996). Likewise, Marxist and neo-Marxist accounts have sought to show how the structures of political economy manifest in the social distribution of higher rates of participation in criminal homicide among certain social classes (Taylor 1999). New theory and theoretical revisions have also been "products" of studying criminal homicide.

Acknowledging the role played by theory as both an input and output certainly aids the student of society to navigate between the perils of Mills's (1959) famous two poles of "abstracted empiricism" and "grand theory." The former focusing exclusively on describing patterns in data with no attempt to generalize and the latter reserved for theory that is constructed with no reference to data. Becker (2014) makes the case that careful description of *how* something happens is one of the principal ways in which social analysts can generate new conceptual and theoretical ideas; a move away from the dominant use of theory to engage with "why" something happens. He articulates this with reference to murder and the implications it has for labeling theory in criminology, of which he was a principal architect. Becker shows how the application of labeling processes shape how some acts come to be defined as murders, which is consequential for their processing by the criminal justice system, while others are classified in other ways—for example, as terrorism or acts of war—altering the societal reactions and responses to them. Becker's is a position that exemplifies how theoretical innovations can both inform and result from the study of criminal homicide.

We will return to some of these issues about definitions and classifications in the later phases of this chapter. For now, we can conclude that there are a variety of different theoretical positions that have been engaged in different ways to study the causes and consequences of murder and manslaughter. For any given aspect of homicidal violence, being able to state how it happens, why it happens like this, and what implications flow from such patterns, is critical to improving our understandings.

Macrostructural Accounts of Murder

Macrostructural accounts attend to the ways large-scale social forces shape risk, choices, and ultimately behavior. We can distinguish between longitudinal structural theories and cross-sectional or comparative structural theories in terms of how they explain trends in murder. The former focus on changing levels of murder over time, while the latter are more concerned with different patterns that emerge across varying geographical areas, contexts, and situations in contemporary society.

Longitudinal structural theories

Daly and Wilson's (1988) influential book *Homicide* was quite explicit in advocating a social-Darwinist position to explain violent impulses and homicide. Theoretically, patterns in the etiology of homicide are cast as evolutionary shadows of sexual selection processes whereby individuals compete and pursue their own interests. The adaptive logic of human desires, motives, and emotions is to propagate our "selfish genes" to future generations. Accordingly, masculine competitiveness and risk taking explains why men kill women in far greater number than women kill men, and

the large number of homicides involving young men known to each other which erupt and escalate over seeming trivialities (Wilson and Daly,1985).

Contrary to the popular notion that homicide is more commonplace today than ever before, long-term historical data shows that levels of lethal violence have declined with the evolution and advancement of human society. Pinker (2012) meticulously traces levels of violence through the historical and cultural transitions of human society, from small nomadic, egalitarian bands of hunters and gatherers to settled communities and the gradual emergence of a state society. The first major historical decline in violence at the end of the Middle Ages coincided with the beginnings of more formalized and centralized governance structures (Eisner 2001). Drawing on forensic and ethnographic data to compare the rate of violence in early non-state with post-state or civilized societies, Pinker reports that the latter suffered no more than one-quarter of the average death rate of non-state societies, even at their most violent.

Norbert Elias (1978) introduced the idea of a "civilizing process" to explain the widespread uniformity and scale of the historical decline in lethal violence. The emergence of states and the monopolization of violence by powerful central authorities were the impetus for changes in psychological traits and modes of behavior among the populace, most notably greater individual self-control. This prompted the pacification of everyday interactions and fewer violent altercations, initially among the nobility and subsequently other social strata.

Emile Durkheim's theory of homicide also links declining rates of fatal violence to societal advancement, evidenced by a growing division of labor (Dicristina 2004). The causal mechanism for the decline is held to be the waning significance of collective bonds in society as the prevailing social order transitions toward more individual sentiments. This "moral individualism" is commensurate with a greater respect for human life, tough legal sanctions, and an associated decline in the homicide rate. Durkheim asserts that collective states of consciousness, such as religious beliefs and group practices, are more characteristic of "lower societies" and can act as "stimulants to murder" with such forces overriding individual pity or empathy for the value of a human life (Durkheim 1957[1900]: 115). However, periods of rapid social change and economic development can elevate levels of "anomie" whereby individuals feel unable to satisfy their desires. Anomie can foster lethal emotions that "turn against the self" resulting in suicide, or "turn against another," according to circumstances, resulting in homicide.

Cross-sectional comparative theories of homicide

Contemporary rates of homicide, although not comparable with premodern societies because of advancements in medicine and increased life expectancy, place the global intentional homicide rate at 7.6 per 100,000 population in 2004, although this conceals considerable variation between countries and in recording practices (UNODC 2008). In more recent decades, individual countries have experienced

periods where the homicide rate has increased. Most European countries saw increases between the early 1960s and mid-1990s (Eisner 2001) and the United States experienced a well-documented sharp rise in homicide in the latter half of the 1980s, peaking in the 1990s before declining rapidly (Blumstein, Rivara, and Rosenfeld 2000). Britain's homicide rate is in the lower half of the distribution for European countries, but the homicide index for England and Wales showed an increase in the number of police recorded homicides between the 1960s and the early years of the 2000s, followed by a downward trajectory from 2002/2003 to a current low of 9.7 per million in 2011/2012 (ONS 2013).

Some macro-theories have engaged with how the hierarchical organization of a society and the degree of structural inequality therein can account for rates of violent crime and homicide. Focus is given to the negative effects of inequality on interpersonal relationships and to how the social patterning of homicide shapes the risk of mortality from lethal violence for particular social groups or neighborhoods. A statistical correlation between the scale of income inequality and the homicide rate within states, countries, and communities underpins the theory that more egalitarian societies will have a lower rate of homicide than those that are more hierarchical in structure. It is hypothesized that inequities have a detrimental and divisive impact on social relationships, including trust and social capital (Putnam 2000), and as societies become less equal, so hostility and discrimination within them increase. Wilkinson (2004) draws attention to individuals' inherited attentiveness and sensitivity to their social status relative to others within the broader social structure as a trigger to acts of violence.

The over-representation of particular social groups as victims (in homicide mortality statistics) and as perpetrators of lethal violence has led theorists to argue that large-scale changes in the homicide rate can only be understood from how various sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors interact with each other and with structural factors in society. For example, homicide research from the United States finds that victims are disproportionately male, from minority ethnic populations, have low income, and are poorly educated, out of work or in manual occupations. Blumstein, Rivara, and Rosenfeld (2000) attribute the homicide peak in America to the excess victimization of young adults, with the risk concentrated among black men.

Today, when the main trajectory of criminal homicide is downward in England and Wales, social and spatial inequalities in homicide rates are reportedly widening (Shaw, Tunstall, and Dorling 2005). The homicide death rate among Scottish adults in routine occupations was nearly twelve times that of those in the managerial and professional class, far greater than for all-cause mortality (Leyland and Dunas 2009). Both studies show that murders are disproportionately concentrated in poor areas of the United Kingdom based on relative income or poverty.

Multiple processes are proposed to underlie the links between poverty, inequality, and the homicide rate—chief among these being illegal drugs markets and the availability of guns (Bowling 1999). The rapid escalation in US homicide in the late 1980s and into the 1990s coincided with the emergence of crack cocaine drug markets in impoverished inner cities and a time of lessening economic opportunity. This was a

period of growing unemployment and anomie in poor racially segregated neighbor-hoods where the choices and life chances faced by individuals therein were constrained by wider social forces. Illegal drug markets are generative of violence through territorial gang-related activities where conflict between rivals is often resolved through the use of firearms. The United States has a high rate of gun own-ership and is set apart from other countries by the large proportion of its homicide attributable to the use of firearms (Brookman and Maguire 2003). Drugs and guns framed an informal economy regulated by gang-based norms and codes of honor. In this social situation, aggressive and violent behavior became a rational response to hostilities, discrimination, and disrespect in the environment, an environment where police were not viewed as a legitimate presence. This had, and continues to have, profound ramifications for policing and the delivery of policing interventions and these are considered in the next section.

Structural consequences of murder

The weight of attention among structural theories is undoubtedly upon explaining the causes of murder. That said, important contributions have been made in terms of the consequences that patterns and trends in criminal homicide have for social structures and the ordering of social reality.

Kubrin and Weitzer (2003), for instance, argue that a major consequence of the high rates of gang-related homicide in many North American cities is to cause more violence and murder. Their work unpicks how a principal motivation is retaliation for prior killings, which in turn pushes young men toward further involvement in gang structures (Papachristos 2009). The wider availability of guns arguably sets in motion an escalating process whereby others in the community feel that they too must take up arms in order to protect themselves and their families. However, the high toll of street violence on families may make gang life less appealing to younger people—what Currie (2013) terms "the little brother effect." This may be one expla-nation for the decline in homicidal violence in recent years.

Comparatively high rates of murder and violent crime in the 1980s and 1990s, embedded within rises in criminal offending more generally, were responsible for triggering a profound re-engineering of key social institutions to focus their attention on crime and offender management tasks. Garland (2001) posits that at the time he was writing, the whole culture of neoliberal states had come to be defined by the preeminent task of controlling crime. Similar themes can be detected in Simon's (2007) contention that by the 2000s state institutions were "governing through crime." Discourses of welfare and social protection had been supplanted and replaced by a rhetoric of "a war on crime." Institutions and interventions that in previous gen-erations would have been intended to provide social support to vulnerable and deprived individuals and communities were increasingly directed toward controlling crime risks. According to Simon, these rhetorical devices were not just expressive, but induced specific material effects and consequences.

These impacts were evident, for example, in the changes wrought to the conduct of policing in cities like New York. High rates of homicide in such urban areas in the 1980s created a climate of political permission for police to adopt more aggressive and interventionist strategies and tactics (Zimring 2012). The most infamous of these was the NYPD's (New York Police Department) implementation of "broken windows" policing, derived from a short article penned by Wilson and Kelling (1982). Precisely what such approaches did, or did not, achieve has been widely debated across the academic and policy literatures and lies beyond the scope of this chapter. The key point is that high rates of murder shaped the trajectory of criminal justice policy development with the consequence that the conduct of policing and the use of incarceration was drastically re-engineered to craft a response to high levels of fatal violence. In the early 1990s, zero-tolerance policing strategies were widely credited with ending the peak in New York homicide, neglecting to mention a longer-term downward trend in homicide that preceded its enforcement in the city (Bowling 1999).

In her ethnographic account of life in a deprived Philadelphia neighborhood, Alice Goffman (2014) focuses upon the lives of young black men "on the run" from the criminal justice system. She carefully documents how crime control imperatives have taken over from other social functions of the state and its relationships with its citizens. Although not a structuralist account, her book gives a compelling and tragic account of how social-structural forces influence and determine the biographies and identities of many marginalized young men and the communities of which they are a part.

Microsocial Interactions and Emotions

Where macrostructural theories focus on abstract social forces, microsocial perspectives attend more to actions and behaviors performed in particular social situations as contributors to fatal interactions. Departing from the primary focus of much homicide analysis upon statistics or a post-incident narrative, the most important elements of homicide are cast as the "pre-" and "during" stages of the act itself (Collins 2008). This is on the grounds that the "foreground" of the act can shine a light on the behavioral, cognitive, and affective social dynamics that propel a person to engage in fatal violence. As previously, we distinguish between theories disposed toward causes and those concerned with consequences.

Emotional causes

In a major contribution to the field, Randall Collins (2008) proposes a general theory of violence that concentrates upon the "situational processes" taking place within the violent encounter, sometimes culminating in a killing. Within its purview his theory spans police violence, riots, war, and intimate partner violence as well as murder and criminal homicide.

Where traditional psychological perspectives attend to the "hardwiring" of "violent individuals," Collins explores the situational dynamics of violence through individuals' emotional reactions to conflictual confrontations, and how they negotiate barriers of tension and fear. Collins accepts that social, psychological, and physiological factors play an important part in the move to violence, but emphasizes how the emotional dynamics are positioned at the center of the violent situation. Domestic violence is used as one example where stress, poverty, life transitions, and social isolation can be important, but not sufficient, for individuals in these situations to behave violently (Straus 1990). Collins proposes that it takes a further situational process to create actual incidents of violence in this context.

Arguably the signature innovation of Collins's theory is his description of the ways situational emotional tension and rage can ignite into "forward panic." The concept of "forward panic" begins with tension and fear in a conflict situation, moving an individual from a passive to an action state of mind, where there is "an emotional rush"—an overpowering emotional rhythm carrying them to actions that they would not normally commit in a calm reflective moment. The onset of forward panic leads to individuals overriding emotional and psychological barriers that in other circumstances would prevent violence from occurring, such as fear of retaliation. Developing these insights through a diverse array of empirical evidence, it is identified that a power asymmetry between parties to a violent situation renders physical attack more likely.

Collins acknowledges that not all violence occurs in a hot emotional rush, allowing for a more cold and calculated mode of execution. But he provides compelling evidence that, in contrast to many fictional and nonfictional representations, it is a relative rarity. Coldblooded killing exists at the "apex of violence" in a hierarchy of competent performance. Most people, including those in professions trained to legally enact it, are not good at violence. They are not able to suppress the emotional and physiological states of acting violently, which typically results in greater levels of harm and damage being caused.

This emphasis on the role of emotions can be traced back to Katz's (1988) work on the "seductions of crime." Controversially, Katz seeks to both differentiate and integrate the "situational emotional" and the "personal emotional" facets of criminal conduct. He focuses upon the "positive," and often "wonderful attraction" within the lived experience of crime that seduces individuals and groups to be involved in potentially fatal violence. As with Collins, Katz explores the "foreground" of homicide in order to understand what it feels, means, tastes, and sounds like to commit homicide.

Many theories of violence, whether micro or macro in focus, have failed to understand how and why some murderers can rationalize it as a sensible and justifiable act. Katz approaches this with an intimate view of the emotions of the criminal act—the sensual dynamics of what happens just prior to a crime being committed. From enticement to fury and how individuals conjure up the "magic" to conduct the required action to commit a crime, Katz proposes a distinct set of individually necessary conditions required to commit homicide: a path of action, a line of

interpretation, and an emotional process. These conditions typically require additional elements to ignite the emotional trigger, such as humiliation, ridicule, and arrogance to name a few. This resonates with other contributions to the literature, such as Polk's (1994) focus on the "defense of masculine honor" as a "justifiable" cause for murder.[1] He notes how personal slights and insults become more pronounced and more acutely felt in the presence of a social audience, amplifying the risk of conflict. Examining homicide, Katz explores how individuals move through these conditions to negotiate what he terms the act of "righteous slaughter."

Ideas such as these resonate with a long-established finding of social research into the interactional dynamics of criminal homicide and the extent to which the identities of who kills and who dies is often not clearly evident at the outset of a fatal encounter (Wolfgang 1958). In emotionally fraught and often confused interpersonal conflicts in public spaces involving young men, who will transpire to be the victim and who the perpetrator is not easily predictable (Luckenbill 1977). The introduction of theories of affect and emotion into our understandings of how and why criminal homicides arise is then potentially the most significant contribution of micro-theoretical perspectives to explaining the causes of such violent acts. Concepts of the sensual dynamic, righteous slaughter and forward panic give theoretical form to the emotional forces that propel the moves to murder.

Micro-consequences of homicide

Mirroring structural accounts, micro-theories of murder again display a disposition to identify causes. That said, some of the most compelling studies emanate from broadly phenomenological and interactionist approaches and provide "high resolution" pictures of the aftermath of homicidal acts. These include: accounts of the secondary victims of such crimes and their trauma, grief, and experiences of the criminal justice process (Rock 1998); how some of these individuals mount moral entrepreneurship campaigns leading to changes in law (Rock 2004); the stigma and shame borne by families and friends of offenders (Condry 2007); the work of criminal justice agencies in marshaling a response to such acts (Innes 2003); and those who are "victimized" when the criminal justice process "miscarries" (Naughton 2007).

Extending and elaborating the reach of the affective phenomenology that has proven so productive in unpicking the causes of homicides, Howarth and Rock (2000) apply similar ideas to framing an analysis of the aftermaths of such incidents. They identify how, following a murder, a complex blend of emotional and physical labor performed by a range of actors is enacted with the intent that it should dispel chaos and alienation while affording recognition of the harms suffered. In certain circumstances these affective responses are translated into a political imperative, such as occurred in the Stephen Lawrence case.

Mirroring the interchangeability between eventual victims and perpetrators discussed earlier, Burgess and Holstrom (1974) found that the parents of the murdered

and the parents of the murderer experience many of the same problems and symptoms following the death. These are themes developed by Condry (2007) in her account of how families of serious offenders seek to negotiate public opprobrium and stigma. As Howarth and Rock (2000: 59.) state, there is much still to explore in order to understand how homicide and its aftermath can assist in "illuminating the complexity of crime, the abundance of the group which it creates and effects, the multiple consequences that it inflicts, the diversity of the responses that it elicits and concomitant intricacy and scale of the social structures that it generates."

Toward a "Momentary" Sociology of Criminal Homicide

Not then, men and their moments. Rather, moments and their men. (Goffman 1967: 3)

Erving Goffman suggests that even students of society attracted to microsocial perspectives must be appreciative that how people act is not unconstrained, but rather strongly conditioned by the norms and conventions of the particular social situations in which they are located. Although he never really worked through the full implications of the concept of the "moment" that he introduced, Goffman was subtly gesturing to something rather different to that which is typically emphasized by macrostructural accounts. For a "moment" is a particular point in space and time where something significant happens, with causal consequences for what follows after. This focus upon specific spatial-temporal intersections when significant events take place is, we want to argue, potentially profoundly useful in providing a new theoretical lens to unpack some neglected dimensions of criminal homicide cases.

Moments, definitions, and causes

We now return to the issue of how fatal situations are defined. How an incident is labeled and officially categorized is freighted with several significant implications. Not least, for the statistical data that are the raw ingredients for many social-structural analyses, which are aggregated artifacts of such decisions. Whether an incident of fatal violence is treated as potentially criminal or not determines how it will be treated by the institutions whose work comprises the criminal justice process, as well as the wider public. As long ago as 1960, Havard noted the potential for "hidden" homicides to occur. His work pointed to significant numbers of undetected criminal acts occurring in cases that were being classified as "sudden deaths," especially where the deceased was very young or very old. In subsequent years, with cases such as those involving the serial killer Dr Harold Shipman, Havard's conclusions appear to have been exceedingly prescient.

Important variants of these definitional processes relate to the category of cases and incidents that come to be revealed as miscarriages of justice. The public stories about these cases pivot around the moments where cases were originally defined as

homicides, the wrongful assigning of blame, and the subsequent moments where the original definition is revealed as erroneous and consequently must be publicly redefined in consequential ways (Naughton 2007).

Innes's (2003) ethnographic study of police murder investigation expends considerable effort upon deconstructing how and why police detectives come to define the circumstances of suspicious deaths in particular ways, and their work to try and ensure that these are authorized by the judicial process. He details the contingencies of such processes and how the art and craft of the police murder squad detective pivots around synthesizing and blending different pieces of information to construct a narrative of the event, setting out "who did what to whom and why." In so doing, police detectives working a case must contend with partial and incomplete data, all of which have to be reconciled with each other to some degree in order to tell a coherent story. Any police definitions will be scrutinized and tested during subsequent legal proceedings such as coroner's inquests or criminal trials, but the police investigative function possesses particular influence upon how a cause of death is established and any blame assigned.

This "narrative reasoning" is an intrinsic part of the sense-making process police investigators employ. It is transformative in the status of an event, but it also inflects how the incident is subsequently projected publicly in journalists' reporting. In the production of these definitions of the situation, police (and later criminal trials) attend to particular moments in the story such as the fatal interaction. In respect of this chapter, the point is that practitioners have a particular focus on retrospectively unpacking and understanding key moments, rather than structural forces that would be the principal issue of interest to a sociologist. The investigation of a murder is literally "a defining moment" in how a fatal interaction is to be publicly understood and treated—it is the point in time where a public definition of the situation is worked up and adversarially tested.

The significance of understanding the work of police investigators and their auxiliaries in the criminal justice process in this light is exemplified by cold case review (CCR) conferences of long-term unsolved homicides. These innovations in policing were "invented" by a number of policing agencies in the United Kingdom and United States in the 1990s as a methodology for revisiting past cases where a suspect had not been successfully prosecuted. As Allsop (2013; see also Chapter 32, this volume) reports, they have come to be defined by an increasing "reliance on science," particularly DNA analysis. Allsop's empirics suggest the application of such methods has produced relatively few case "solutions," but enough for CCRs to be strategically important as "symbols" of integrating "high science" into police work. Innes and Clarke (2009) posit that CCRs are emblematic of wider and deeper trajectories in the conduct of social control. CCRs are imbued with the logics of "retroactive social control," where past events are placed under new descriptions that change, or radically revise, what is held to have happened in the past. Here, thinking in terms of key "moments" becomes profoundly insightful. Potentially, a past incident that may not even have been categorized as a crime, is redefined; what is understood to have happened is substantively reconfigured. These kinds of development pose deep

questions for our ideas about justice and social order: are there any temporal limits in terms of how long an individual should be accountable to justice, especially if they are responsible for taking the life of another? They also establish connections to new theoretical traditions. For example, the concept of retroactive social control keys into the ways that collective memories are constructed and CCRs potentially identify moments when established collective memories, in terms of how a murder has previously been publicly defined, are disturbed and redefined.

Consequential Moments

The principal theme of the preceding section has been how the criminal justice process works to define incidents and cases in ways that profoundly shape the ways they are treated and processed. In this penultimate section, we focus upon the social consequences that these definitional moments have.

When Stan Cohen (1972) developed his processual model of moral panics, he was concerned to show how a small number of social problems are able to trigger profound institutional consequences that reshape culture and the ordering of reality. It is an approach that has been subsequently picked up and applied widely in respect of a range of issues and problems. There are certainly a small number of murders that have provided the raw ingredients for setting off moral panics over the past couple of decades. For example, the killing of the toddler Jamie Bulger in Liverpool in 1993 by two other young boys played directly into a wider environment of concern about the safety of children.

In his original formulation, Cohen was careful to detail how key social institutions (including the magistracy, media, and criminal justice system) were both *agents* of consequential social change, amplifying concern about a social problem condensed by the incident in question into a highly memorable form, and *reactors* to the changes that they induced. Positioned in a chapter on theorizing the causes and consequences of murder, moral panic theory keys into how a small subset of murders have been responsible for wide and deep cultural transformation.

Picking up on this issue, Innes (2014) has argued that most murders do not induce the institutional ramifications associated with moral panics and are better conceptualized as "signal crimes"—infractions of the criminal law that send a signal to the public about the distribution of risk and threat across social space. Based upon a study of collective reactions to six high-profile murders in England and Wales, he models the consequences of these incidents in terms of "how fear travels" in the aftermath of such crimes. Informed by detailed empirical data collected through interviewing a sample of community representatives living near to where the crimes occurred, he derives several key reaction patterns in terms of how particular behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses flow out from the crime incident (Table 1.2). Appropriating aspects of Albert Hunter's (1985) conceptual differentiation between public, parochial, and private social orders, he shows how collective reactions to murders follow particular trajectories.

Table 1.2   Reaction patterns emanating from incidents of homicide.

Reaction pattern	Consequences of the crime
Private	Restricted to those known to the victim or offender in some way.
Parochial	Travel across a neighborhood or defined community, but do not extend beyond these boundaries.
Public	The effects of the signal crime influence a lot of people in terms of how they think, feel, or act in relation to their safety and security (tend to be high-profile cases).
Public with parochial counter-reaction	In a small number of cases where a high-profile crime captures the public imagination and the area where the crime occurred starts to be stigmatized, local communities sometimes "push back" against the reputational consequences.

This approach starts to open up new ways of theorizing how particular moments of fatal violence are responsible for inducing social impacts and consequences that touch people in a range of different ways. In due course, they may provide an evidence base for conducting community impact assessments and consequent management strategies, both of which have become an increasingly important aspect of how police and other agencies respond to murders and other instances of serious violence.

Conclusion

Drawing back from the detail of individual theoretical contributions, it can be observed that most attention has focused on trying to explain the causes of murder and homicidal violence. More recently, however, as exemplified by an increasing focus on issues of victimology and consequence management, effort has attended to explaining and interpreting the effects that travel out in the aftermath of such incidents. To make sense of such developments we have devised a "meta-frame" that distinguishes between "causal" and "consequentialist" accounts. We have also sought to outline a new conceptual "space" that is delineated by attending to a sociology of "moments"—points in social space and time where things change markedly in the accounting and construction of a homicide.

This chapter started by setting out how murder as a social problem attains its particular status and symbolic power through its finality and irreversibility. We have concluded with reference to the ways murder can be defined and redefined by accounting processes applied after the event that frame and influence the social meaning and consequences that become attached to a specific incident or case. In so doing, the discussion has illustrated the ways that extant theoretical perspectives, such as notions of "collective memory," can be deployed as inputs to produce new insights into why murder matters so much to the stories our culture tells us about ourselves. At the same time, we have also outlined some of the new insights into social life that are being generated through the study of homicidal violence.

Notes

1   We use "justifiable" here in the sense of something for which an act of justification can plausibly be made as opposed to it being considered legitimate.

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