

## **STEPHEN PADDOCK – A FORENSIC PROFILE**

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9 October 2017

Stephen Paddock, the 64-year-old man who murdered 58 people and wounded 489 others on 1 October 2017 remains an enigma to police investigators, journalists, social commentators and even to his own family. Without a criminal record, evidence of radicalisation or religious affiliation, a motive for his catastrophic behaviour remains elusive. The FBI recently appealed to the public to provide any information which could shed light on the reasons behind the mass shooting. Unfortunately, even assuming that such behaviour could be explained by rational motives, no explanation has emerged to date.

One barrier in understanding Paddock's behaviour is the belief that most, if not all actions, can be readily explained by a limited number of motives. Psychologically motivated crimes are difficult to understand, as they do not involve common motives such as financial gain, revenge or sexual gratification. There are endless debates in the media and the Courts about the motivation of serial killers, mass murderers and some extremist groups. We do not question the motivation of mainstream religions, ultra-marathon runners or stamp collectors. The reason is that society either ignores or tolerates irrational behaviour unless it harms others.

Much research has been focused on the psychological makeup of perpetrators of otherwise inexplicable crimes. Psychological profiles focus on a person's upbringing, and the values they might have acquired from their parents, peers or other influential figures. A psychological profile can provide a plausible explanation for otherwise irrational behaviour. Such profiles cannot be tested, and can only be considered an educated guess. A plausible profile, whether right or wrong, will reassure people that authorities will use this information to prevent similar crimes and track down unidentified perpetrators. A plausible profile will reassure us that we live in a predictable world.

Most people's behaviour does fall within a recognizable pattern, but the same cannot be said for all individuals within society. There are endless combinations of factors that influence human behaviour. These range from inherited personality characteristics such as temperament, and unique events that occur in an individual's life. Coroners, life insurers and legal firms often ask forensic psychiatrists to prepare psychological post-mortems. The psychiatric post-mortem will help others understand suicides, homicides or uncontrollable outbursts that sometimes end in police shootings. The profiler's

report is based on a forensic analysis of information, knowledge of similar cases, and a capacity to provide a reasonable explanation for an otherwise inexplicable act. Clinical experience is the most important tool in a profiler's cabinet and can never be replaced by reading case studies.

A large amount of information has emerged in Stephen Paddock's mass shooting and most of it is surprisingly unhelpful. Investigators are yet to reach the eureka moment, when everything becomes clear. Paddock was an unremarkable man who was twice divorced and in a long-term relationship with Marilou Danley, whom he met in a casino. Paddock graduated from California State University in 1977 with a degree in business administration. He worked for the Federal Government for about 10 years, and he worked as an internal auditor for three years in the private sector. Paddock and his brother Eric ran a real estate business.

Paddock later became a successful real estate investor. He was described as a prolific gambler, who spent many hours playing video poker, a solitary game. People who knew Paddock described him as intelligent and methodical. There is speculation about the influence of early life events on Paddock. His father Benjamin was a bank robber who was labelled a psychopath with suicidal tendencies. He was arrested in 1960 after committing a number of armed robberies. He escaped from prison in 1969 and he appeared on the FBI's most wanted list. Paddock's brother stated they never really knew their father. It is worth noting that Paddock's father was not a mass murderer, and that his crime was most likely driven by financial motives. To a profiler, the comment about suicidal tendencies is more relevant, but more about that later.

Sifting through the minutiae of Paddock's life is unlikely to reveal a motive for the events of 1 October 2017. It is therefore appropriate for experts to begin Paddock's psychiatric post-mortem. Unlike a physical post-mortem, this exercise will not be impeded by the body's biological decay. Experts will identify relevant information over the next few weeks and possibly months. Paddock's motivation will eventually become clearer.

When preliminary investigations do not yield useful information, forensic psychiatrists begin by analysing the end result of inexplicable behaviour. The first two incontrovertible outcomes of the Las Vegas shootings are that Paddock is dead, and that his name will remain in the annals of crime.

Like Charles Whitman, who killed 15 people and injured 31 others in the Texas Tower shootings in 1966, Paddock's name will not be forgotten. Paddock's 23 rifles, bump stocks, telescopic sights, video equipment and victim numbers will echo in eternity. It

is wishful thinking for sociologists to ask journalists not to name mass murderers, lest their actions encourage others. In reality, people are not just morbidly interested in mass murderers. People want to understand the perpetrators' motives and avoid becoming future victims. Fewer tourists are likely to visit Las Vegas, at least in the short-term. Travellers remain wary of the London underground, and many still avoid some parts of the Middle East or Central America. Self-preservation will continue to alter behaviour, and knowledge is an integral component of risk assessment.

Returning to Paddock, the third known fact is that he collected civilian versions of military firearms, including AR-15 style rifles and AK-47 style rifles. Whilst most U.S. states banned automatic firearms and large magazines, owners could still fit their weapons with bump stocks. These devices use the gun's recoil to push the trigger, and enable a rifle to fire 600-800 bullets per minute. The only problem with such high firing rates is that the barrel overheats after firing 50-100 bullets. This explains why Paddock took so many firearms into his room. Paddock fitted some of his firearms with telescopic sights and tripods. He chose a high vantage point to maximise carnage. Investigators allegedly found a note with ballistic calculations.

Paddock owned over 50 guns, although he purchased at least 33 in the 12 months before the mass shooting. His guns were expensive, costing from \$5,000 to \$10,000 each. At this point, it is worth asking about the psychological makeup of someone who owns a firearm. According to research, 30% of American adults own guns. Most are concerned citizens who want to protect themselves and their families against criminals. Only about 9% of American adults own more than five firearms.

Undoubtedly, many criminals also own undeclared firearms. Criminals are unlikely to own multiple firearms unless they are gun dealers. Criminals use firearms for a very specific purpose. Only one or two firearms are needed to rob a bank, subdue a victim or kill a rival. Paranoid people live in a hostile world and also need firearms. Paranoid people fire in self-defence, generally when under attack by imaginary foes or police trying to arrest them. Paranoid people fire at well-defined targets and not on crowds of strangers.

So, why did Paddock have 55 expensive guns? Psychologically, guns represent power. There is a sense of grandiosity that goes with a gun collection. Guns give their owner the power of life and death, like a god. More guns, more power. The higher the firing rate, the greater the power.

Did Paddock suffer a Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) ? The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5), published by the American

Psychiatric Association, lists the criteria required for a diagnosis of NPD. These include a preoccupation with “fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love’. Another criterion states, ‘has a grandiose sense of self-importance, and believes that he or she is special and unique. The narcissist, ‘lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognise or identify with the feelings and needs of others’.

As a psychological experiment, imagine sitting in your armoury in the basement of your house. Statistically, you must be a man or the experiment won’t work. Whilst looking at your gun wall, you oil your \$8,000 military-style rifle which can fire 700 rounds per minute. It was featured in the latest Hollywood blockbuster, where the hero just killed a room full of terrorists and rescued the hostages. You look at your wall, and you see another 10 firearms that could protect you and your family from an invading foreign army or a zombie-style apocalypse. Your guns give you a feeling of omnipotence and control.

Paddock was described as a wealthy investor who owned many properties. He did not need to work, and he spent money lavishly on gambling, cruising and collecting firearms. At least from a financial perspective, he was successful. There were early rumours about Paddock losing substantial amounts of money on real estate deals and gambling, but these remain to be confirmed. On the surface, Paddock had no reason to be depressed. He had no motive to commit suicide. Some snippets of information suggest otherwise. His girlfriend told investigators that Paddock would lie in bed, just moaning and screaming, ‘Oh My God’’. Paddock was prescribed an anti-anxiety drug, Valium, in June 2017. He was reportedly despondent and drinking more alcohol than usual.

Was Paddock a depressed narcissist? Whilst the two conditions are not mutually exclusive, the combination gives rise to the most destructive rage a psychiatrist will observe in clinical practice. Otto Kernberg, one of the world’s foremost experts on NPD noted that whilst low self-esteem is a core symptom of depression, narcissists cannot cope with it. Individuals with NPD have an inflated self-esteem, and depression deflates it to a critical level. Narcissists cannot cope with feelings of despondency, and either numb themselves with drugs and alcohol, or blame their parlous state on the rest of the world. A narcissist just cannot allow himself to feel worthless.

Let’s assume Paddock was depressed. The more depressed he felt, the angrier he became towards society. The insidious onset of his depression coincided with buying more firearms and increasing their lethality. He purchased bump stocks, ammunition and even ammonium nitrate to make bombs. His depression coincided with laying in bed screaming and moaning, a behaviour commonly observed amongst agitated

depressed people. A doctor prescribed him a tranquilliser in June 2017. Paddock killed 58 people and then he killed himself. Depression is the most common cause of suicide. Did Paddock blame others for his sense of hopelessness and despair?

Paddock spent time gambling, and although there is an association between compulsive gambling and depression, Paddock's gambling began many years earlier. It could not be considered a symptom of depression, although an escalation before the mass shooting would support the diagnosis.

Why was Paddock depressed? His father's suicidal tendencies suggest Paddock had a constitutional predisposition to depression. Were there external explanations for Paddock's descent into madness? Paddock had two failed marriages and no children. He liked country music, and he killed a large number of people who were attending a country music concert. Many victims could have been his children. Perhaps Paddock resented missing out on a family, and that he would soon be forgotten after his death.

Erik Erikson, the German born developmental psychologist who coined the term identity crisis, described the different challenges faced by people through life. For someone like Paddock, in the twilight of his life, the Eriksonian conflict would have been between legacy and despair. It is a stage in life when you look back and decide whether you have achieved something long-lasting, a legacy you can proudly leave behind. If you haven't, it will be too late to start again and you will be left with despair. A narcissist cannot tolerate despair, he cannot disappear and be forgotten. Did Paddock choose a legacy of infamy?

Perhaps Paddock's depression was simply biological, and caused by a genetic time bomb which went off at age 64. Perhaps Paddock suffered significant financial losses in the last few days of his life. Did he suffer a brain tumour? Dr Chenar, the pathologist who performed Charles Whitman's autopsy found a tumour near his Amygdala. The Amygdala is an area of the brain which modulates anger. Fifty years later, doctors are still arguing about the significance of this finding. Paddock might have blasted a tumour out of his brain with a bullet, destroying evidence of it.

There are many possible explanations for Paddock's irrational behaviour, but ultimately we will never be sure. All we can say is that whatever troubled Paddock, military-style firearms magnified his lethality.

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