

A Taxonomy of Male British Family Annihilators, 1980–2012

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Abstract: This exploratory article presents an overview of British, male family annihilators from 1980 to 2012. In doing so it provides a range of criminological information relevant to the incidents being described, and offers a taxonomy of four different types of annihilators that moves discussion beyond 'revenge/altruistic' categories.

Keywords: family annihilator; taxonomy; masculinity; family; Britain

It would seem to have been Dietz (1986) who first coined the term 'family annihilator' in an American medical bulletin. Dietz saw this type of murderer as the first of three subcategories of 'mass murderer', with the other two subcategories being 'pseudo-commandos' and 'set-and-run killers'. He described the family annihilator as, 'usually the senior man of the house, who is depressed, paranoid, intoxicated or a combination of these' and noted that 'he may commit suicide after killing the others, or may force the police to kill him' (Dietz 1986, p.482). This latter point is important, for the family annihilator depicted by Dietz, in taking, or intending to take, his own life, is different from that type of murderer who might kill his own child or children – an all-too-common occurrence both in this country and the USA – but who does not intend to kill himself and has traditionally been labelled as a 'filicide'. It is also clear that family annihilation, as well as spree or serial murder, is an overwhelmingly male preserve (Wilson 2009).

More recently, Fox and Levin (2005) have developed Dietz's ideas, although they still see family annihilation as a subcategory of mass murder, which they define as involving the killing of four or more victims in one location, murdered in one event. They argue that family annihilators have:

A long history of frustration and failure, through childhood and into adult life. He has tremendous difficulty both at home and at work in achieving happiness and

success. Over time, repeated frustration can erode a person's ability to cope, so much so that even modest disappointments seem catastrophic. (p.177)

Fox and Levin see this type of murder as 'serving as a necessary, even if distasteful, means towards some desired outcome' and that some will kill from 'a warped sense of love and loyalty – a desire to save their loved ones from misery and hardship' (p.23).

These contributions notwithstanding, there has been comparatively little academic attention given to family annihilators, although there is, of course, a long-established research interest in child killing with the family seen as the primary site of violence and homicide (see, for example, Blaser 1985; Bourget and Bradford 1990; Crittenden and Craig 1990; Goetting 1988; Silverman and Kennedy 1993; Donnelly, Cumines and Wilczynski 2001). Broadly, this research has identified two patterns of child killings – intra- and extra-familial homicides. Our interest in this article is with the first of these patterns of child murders and, as Alder and Polk (2001) have described, with one of the two broad groups of men who kill their own children – the 'filicide-suicides'. This occurs when the father attempts to take, or succeeds in taking, his own life, as well as that of his child.

In the UK, Brookman (2005, p.195) has drawn attention to the phenomenon of 'family annihilators' and noted that cases of fatal child abuse/assault often occur in situations where the father, or stepfather is attempting to discipline the child – a situation previously characterised as corporal punishment run amok – and where the intention is not to kill the child. Hodson (2008), on the other hand, writing about fathers who *deliberately* set out to kill their children and drawing on research about filicides, suggests that we should distinguish between two broad types of family annihilators: 'altruistic filicides' and 'revenge killers'. The first type occurs where the father:

believes that the breakdown of the family unit is the end of the world – of his world at least – and that in killing his children he is sparing them pain and possibly removing them to a better place. Often the father takes his own life, and sometimes his partner's too. Monstrous self-obsession leaves the father apparently unable to perceive his children as separate entities, so that in his own mind they are him – after all they probably share his name – and this leads in turn by a kind of twisted logic to the conclusion that if his life must end, then so must theirs.

Hodson's 'revenge killer', on the other hand, kills his children because this will be seen as the ultimate injury to his partner, or former partner and she will have to live with that loss for the rest of her life.

Cavanagh *et al.* (2005) have pushed much of this research territory forward by drawing on data from 90 British men who murdered children between 1998 and 2001 and comparing those men in their sample who killed children within their family (n = 49), with men who murdered outside of the family context (n = 41). Overall, they concluded that both groups had much in common, in that 'the great majority of men came from low socio-economic backgrounds, were undereducated, underemployed and had histories of disruption and offending, both in childhood

and adulthood' (p.681). As for those men who had specifically killed children within their family, they noted that most were the biological father of the child who was murdered; two-thirds of these men had previously committed violence; one-fifth had had some sort of sexual contact with the child who died; and that most murders had occurred when the 'father or step-father was left with the temporary care of a young, crying child, the primary intention often being to "silence" the victim' (p.682).

Research has previously indicated that intra-familial homicide is often committed to prevent children reporting a sexual assault (Alder and Polk 1996), or has emphasised other aspects of the child's behaviour, such as the need to stop the child crying (Becker *et al.* 1998; Baker, Craig and Lonergan 2003). So, too, previous research has suggested that this type of homicide is most likely to involve the use of blunt instruments (Jason 1983; Schmidt, Grab and Madea 1996); that younger children – often below the age of two years – are more likely to be killed within the family than those children killed outside of the family (Blaser 1985; Silverman and Kennedy 1993; Vanamo *et al.* 2001); that the home is the most likely place where a child murder will take place (Lucas *et al.* 2002); that child killers tend to be young (Alder and Polk 1996; Strang 1995); and that children are less likely to be killed by their biological fathers as they grow older (Daly and Wilson 1988).

In contributing to this field, it has been necessary to maintain closeness to the detailed particulars of individual cases. However, we have sought to avoid an overemphasis on the individual – or *microcriminology*, prominent in the study of serial murder (Haggerty 2009) and criminology more generally (Rosenfeld 2011). As such, we argue that the social institution within which family annihilation takes place exists alongside the economy, education, polity and religion in the framework of modern society. Family annihilators can, therefore, be seen in this way as essentially destroying the physical manifestations of the family and, as a consequence, a consideration of the institutional landscape holds potential for a more contextually-rooted conceptual model. In considering the institutional context of family annihilators, we draw upon the general institutional literature in criminology (Messner and Rosenfeld 2004; Karstedt 2010; Messner, Rosenfeld and Karstedt 2013).

Methodology and Terminology

In this exploratory article we consider male British family annihilators who could be identified in newspapers published between 1980 and 2012. By 'family annihilators' we mean those men who deliberately set out to kill their child or children. They may or may not attempt to kill the mother of the children and may or may not attempt to kill themselves. Thus, while all our family annihilators are filicides, they are not necessarily familicides, or filicide-suicides.

There are a number of advantages, and some disadvantages, in using a newspaper search, over gathering data from more official sources. In

relation to the former, for example, a newspaper journalist will usually interview friends, acquaintances and even surviving family members as to what might have caused the annihilator to behave as he did. Thus, we were often able to quickly determine possible motives that might have prompted these murders. Moreover, given that few men in our sample were previously known to the criminal justice or mental health systems, or to social services, we were able to build up a more detailed picture of what these men – and their relationships with their partner, ex-partner and children – had been like in the past. This is important, for there is a tendency in more popular writing about this subject to see these men as having ‘snapped’. In other words, that some sort of ‘triggering incident’ had made these men behave out of character. As we will show, this was not necessarily the case.

However, as might be imagined with incidents of this kind, these newspaper sources were rarely dispassionate and clearly the views of surviving family members, neighbours, acquaintances and friends about the murders do not necessarily have to reflect the motivation of the family annihilator, or, indeed, accurately depict what actually took place. As a consequence, we read the various accounts of the family annihilation independently of each other and thereafter came to a consensus through discussion as to possible motivations. The fact that there were often several accounts of the family annihilation, in competing newspapers, written by different journalists, also afforded some degree of internal data triangulation at the point at which the story was reported.

We have also attempted to discover if this type of offence has been increasing over the past 30 years, as well as gathering other criminological information, including: how, when and where the murder was committed; identified the age profile of the victims and their relationship to the perpetrator; established the age and occupation of the murderer; whether the murderer took his/her own life; and, if the murderer survived, how he/she was subsequently dealt with by the courts. Comparing our results with these research findings will allow us to determine whether or not the ‘family annihilator’ might be viewed as a distinct type of child murderer. Given the exploratory nature of this research, univariate analysis in the form of the chi-squared test was used where appropriate, to determine whether or not the frequencies reported in each category were significantly different from one another when comparing observed and expected values. In other words, did the variables act differently from what we might expect by chance? This has enabled us to identify some initial propositions relating to the characteristics of family annihilators.

Using Nexis, a search of newspaper articles, identifying the subsets of ‘murder’, ‘family’, and ‘annihilator’ was carried out in order to establish our sample from 1980 to 2012. Nexis is an electronic database which houses all major British newspapers, including both national and regional titles, some 2,000 global newspapers, plus copy from newswires and newsletters. Sometimes this search produced general, opinion and editorial articles but which included the names of specific murderers which allowed us to further refine our search, often using regional newspapers (see, for

example, Gerrard 2012; Grice and Martin 2001; Mair 2002). In total, 71 cases were identified which matched our search criteria and those cases involving men are presented as *Table 1*. In this exploratory article we do not discuss the twelve women who were family annihilators, but will leave this for a subsequent article and, instead, concentrate on the 59 cases of male family annihilators. It should be noted that the earlier cases which we identify were not as extensively reported upon as the more recent cases and, therefore, did not yield as much information relevant to our research. This, in itself, is an interesting finding and, although this is not a focus for this article, it might suggest how ‘news values’ have changed over the past three decades (Jewkes 2004).

Given the number of cases that our search produced, we suggest a taxonomy of male British family annihilators which moves beyond the binary altruistic and revenge categories suggested by Hodson (2008). We describe how it is possible to identify four different types of male British family annihilators, whom we have labelled: *anomic*; *disappointed*; *paranoid*; and *self-righteous* annihilators. We discuss these types more fully below and within each type, offer a case study to illustrate our ideas. However, we also acknowledge that there is ‘seepage’ between these categories and that masculinity and power form the broader, ‘background’ context within which to understand all family annihilators. In this respect, family annihilation is a crime committed by men as a form of ‘social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity’ (Messerschmidt 1993, p.85). Before discussing this taxonomy further, given the exploratory nature of the article, we offer some broad, descriptive statistical analysis of our findings.

Findings

Our search identified 59 male family annihilators between 1980 and 2012, listed below in *Table 1*.

We identified six cases of family annihilation which occurred in the 1980s, a figure which was to triple for the 1990s and increase still further between 2000 and 2009, when there were 28 cases of family annihilation. There were statistically significant differences between the three decade categories 1980–89, 1990–99 and 2000–09, $\chi^2 = 14.00$ (2 df, $p < 0.005$, $n = 52$). The first decade of the 21st Century produced nearly half of all our 59 cases of family annihilators, and this phenomenon shows no sign that it is decreasing, as there have already been seven cases of family annihilators in the first three years of the current decade. The number of cases by decade are shown in *Table 2*. However, caution is advised in drawing conclusions about increases in the overall numbers of family annihilations, given that there may, indeed, have been cases during the period studied which did not make it into the local or national press. Nonetheless, it is clear that this phenomenon has, at the very least, become more visible since 1980. Of the cases from the 1980s, it has been particularly difficult to discover anything substantive about the case of Graham

TABLE 1
Cases of Family Ammihilators Included in Analysis

Name of murderer	Specific date	Day of the week	Age of murderer (years)	Occupation of murderer at time of murders	Primary reported motive	Single / multiple method	Killed wife / husband / partner	Committed suicide?	Primary type
Michael Wynar	18/10/1983	Tuesday	59	Unemployed	Mental health issues	Single	No	Yes	Paranoid
Frank Parry	28/03/1984	Wednesday	52	Librarian	Financial difficulties	Single	Yes	Yes	Paranoid
Robert Healey	15/08/1986	Friday	38	Driving instructor	Concealment of sexual abuse of stepdaughter	Multiple	Yes	No	Paranoid
Kevin Wright	21/04/1987	Tuesday	23	Not known	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Jim Donnelly	10/01/1988	Sunday	30	Not known	Not known	Single	Yes	Yes	Not known
Graham Sherman	09/11/1989	Thursday	21	Royal Marine	Not known	Single	Yes	No	Not known
Ian Lazenby	24/01/1994	Monday	52	Chief	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Sukhdev Sandu	06/02/1994	Sunday	35	GP	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Wayne Skerton	23/03/1994	Wednesday	Not known	Not known	Family break-up	Single	No	No	Self-righteous
Aidan Kenny	25/03/1994	Friday	34	Unemployed	Mental health issues	Single	No	No	Paranoid
Mark Bradley	08/06/1994	Wednesday	32	Care home assistant	Family break-up	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Maryn Hughes	13/07/1995	Saturday	37	Lorry driver	Financial difficulties	Single	Yes	Yes	Anomic
Jose Pimenta	14/07/1995	Friday	42	Painter and decorator	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Phillip Mitchell	30/09/1995	Saturday	36	Cutter (machine operator)	Financial difficulties	Single	No	Yes	Anomic
Brahim Aderdour	12/10/1995	Thursday	37	Unemployed	Family break-up	Single	Yes	No	Self-righteous
Khalid Mahmood	20/01/1996	Saturday	38	Not known	Family break-up	Multiple	Yes	No	Disappointed
John Chetwynd	23/06/1997	Monday	43	Accountant	Honour killing	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Disappointed
Paul Madin	02/08/1997	Saturday	37	Mechanic	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Alexander Lumsden	30/04/1998	Thursday	46	Unemployed	Family break-up	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Steven Carter	02/08/1998	Sunday	36	Unemployed	Family break-up	Multiple	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Julian Philpott	02/08/1999	Monday	29	Garage worker	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Peter Stafford	01/10/1999	Friday	33	Window cleaner	Financial difficulties	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Anomic
David Price	15/10/1999	Friday	32	Postman	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Paul Roberts	04/11/1999	Thursday	28	Fitter at a window manufacturer	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Zaimulabedin Zaidi	17/03/2000	Friday	34	Unemployed	Family break-up	Single	Yes	No	Disappointed
Frank Fairless	19/04/2000	Wednesday	36	Self-employed builder	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Paranoid
Phillip Austin	10/07/2000	Monday	31	Forklift driver	Financial difficulties	Multiple	Yes	No	Disappointed
Robert Mochrie	12/07/2000	Wednesday	49	Businessman	Financial difficulties	Single	Yes	Yes	Anomic

TABLE 1
Continued

Name of murderer	Specific date	Day of the week	Age of murderer (years)	Occupation of murderer at time of murders	Primary reported motive	Single / multiple method	Killed wife / husband / partner	Committed suicide?	Primary type
Phillip Hall	21/07/2000	Friday	41	Marketing executive	Mental health issues	Single	No	No	Paranoid
Leslie Pepall	06/08/2000	Sunday	29	Not known	Family break-up	Multiple	No	No	Self-righteous
Leonard Hurst	10/10/2000	Tuesday	33	Factory worker	Family break-up	Single	No	No	Self-righteous
Anthony Smith	04/02/2001	Sunday	34	Bodyguard	Financial difficulties	Single	Yes	Yes	Anomic
Karl Bluestone	28/08/2001	Tuesday	36	Police constable	Family break-up	Single	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Steven Wilson	06/02/2002	Wednesday	43	Unemployed	Family break-up	Multiple	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Claude Mubianga	17/06/2002	Monday	38	Not known	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Keith Young	27/03/2003	Thursday	38	Farm labourer	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Spencer Smith	24/12/2003	Wednesday	27	Builder	Family break-up	Single	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Jaya Chiti	01/02/2004	Sunday	41	Surgeon	Family break-up	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Richard Hicks	03/02/2004	Tuesday	37	Chef	Family break-up	Single	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Rahan Arshad	28/07/2006	Friday	36	Taxi driver	Family break-up	Single	Yes	No	Disappointed
John Hogan	15/08/2006	Saturday	32	Tiler	Family break-up	Single	No	No	Self-righteous
Robert Tamar	31/08/2006	Thursday	48	Unemployed	Family break-up	Multiple	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Mohammed Riaz	31/10/2006	Tuesday	49	Low-paid jobs	Honour killing	Single	Yes	Yes	Disappointed
Perry Samuel	05/11/2006	Sunday	35	Unemployed	Family break-up	Single	No	No	Self-righteous
Neil Crampton	13/11/2006	Monday	34	Taxi driver	Family break-up	Single	Yes	No	Self-righteous
Ashok Kalyanjee	03/05/2008	Saturday	46	Call centre worker	Family break-up	Multiple	No	No	Self-righteous
Robert Thomson	03/05/2008	Saturday	50	Construction worker	Family break-up	Single	No	No	Disappointed
Brian Philcox	21/06/2008	Sunday	52	Security guard	Family break-up	Multiple	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Chris Foster	26/08/2008	Friday	50	Businessman	Financial difficulties	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Anomic
David Cass	21/09/2008	Sunday	33	MOT inspector	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Andy Copland	29/12/2008	Tuesday	56	Painter and decorator	Family break-up	Single	Yes	Yes	Self-righteous
Hugh McFall	05/02/2009	Thursday	48	Businessman	Financial difficulties	Single	Yes	Yes	Anomic
Christopher Grady	11/02/2010	Thursday	42	Welder	Financial difficulties	Single	No	No	Anomic
Damian Rzeszowski	14/08/2011	Sunday	31	Builder	Family break-up	Single	Yes	No	Disappointed
Toby Day	08/12/2011	Thursday	37	Unemployed	Honour killing	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Disappointed
Richard Smith	17/12/2011	Saturday	37	Quantity estimator	Bereavement	Multiple	Yes	Yes	Paranoid
Ceri Fuller	16/07/2012	Monday	35	Paper mill worker	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous
Graham Anderson	25/08/2012	Saturday	36	Unemployed	Family break-up	Not known	No	Yes	Paranoid
Michael Pedersen	30/09/2012	Sunday	51	Lorry driver	Family break-up	Single	No	Yes	Self-righteous

TABLE 2
Cases of Family Annihilation by Decade

Decade	n	%
1980-1989	6	10.2
1990-1999	18	30.5
2000-2009	28	47.5
2010-2012	7	11.9
Total	59	100

TABLE 3
Month of Family Annihilations

Month	n	%
January	3	5.1
February	7	11.9
March	5	8.5
April	3	5.1
May	2	3.4
June	4	6.8
July	7	11.9
August	11	18.6
September	3	5.1
October	6	10.2
November	4	6.8
December	4	6.8
Total	59	100

Sherman, a 21-year-old Royal Marine, who shot and killed his wife, Michelle, and one-month-old son, Josh, in Arbroath in November 1989. He seems to have made a suicide attempt after these murders, but survived and was then allowed to walk free from court with an admonishment following conviction for culpable homicide. The trial judge, Lord Dunpark, considered him a 'devoted father' and believed that he had 'punished himself enough' (Gill 1990).

Regarding the month in which these cases occur (see *Table 3*), August has proven to be the most common month for a man to annihilate his family, accounting for almost 20% of the total number of cases. Statistically significant differences were found when comparing August cases to non-August cases, $\chi^2 = 8.211$ (1 df, $p < 0.005$, $n = 59$).

Looking at the specific day of the week when the murders occurred (see *Table 4*), Sunday is the most common ($n = 11$, 18.6%). If we were to regard the weekend as including Friday (when children are often picked up after school to be taken away for the weekend), Saturday and Sunday, then just under half ($n = 29$, 49.2%) of all family annihilators will kill at this time,

TABLE 4
Day of Family Annihilations

Day of the week	n	%
Monday	7	11.9
Tuesday	7	11.9
Wednesday	7	11.9
Thursday	9	15.3
Friday	9	15.3
Saturday	9	15.3
Sunday	11	18.6
Total	59	100

although the differences in frequencies recorded for days of the week and weekday/weekend groupings are not statistically significant – respectively $\chi^2 = 1.62$ (6 df, ns, $n = 59$) and $\chi^2 = 2.19$ (1 df, ns, $n = 59$). Indeed, as Friday, Saturday and Sunday, inclusive, encompasses 3/7 of the week, it could be argued that it is not unusual for just under half of family annihilations to occur over this period. However, the reasons for the day and month chosen would seem to be both instrumental and symbolic. The weekend, for example, would be the most obvious time that a man would get access to his children, largely because he would have been working during the week and his children would have been attending school, and August is in the middle of the school holidays. To these instrumental reasons we might also add the symbolic importance of knowing that having gained access to his children for the weekend, he would, nonetheless, also have had to hand them back to his partner or ex-partner on the Sunday evening. Some family annihilators are acutely aware of the significance of the days on which they commit these murders, which also indicates a degree of planning on their part and, for example, Brian Philcox murdered his two children and committed suicide at a beauty spot in Snowdonia, Wales on Father's Day 2008 – a case which we discuss more fully below.

Although not statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 1.37$ (1 df, ns, $n = 59$), most murders happened within the home ($n = 34$, 57.6%) as opposed to another location ($n = 25$, 42.4%), for example, a beauty spot, country lane, relative's home or on holiday (see *Table 5*). Murders which took place outside the home included those committed by John Hogan, who jumped with two of his children from a balcony whilst on holiday in Crete in August 2006 – a similar method to that chosen by Jaya Chiti, a surgeon who jumped from the Orwell Bridge in Ipswich with his child in 2004, and by Christopher Grady, who drove his car into the Avon canal with his two children in the rear, in February 2010. Grady and one of his two children survived.

The majority ($n = 41$, 70.7%) of family annihilators killed using a single method, while the remainder ($n = 17$, 29.3%) used a combination of up to three methods. For one person the method was unknown. There were

TABLE 5
Locations of Family Annihilations

Location	n	%
Home	34	57.6
Country lane	10	16.9
Beauty spot	6	10.2
Other	9	15.3
Total	59	100

TABLE 6
Methods Used in Family Annihilations

Method	n	%
Stabbing	19	32.2
Carbon monoxide poisoning – car exhaust	9	15.3
Strangulation	8	13.6
Bludgeoning	7	11.9
Fire	7	11.9
Shooting	6	10.2
Jumping from height	4	6.8
Drugging/poisoning	3	5.1
Hammer attack	3	5.1
Cutting throat with knife	3	5.1
Suffocation	3	5.1
Drowning	2	3.4
Carbon monoxide poisoning – other	1	1.7
Pushed from height	1	1.7
Not known	1	1.7

statistically significant differences between the categories in terms of methods used (see *Table 6*) during the murders, $\chi^2 = 52.58$ (13 df, $p < 0.005$, $n = 76$),. The most common method used to kill was stabbing, which was used in just under a third ($n = 19$, 32.2%) of all the murders committed. Carbon monoxide poisoning from a car exhaust was the second most common method of murder, seen in 15.3% of cases ($n = 9$).

As is clear from *Table 7*, most of the annihilators were employed ($n = 42$, 71.2%), with only 11 (18.6%) unemployed; it was not possible to determine the occupation of the annihilator in six cases. Among those for whom data were available, there was a statistically significant difference between the categories of employed and unemployed, $\chi^2 = 18.13$ (1 df, $p < 0.005$, $n = 53$) (see *Table 7*). Even more striking was the range of occupations that family annihilators held. These included: a surgeon, doctor, accountant, librarian, driving instructor, marketing executive, postman, factory workers and several lorry and taxi drivers, builders, painters and decorators and businessmen. Of the sample, 13.6% ($n = 8$) had a history of

TABLE 7
Employment Status of Family Annihilators

Employment status	n	%
Employed	42	71.2
Unemployed	11	18.6
Not known	6	10.2
Total	59	100

TABLE 8
Age Group of Family Annihilators

Age group (years)	n	%
20–29	6	10.3
30–39	32	55.2
40–49	12	20.7
50–59	8	13.8
Total	58*	100

(Note: *Age of Wayne Skerton was unknown.)

employment in the armed forces, security or law enforcement. PC Karl Bluestone, for example, murdered his wife and two children with a claw hammer in August 2001 before hanging himself, and Toby Day, who had been sacked as a police inspector for misusing the police computer, stabbed his wife and two of his children in January 2012, before committing suicide.

There were statistically significant differences between age groups of the murderers (see *Table 8*), $\chi^2 = 29.45$ (3 df, $p < 0.005$, $n = 58$). The majority of the family annihilators were in their thirties when they committed their murders ($n = 32$, 55.2%), with only 10% ($n = 6$) in their twenties. Eight were aged between 50 and 59 years (13.8%) – the oldest being 59-year-old Michael Wynar.

There were also statistically significant differences between the ages of the child victims (aged under 18 years) of family annihilators, $\chi^2 = 80.69$ (17 df, $p < 0.005$, $n = 117$), displayed in *Table 9*. The oldest offspring who was a victim of a family annihilator that we uncovered was Michelle Thomson, the 25-year-old daughter of construction worker, Robert Thomson, who murdered his daughter and his seven-year-old son, Ryan, in Buckhaven in May 2008. The median age of child victims of family annihilators in our study was 6 years, the arithmetic mean was 6.4 years and the mode 3 years.

Over four-fifths ($n = 48$, 81%) of annihilators committed, or attempted to commit suicide (see *Table 10*). Of those who committed suicide, the majority ($n = 31$, 77.5%) took their life immediately after the killing event,

TABLE 9
Ages of Child Victims (Under 18 Years)

Age (years)	n	%
<1	1	0.9
1	8	6.8
2	10	8.5
3	18	15.4
4	7	6.0
5	8	6.8
6	17	14.5
7	15	12.8
8	7	6.0
9	7	6.0
10	4	3.4
11	3	2.6
12	6	5.1
13	1	0.9
14	2	1.7
15	1	0.9
16	2	1.7
Total	117	100

TABLE 10
Suicidal Behaviour of Family Annihilators

Behaviour	n	%
Committed suicide	40	67.8
Attempted suicide	8	13.6
Did not commit suicide or attempt to commit suicide	11	18.6
Total	59	100

whilst others did so following a short delay – for example, to travel to a different location (n = 6, 15%) and the remainder (n = 3, 7.5%) after a long delay – for example whilst awaiting trial or during their prison sentence (*Table 11*).

Further examining the victims of family annihilations (see *Table 12*), in just under half of all cases (n = 28, 47.5%), family annihilators killed their partner or ex-partner, whilst in just over half of all cases (n = 31, 52.5%) they did not. In all cases, the child victims were overwhelmingly the biological children of the murderer (n = 57, 96.6%), with only a small number of cases including stepchildren (n = 2, 3.4%). In a minority of cases (n = 4, 6.8%), members of the extended family were also killed alongside the immediate family. It is clear that survivors of family annihilations are rare, in only around one in ten cases (n = 7, 11.9%), victims subjected to an attack have survived.

TABLE 11
Timing of Suicide amongst Family Annihilators who Commit Suicide

Timing of suicide after murders	n	%
Immediate	31	77.5
Short delay	6	15.0
Long delay	3	7.5
Total	40	100

TABLE 12
Victims of Family Annihilators

Victims killed	n	%
Biological children	57	96.6
Spouse/partner	28	47.5
Extended family members	4	6.8
Stepchildren	2	3.4

It is possible to suggest primary motives for what might have prompted the annihilation, although sometimes there may have been a number of motives, all messily competing in the run-up to the murders. Inevitably there are connections between one motivation and another and we have had to exercise an element of judgment in identifying a primary motivation. This was not always easy to do, although we were helped because sometimes family annihilators left suicide notes, which were then discussed at the subsequent coroner's inquiry and, as we got closer to more recent cases, newspapers were adept at discussing motivation with surviving family members, neighbours, friends and work colleagues. Breakdown of cases by primary motive is included in *Table 13*.

Family break-up was the most commonly-reported primary motivation (n = 39, 66.1%) although this hides a number of different domestic situations. For example, this description includes the threat that the family is to break up, as well as situations when the family had already broken up and the actual motivation for murder might have been in relation to the annihilator's dislike of that situation, or anger over access arrangements to a child or children, or some other post-break-up factor. The second most commonly-reported primary motivation related to financial difficulties (n = 10, 16.9%), as in situations when, for example, an annihilator had been made bankrupt, or was facing the threat of bankruptcy. Other primary motives were reported as honour killing (n = 3, 5.1%), where the father was reported to have felt shamed by the actions of his family and mental health issues (n = 3, 5.1%), where reports of cases emphasise a history of diagnosed mental illness in the murderer.

TABLE 13
Primary Motive of Family Annihilators

Motive	n	%
Family breakdown	39	66.1
Financial difficulties	10	16.9
Honour killing	3	5.1
Mental health issues	3	5.1
Other	2	3.4
Not known	2	3.4
Total	59	100

Discussion

Through examining the findings described above, it becomes clear that the family annihilators in our sample differ markedly from family annihilators discussed in previous research. Considering the propositions of Dietz (1986), whilst, indeed, suicide was common, we came across no instances where the murderer had forced 'the police to kill him' (p.482) as Dietz had suggested may be the case. Where suicide did occur, its immediacy in most cases meant that there were no such 'stand offs' with law enforcement; the act of killing was played out in the private family home or an isolated location away from police. Fox and Levin (2005) had painted a picture of the family annihilator as an unhappy and frustrated man, whose life was characterised by a long history of failure. Whilst this may have been relevant in some cases, it did not apply across the board – most notably when examining cases of men who had at one stage been highly successful and accomplished professionals.

In addition, there are more distinctions than similarities when we compare our sample of family annihilators with previous findings relating to intra-familial homicide. In common with this body of literature, the child victims of men in our sample were overwhelmingly the biological children (as opposed to stepchildren) of the murderer (Cavanagh *et al.* 2005). However, the age profile of the child victims in our sample (a mean age of 6.4 years) is considerably higher than in intra-familial homicide where those under the age of two years are most likely to be killed by their fathers, a risk that decreases as they get older (Blaser 1985; Daly and Wilson 1988; Silverman and Kennedy 1993; Vanamo *et al.* 2001). Regarding intention, children in our sample were not killed by accident in the enforcement of discipline (Becker *et al.* 1998; Baker, Craig and Lonergan 2003; Cavanagh *et al.* 2005), as these fathers very much *intended* to kill their children. Nor was killing as an attempt to prevent a child from reporting a sexual assault a key factor (Alder and Polk 1996) – in fact, this only emerged in one of the 59 cases – the 1986 case of Robert Healey, who killed both his stepdaughter and wife in an effort to conceal a history of sexual abuse. The methods used by family annihilators also appear to differ from the perpetrators of intra-familial homicide, the former most commonly

stabbing their victims, in contrast to the typical use of blunt instruments by the latter (Jason 1983; Schmidt, Grab and Madea 1996). In terms of the characteristics of the murderer, whilst the perpetrators of intra-familial homicide have been identified as predominantly young men (Alder and Polk 1996; Strang 1995), the family annihilators in our sample are characterised by an older age profile with a mean age of 38.5 years. Lastly, whilst the home was, indeed, a likely location for family annihilation, as it is in cases of intra-familial homicide (Lucas *et al.* 2002), in around four in ten cases in our sample, the killings took place in locations other than the home.

Given the distinct nature of family annihilation that has emerged from our research, we propose a more detailed taxonomy of family annihilators, which goes beyond the revenge and altruistic categories identified in previous literature. We present our taxonomy and illustrative case studies below.

A Suggested Taxonomy

We propose four types of family annihilator – self-righteous, disappointed, anomic, and paranoid. The sample of 59 cases described above has been examined in light of these categories and each case assigned a primary type (see *Table 14*). We present the categories in the order of prominence in which they appeared in our sample.

Self-righteous

Borrowing from Katz (1988), our first category of family annihilator is ‘self-righteous’ – a term we prefer to the more popular description ‘revenge annihilator’. The self-righteous family annihilator seeks to locate blame for his crimes upon his partner or former partner, whom he holds responsible for the breakdown of the family, for which revenge has to be extracted. In a number of cases, the family annihilator would telephone his (usually) ex-partner just prior to the murders to explain what he was going to do, as a means to punish his ex-partner and to attempt to blame her for his actions.

For self-righteous family annihilators, there is a lack of flexibility in terms of the structure of the family. These men conceptualise an ideal family, often conforming to the traditional ‘gold standard’ nuclear family, of two parents and their biological children. For these men, such a family is central to their masculinity. Their role as the ‘breadwinner’ affords them a significant degree of control. Thus the threat of family breakdown results in efforts to keep the family together – through an escalation of controlling behaviour that may involve threats and violence towards their partners. Where their partners show signs of thriving without them, the family is perceived as having failed. Even reconstituted families – that may result from separation – will be a constant reminder of the failure of this ideal nuclear family and represent a challenge to the annihilator’s masculinity. The self-righteous family annihilator, therefore, engages in a dramatic

TABLE 14
 A Taxonomy of Male Family Annihilators

Type	Characteristics	Number of cases in sample*	%
Self-righteous	Seeks to blame his partner, or ex-partner for the annihilation. Will have often been controlling/possessive within the family in the past. Narcissistic and dramatic both in the method by which the annihilation takes place and in his statements prior to the murders. Will take his own life, or make serious attempts to do so, partly to avoid being judged by the criminal justice system.	32	56.1
Disappointed	Believes that the family has let him down; that they have failed, either actively or passively, from fulfilling his view of what a family should be. Sees family as simply an extension of his own needs, desires, hopes and aspirations.	9	15.8
Anomic	Has lost the source of his/the family's income, either by being sacked, made redundant, or by being made bankrupt, or is facing the threat of bankruptcy. Over-socialised into a belief that consumption determines quality of life.	8	14.0
Paranoid	Annihilator believes that an external threat, which may be real or imagined, such as from social services, whom he believes will take his children into care, will destroy his family. In his own mind, killing his family is a way of protecting them from that threat.	8	14.0

(Note: * Total excludes Jim Donnelly and Graham Sherman, for whom there is insufficient information available to suggest a category.)

performance of his domineering, masculine identity. By removing his children, he effectively prevents them from becoming the stepchildren of another man. For the self-righteous family annihilator, the family has failed in its function as a forum for the performance of masculinity through dominance and control.

Here we should note that the threat has come from *within* the family – specifically the non-compliance of his partner, who has wrested back a degree of power and independence. The self-righteous family annihilator is unable to adapt his idealistic conceptualisation of the family to new, or as he would see it ‘second best’, circumstances, as his masculine identity is premised on his role as the male breadwinner and no substitutes will be accepted. The potential sanction of the ‘broken home’ label, with another man taking his place, and the perceived implications of this for his

masculinity prompt the self-righteous family annihilator. In short, the family has slipped out of his control and must be destroyed.

Case Study: Brian Philcox. Brian Philcox (aged 53 years), a security guard and chairman of the Federation of English Karate Organisations, picked up his two children, Amy aged seven years and Owen aged three years, on Friday, 20 June 2008, on an agreed access day and drove them to an isolated spot in North Wales. The children had got into Philcox's Land Rover clutching home-made Father's Day cards and the bodies of all three were subsequently found in the back seat of the car, after having died of carbon monoxide poisoning. There is some evidence to suggest that Philcox had drugged his two children with chloroform so that they would be asleep while the gas was filling the car. Philcox had separated from his wife in May 2008, partly due to his 'violent and controlling personality' (McCartney 2008) and, by all accounts, this was a bitter divorce with, for example, Philcox claiming: 'she's trying to take me to the cleaners and leave me with nothing – well, I'm not going to let her' (Narain 2009).

Philcox repeatedly telephoned and texted his wife when it became clear to her that he had not returned at the appointed time on Sunday with the children. In these conversations, Philcox suggested that his car had broken down and claimed that 'there's nothing I can do, it is out of my control' (Narain 2009). His former partner believed that this statement related to the car's mechanical problems but this can now be interpreted in a quite different way. Philcox also texted his ex-partner, encouraging her to go to his house, where he had left a note with the word 'bitch' on it which, if moved, was supposed to trigger a bomb. Undoubtedly he hoped that this would kill his ex-wife.

In all of this we can see a public demonstration of the violent and controlling personality that Philcox's ex-partner describes in relation to their former private lives. We can also glimpse the narcissism and drama that seems to have characterised Philcox's life and death: bombs were to be exploded; he spoke to, and texted, his ex-partner; and all of these events took place on Father's Day. This was calculated behaviour, rather than Philcox 'snapping'. The self-pity of his statement that 'there's nothing I can do, it is out of my control', which is, of course, inaccurate in both respects – he could have done something to have stopped these murders and the fact that he chose not to was a decision which he alone made – was a blatant attempt to deflect blame. As with all self-righteous annihilators in this sample, he believed that his ex-partner was at fault for their divorce – a divorce that would leave him with 'nothing'. As a consequence, he felt entitled to take his children and kill them, as if they were merely another type of possession to be fought over, in much the same way that the fight had already started as to who should have the house, the TV and the car. Philcox did not see his children as sentient beings, with their own hopes, dreams and aspirations; as individuals to be cherished and nurtured, but merely as another extension of how the world didn't understand him and all that he had done. Ultimately, it was Philcox himself who chose a course of action that would ensure that he was left with 'nothing'.

Disappointed

The disappointed family annihilator believes that his family has let him down; that they had not fulfilled his expectations or, as he would see it, they were actively and consistently acting in ways that would detract, undermine, and ultimately destroy, what it was that he wanted from family life. The institutional position of the disappointed family annihilator is similar to that of the self-righteous family annihilator, in that both have rigid and fixed conceptions of what 'family' should be. However, while the self-righteous family annihilator responds, in the main, to the threat that his 'nuclear' family is to break up as a result of his partner's actions, the disappointed family annihilator wants to create that break-up for himself. His family, by which we mean his children, his partner, or both, have, in some way, either actively or passively, let him down and, therefore, can no longer deliver what he wants from being a father, or as a husband. For him, the family is no longer performing its institutional role and, therefore, his solution is to break up the family permanently through murder.

Case Study: Mohammed Riaz. Mohammed Riaz (aged 49 years) killed his wife and his four daughters by setting fire to their house in Accrington, Lancashire on 1 November 2006. He was initially pulled free from the burning house but died from his injuries a few days later in hospital. There were no signs of a struggle with his wife, although there were reports that they had argued that day, nor was there any evidence of a break-in. It was soon discovered that accelerant had been used to ensure that the fire would spread quickly and later reports confirmed that Riaz had bought petrol. This implies premeditation. The only survivor of the blaze was their 17-year-old son, Adam, who was in the Christie Hospital in Manchester, where he was receiving treatment for terminal cancer and who, himself, died six weeks later.

In trying to work out what might have prompted Riaz to kill his family, a complicated intra-familial picture emerged, which had a number of different elements. There were, for example, suggestions that Riaz was concerned that his wife might be having an affair; that he was depressed because his only son was dying of cancer; and, that he was limited by his lack of English. Riaz had spent most of his life in North-West Pakistan and it was only an arranged marriage to his wife that had brought him to England. He was particularly concerned that he was being outshone by his wife, who was a well-known community activist and that his wife and children were adopting a more Westernised lifestyle. It is reported that he found it 'abhorrent that his eldest daughter wanted to be a fashion designer and that she and her sisters were likely to reject the Muslim tradition of arranged marriages' (Bunyan 2007).

In short, Riaz felt disappointed that he had lost control of his family; that they were no longer prepared to accept the values that he felt were important and, in their rejection, he believed that this reflected badly on who he was as a husband, father, as a man and as a Muslim. Killing his wife and their children allowed him to regain control of a situation in which he

had felt increasingly powerless and shamed. As he would see it, his family had let him down. Ironically, at his post-mortem, it was discovered that Riaz was suffering from cirrhosis of the liver and was a secret alcoholic. In short, he was a hypocrite and his public anxieties about his family becoming too Western were merely a cover to hide an all-too-common private Western vice.

Anomic

In a conscious nod to Durkheim (1893/1984, 1897/1979), who argued that social norms become unclear during times of change and that individual behaviour is less receptive to social control, we have labelled our third type of annihilator ‘anomic’. For anomic family annihilators, the family appears to have become inextricably linked to the economy. It has been suggested that within capitalist society, the pressures of economic success are detrimental to non-economic institutions such as the family (Messner and Rosenfeld 2004). This is of clear relevance when considering anomic family annihilators, for whom the family has become simply an *indicator* of economic success. The manifestations of ‘family’ created by these men are ones in which they are able to display their achievements by presenting widely-acknowledged symbols of success, within the social locations they inhabit. Key family ‘markers’, for example, a palatial family home, prestige vehicles and expensive leisure pursuits provide others with proof of his status. However, the potential sanction of disapproval, or rejection by his peers in the absence of these symbols is akin to a social death. In other words, it would suggest that he is not economically successful. In these cases, the family itself has not underperformed as an institution – it has delivered the expected outcomes in maintaining a respectable façade, but the father’s ‘economic failure’ has meant that the family becomes obsolete; it no longer serves a function.

Case Study: Christopher Foster. Christopher Foster (aged 50 year) shot his wife, Jill, and his daughter, Kirstie, in the back of their heads, while they were asleep in their bedrooms, on Friday, 26 August 2008. He then shot his horses and dogs, jammed a horsebox against the gates of his mansion, Osbaston House, in Maesbrook, near Oswestry, Shropshire, before setting light to the house. He had a gun beside him when he died, but seems to have succumbed to smoke inhalation. Foster has been described as a ‘millionaire’ and as a ‘failed businessman’ (Townsend 2008) and both descriptions are probably accurate. At the time of his and his family’s deaths, he had debts of at least £2.8 million and, at the Royal Courts of Justice in February 2008, Lord Justice Rimer described Foster as ‘bereft of the basic instincts of commercial morality. He was not to be trusted’ (Townsend 2008). His thermal insulation business – Ulva Ltd – had gone into liquidation in 2007 and it was later revealed that Foster had mortgaged his home three times, had 20 different bank accounts, one of which was overdrawn by £330,000. He had no visible income source at the time of his death.

This must have been especially difficult in the village of Maesbrook, described as a 'rarefied, aspirational village', made up of 'self-made millionaires from Birmingham and Wolverhampton, entrepreneurs who've made it big' (Ronson 2008). Foster, before setting up his business, had, indeed, been a salesman – an 'ordinary bloke from Wolverhampton' (Ronson 2008) – but had initially been successful enough to buy two Porsches, an Aston Martin, a 4X4 for his wife and a tractor for his mansion. He also held a firearms licence and, on the day of the murders, had been attending a barbecue and a clay pigeon shoot before taking the lives of his wife and daughter. He had also had numerous affairs and, according to his sister-in-law: 'he had a big thing about blondes – there were lots of women on the scene. He wasn't a good-looking guy, but money did the talking. He was always flashing the cash – it seemed to give him confidence' (Ronson 2008).

In other words, far from the initial picture that one might have gained from considering why Foster annihilated his family, perhaps as a perverted form of 'protecting' them from hardships that might be coming their way as a result of his failed business endeavours, a very different picture emerges than this potential altruism. Foster murdered when it became clear that he could no longer have the status of being a millionaire within the confines of a social setting which valued wealth and the trappings of wealth. If the cars and his mansion were going to be taken from him, he would take matters into his own hands and destroy everything himself. He was 'self-made' and, equally, he could self-destroy. Is there not also something quite chilling about the observations of his sister-in-law that 'money did the talking' and that it 'gave him confidence' (Ronson 2008)? For if money was the confidence that he needed to speak, the looming reality that there was to be no money in the future, is suggestive of the abyss of silence that Foster must have viewed, not for his wife and child, but for himself. Over-socialised into the values of wealth and status, what motivated Foster to annihilate his family was a fear that he was, once again, to become 'an ordinary bloke from Wolverhampton'.

Paranoid

By 'paranoid', which we accept has an association with underlying mental health issues, we mean those annihilators who believed that there was some external threat to the well-being of their children and the status of their families. This threat could be real or imagined. The paranoid family annihilator feels that the 'family' he has created is under threat from institutional forces outside of that family. The function of the family for these men is similar to that of the anomic and self-righteous family annihilator, as the family is central to his masculinity. However, it is his role as protector of the children that is central here. The paranoid family annihilator has become distrustful, both of his partner's capacity to care for his children and of institutional manifestations of the polity – most notably social services and the Family Court. He fears that these institutions might 'take sides' with his partner, threatening his position as the primary protector of his children's interests. Of note, the paranoid family annihilator

may have a more flexible conceptualisation of the family than the self-righteous family annihilator. For example, he may have been separated from his partner for some period of time prior to the murders, which suggests a degree of acceptance that his 'nuclear family' has changed. However, the family is seen as existing in a private sphere and, whilst interference from organisational manifestations of the polity may be tolerated if they are on *his* side, he will retreat back into the private sphere if under threat. The potential sanction of being perceived as an incompetent carer and, perhaps having this label publicly validated by the polity, is a powerful one for these men and so they take fatal steps to preserve their status as their children's protector.

Case Study: Graham Anderson. Graham Anderson (aged 36 years) was an unemployed removals man, who had given up his job to look after his two boys, after he had won custody of them in May 2012. They had previously been placed in foster care. Three months later, he killed both boys and then hanged himself in his rented flat in Tidworth, Wiltshire. It has still not been determined how the boys were killed and the coroner's inquiry into their deaths has still to be held. However, the murders occurred when it became clear that Anderson's former partner had become pregnant by another man and just days after he had been given notice to quit the flat that he rented. Anderson was known to be a jealous and violent man, who had previously served a six-month sentence for attacking his former partner in 2011. A friend remembered that he had made her life 'a living Hell' (Fagge 2012).

Even so, neighbours suggested that Anderson was afraid that the boys would either be taken back into care by social services – given that he would soon be homeless – or that he would lose them in any future custody battle, now that his former wife's circumstances seemed to have become more settled. In this respect, Anderson, while also conforming to a more typical filicide-suicide, was paranoid that, having given up his job to look after his sons, he would lose any subsequent battle to keep them with him. There is no evidence to support this belief, but neighbours who discussed matters with Anderson suggested that he may have killed out of fear. In this respect, despite the history of violence that he displayed towards his former partner, Anderson's paranoid beliefs were, in all likelihood, a basis for his annihilation.

Conclusions

Our research suggests that family annihilators should be seen as a distinct category of murderer, of which there are specific subcategories. What seems to link each of the subcategories that we have identified is masculinity and the need to exert power and control in situations when the annihilator feels that his masculinity has, in some way, been threatened. For these men, the family role of the father was fundamental to their masculine identities and, prior to the murders, the family had, to some

extent, ceased to perform its masculinity-affirming functions for them. Murder, or more bluntly, family annihilation, thus emerges in this sense as a resource to perform masculinity, when other resources have failed, are seen as being inadequate, or do not deliver the desired outcomes. In this way the annihilation makes public what had often been a private reality – a reality masked to family, friends and neighbours who often thought that this man had been a ‘doting’ and ‘loving’ father and ‘dutiful’ husband.

Sadly, we suggest that this is a trend which seems to be increasing. However, our observations are a weak basis on which to consider what can be done to reduce the incidence of family annihilation. After all, children will be – and still should be – given access to estranged fathers, the vast majority of whom would never dream of attacking or killing their children. Marriages and relationships will continue to dissolve. What, therefore, can be done? Clearly, this is a simple question to ask, but a much more difficult one to answer. However, the beginnings of such an answer must relate to gender and a recognition that it is, in the main, men who use violence and will take the lives of their children in this way.

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