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Audrey Reever April 5, 2019

Males and Mass Shootings:

The Deadly Combination of Social Entitlement and Fragile Masculinity

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Abstract

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This April marks the twentieth anniversary of the shooting at Columbine High School. This tragic event remains to this day the mass shooting most often discussed in the media and elsewhere. Since this incident, the United States has become more familiar than anyone would like with the topic of mass shootings. 95% of the mass shootings that have occurred between 1966 and 2016 have been committed by males. Given this striking statistic, I argue that there is a possible connection between masculinity and mass shootings. I draw connections between the social theories of hegemonic masculinity and aggrieved entitlement and psychological theories that argue people with disproportionally high, but insecure, self-esteem may respond more violently to ego threats. I analyze the shootings at Isla Vista, CA, Virginia Tech, and Charleston, SC, connecting the shooters actions with their own perceptions of their masculinity and their need to demonstrate their masculinity when they lost social power. I argue that one way of combating mass shootings is to reevaluate the conception of masculinity in this country. By attempting to change the social narrative around what it means to "be a man," we can end violence as a means of coercion and symbolic domination.

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Introduction: Males and Mass Shootings

This April marks the twentieth anniversary of the shooting at Columbine High School. This tragic event remains to this day the mass shooting most often discussed in the media and elsewhere. Since this incident, the United States has become more familiar than anyone would like with the topic of mass shootings. As someone who has grown up in United States and has gone to school in a post-Columbine world, I am familiar with the national dialogue that occurs every time a shooting makes headlines. I am also familiar with the fear that many people in this country have that they will be a victim of the next shooting.

When I decided to embark on this research, the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida had just happened, and there were several articles and opinion pieces written about the clear connection between masculinity and mass shootings. Most people I talked to would anecdotally agree with this connection, given that the more widely known shootings, such as Columbine, Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, Orlando, and Parkland were all committed by males. The connection between the male identity and violence seemed so apparent that I had never questioned it. I think that because we are all to some extent used to hearing news stories about mass shooting, we have a familiarity with them. Most people have some opinion about gun control—a conversation that is often fueled by mass shootings. After being exposed to what feels like an endless number of shootings, I felt as though I had enough anecdotal experience and therefore sufficient information to make claims about mass shootings. But as I had these conversations with friends and saw countless unattributed claims on social media, I noticed how many assumptions were being made in my conversations about mass shootings. These assumptions had relatively no grounding outside of things I had heard from a variety of

sources, such as news media, social media, or my friends and peers. I decided I needed to know the facts: were men actually the only ones who committed mass shootings, and if so, what does this say about masculinity in our culture?

My exploration of the topic uncovered a lack of continuity among the various works regarding mass shootings. Each source, regardless of whether it was from the academy, the government, or a non-profit agency, defined mass shooting differently and therefore had dramatically different statistics regarding mass shootings. While these groups collect similar information, they are all collecting it in such a way that is it incompatible with others. Among the differing information one thing became clear—men make up the vast majority of mass shooters. Out of the 327 mass shootings that occurred between 1966 and 2016 312, or approximately 95 percent were committed solely by males.[1]

The possible connection between masculinity and mass shootings remains largely unexplored in academia despite the significant statistical difference between the number of men and women who commit mass shootings. The research done on mass shootings often focuses on access to guns, mental health, and preventative measures that could be enacted. While all of these topics deserve consideration and discussion, I believe that the gender discrepancy among mass shooters is a phenomenon that needs investigation. In this thesis, I explore the potential connection between masculinity and mass shootings, arguing that the socialization of men can create a sense of entitlement that some men internalize as part of their identity. In the case of

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[1] Jaclyn Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shooting Events, 1966–2016," in *Mass Shootings in America: Understanding the Debates, Causes, and Responses* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2018), 95-179.
My research will exclude shootings that happened prior to the sixties, mainly because of the difficulty in accurately accounting for all the shootings that happened, given that records of such events are not well kept or easily found, and there is no official database of such events.
Twelve shootings were committed solely by females and three were committed by male-female pairs.

mass shooters, I argue that this internalized entitlement negatively affect their ability to receive criticism or handle negative life events.

The first half of this paper lays the groundwork for my analysis of three mass shootings that occurred in the United States. I define mass shooting and hegemonic masculinity, two central concepts in this paper, and discuss how the general socialization of men in the United States and the perpetuation of masculinity could be connected to mass shootings. Since research on mass shootings rarely argues that there is a connection to masculinity, I examined research that demonstrates how crime can be used by men as a way of performing their masculinity in a certain situation. Using this connection, I argue that mass shootings, similarly, are a situation in which men feel the need to perform hyperviolent masculinity as a way of demonstrating power in their own lives. This research demonstrates that mass shootings are not a crime that is uniquely male, but rather, mass shootings fall into a similar trend of male violence and crime. I then describe the theories of aggrieved entitlement and high, insecure self-esteem combined with ego threats and how these theories can be connected to masculine ideal and manifest in ways particular to some men. I go to describe how particular stressors, or negative events in the shooter's lives, trigger these violent events and often have roots in hegemonic masculinity.

The second half of the paper I analyze three mass shootings. I analyze these shootings through the lens of masculinity and demonstrate the possibility that the socialization of these men may have contributed to their decision to respond violently to particular stressors in their lives. The first mass shooting I examine occurred in Isla Vista, CA, that left six people dead and fourteen injured. The shooter's manifesto reveals deep misogynistic and racist beliefs. I examine how these beliefs are connected to aspects of hegemonic masculinity and how the shooter's

entitlement to women and insecurity over not achieving heterosexual success were the motivations behind his rampage. The next shooting, I consider, took place at Virginia Tech and was the deadliest mass shooting at the time. I examine how this shooters disengagement from society and unstable mental health led him to feel completely victimized. In his manifesto, written prior to the shooting, he blamed his peers for the shooting. He takes no responsibility for his actions but rather sees violence as the only way forward, despite having many different options. The last shooting I examine in this paper was committed by a self-proclaimed white supremacist, who, unlike the previously mentioned shooters, did not commit suicide after the shooting and therefore is still alive to elaborate on his motivations behind killing nine and wounding one in a historically black church. The motivation behind this shooting was clearly racial, and I elaborate on how this shooter's white supremacist ideals and masculine beliefs are intertwined and manifested in a horrific way.

This thesis is largely theoretical, since all research on mass shootings is reactionary in nature and can only consider events after they have occurred. Similarly, many shooters commit suicide or are killed in response to the danger they present others, and therefore, it is impossible to know for certain what each shooter was thinking or what particular factors lead them to violence. My work analyzes the words (preserved in manifestos) and actions the shooters took prior to or during the shooting they committed. For this analysis, I construct a masculine framework that I construct based on theories of hegemonic masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and insecure, high self-esteem in combination with ego threats.

My thesis does not encompass all aspects of mass shootings or masculinity and is limited in scope and analysis. Mass shootings are a complex societal issue, and I have yet to fully

deconstruct all of the major aspects that contribute to these violent events. In this work, I only consider male shooters with known motives. I do not include mass shootings committed by women or men-women pairs in my analysis because these are both relatively uncommon. Instead, I focus on why certain men, in particular, commit this form of extreme violence. My view of masculinity is also limited. In particular, I examine how gender expectations and the shooter's gender performance impact his masculinity. Gender, unlike race and class, is the most statistically significant commonality among mass shooters in general. Factors like race and class also affect an individual's masculinity but seem to play a smaller role in mass shootings overall.

Despite the popular belief that mass shooters are disproportionally white, race is often seen as an unimportant factor in research on mass shootings. While white people commit approximately fifty-four percent of mass shootings, more than any other racial group, over sixty-nine percent of the general population in the United States is white.[2] Therefore, white people are not committing a disproportion amount of mass shootings. Black people and Asian people are overrepresented making up 12.3 percent and 3.6 percent of the US population but committing around twenty-five percent and almost six percent of mass shootings, respectively.[3] Hispanics are underrepresented, making up 12.5 percent of the US population but ten percent of mass shooters.[4] Other racial groups such as Native Americans, biracial, or multiracial individuals are also underrepresented, making up four percent of mass shooters and 8.6 percent of the US

[2]Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi H. Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016), 62.
[3] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi H. Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 62.
[4] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi H. Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 62.

population.[5] Due to these "broad distributions" some researchers argue the "trying to identify potential mass shooters based on race is likely to be of little, if any utility."[6]

While the race of mass shooters is recorded, the class of mass shooters is not regularly reported or recorded, so this information is simply unknown. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize about how race and class impact mass shootings when they do not appear to be statistically significant. This is why my paper does not focus solely on white masculinity or upper-case masculinity. I attempt to examine masculinity broadly through theories on aggrieved entitlement and high, insecure self-esteem. I apply these concepts generally to male mass shooters, regardless of their race and class. These theories are impacted by the specifics of each shooting and each shooter. When examining mass shootings overall, race and class are not considered important factors by researchers, but on the individual level, race and class play a tremendous role in how men see themselves and their masculinity. To rectify the discrepancy between the seeming insignificance of race and class in statistics concerning mass shootings in general, and the importance of all these factors on the individual and their lives leading up to the mass shooting, I explore three case studies of mass shootings that occurred in Isla Vista, CA, Virginia Tech, and Charleston, SC. In these case studies, I consider how the multiple aspects of a shooter's identity, such as his gender, race, and class, contribute to his feelings of entitlement and his self-esteem and ultimately impact his masculinity.

While I conceptualize masculinity without specifications for race and class, future research could examine particular subsets of mass shooters, such as white male shooters and

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[5] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi H. Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 62.
[6] Louis Klarevas, *Rampage Nation: Securing America from Mass Shootings* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2016), 109.

black male shooters (or other mass shooters of color) and compare commonalities, notable trends, or differences among these shootings. Similar research could also be done on subsets of mass shootings differentiated by the shooter's class.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the various definitions of mass shootings, focusing on the most popular and prevalent ones. I argue that the lack of a singular definition can lead to wildly different statistics, which affects how we as a society respond to these violent acts. I also introduce the definition of mass shooting that I use in my research. In Chapter 2, I define masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. I explore how the creation and perpetuation of masculinity in the US may contribute to men's conception of self-worth, power, and their place in the world. I introduce research done on gender and criminality in the third chapter. This shows how an individual's masculinity informs their action in any given situation and argues that some men may use crime as a way of performing or proving their masculinity when other pathways are perceived to be denied. In Chapter 4, I discuss two theories that seek to understand why some people, particularly males, react violently to negative situations. The first theory, aggrieved entitlement, comes from sociologist Michael Kimmel, who argues that hegemonic masculinity socializes men to view themselves as entitled to certain privileges and will react with anger when these entitlements are not met or are actively denied. The second theory from psychologists Baumeister, Smart, and Boden argues that people who have high, but unstable, self-esteem that is disproportionate to their objective abilities are more susceptible to ego threats and more likely to react violently in response to said ego threats. I discuss how these theories can be used to connection masculinity to mass shootings. In the fifth chapter I discuss common "stressors" (particularly negative events) that occur prior to a significant portion of mass shootings and how they are related to values uplifted by hegemonic masculinity. In the next three

chapters, I look at three different mass shootings that occurred in Isla Vista, CA, Virginia Tech, and Charleston, SC. I analyze parts of the shooters' manifestos and words and demonstrate the connection between their masculine identity, hegemonic masculinity, and their violent actions. Finally, I conclude the paper with a brief overview of my thesis and my thoughts on what we can do in a country where mass shootings occur all too often.

Mass shootings are relevant to everyone within the United States. As the news media jump from one mass shooting to another and conversations turn to what can be done, we need to deeply consider the problem. While I do not expect to have the space to fully deconstruct why these violent crimes have occurred or create the perfect solution, I hope my research can work in conjunction with that of others on this topic and help create a fuller, more complete picture of the issue. In a society where citizens have easy access to guns and mental illness is often stigmatized, solutions to preventing mass shootings are heavily debated. Given the research psychologists, sociologists, and gender theorists have done on the connection between masculinity and violence, I argue that one way of combatting mass shootings is to reevaluate the conception of masculinity in this country. By attempting to change the social narrative around what it means to "be a man," we can mitigate violence as a means of coercion and symbolic domination. My hope is that this thesis' evaluation of masculinity and its connection to mass shootings can give us a greater understanding of why these events have occurred and contribute to the ongoing dialogue in our country.

Chapter One: Defining Mass Shootings

There are many functioning definitions of mass shootings currently being used in the United States. The lack of a singular definition affects how people report these incidents and how they are statistically represented. "Mass shooting" is often used as an umbrella term for many acts of mass gun violence, such as school shootings, spree shootings, rampages, and occasionally domestic, gang, or terrorist violence. The classification of whether a shooting is a "mass shooting" or not is left up to each database, news source, law enforcement entity, and congressional committee to determine. Since there is no accepted definition, statistics concerning mass shootings can differ radically depending on the specified definition and what types of violence are included in each definition. This is extremely problematic when determining the frequency and likelihood of mass shootings. The lack of a standard definition makes it difficult to collect accurate information and generate up-to-date statistics. Furthermore, the audience is not always aware of what definition is being used or what might be included in any given definition—often what most people think of as a mass shooting is not what is being represented.

Thinking back on events such as Columbine or Sandy Hook, most people think they *know* what a mass shooting is. But when asked to define a mass shooting, most individuals broadly think of it as "a single event in which a number of individuals were killed," even though the events they are thinking of have more nuance than that.[7] Since the public does not have a more specific definition, a variety of definitions are deemed acceptable without much questioning or pushback. Creating a definition is more complicated than it seems, especially in

[7] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi H. Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 17.

terms of the parameters to include. Does the location of the shooting matter? Or the context? Does anyone have to be injured? Do people have to die? How many deaths or injuries are enough to be considered a *mass* shooting?

Many people and organizations look to The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for definitions of violent crime. But the FBI has no official definition for mass shootings. Instead, in their own tracking of these types of events, they look at "active shooter incidents."[8] These are events where "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. Implicit in this definition is that the subject's criminal actions involve the use of firearms."[9] In the FBI report on active shooter incidents from 2000-2013, the agency acknowledges the possibility of an overlap between mass shootings and active shooter incidents, but they clearly state that they are not the same thing. The FBI says the statistics reported should not be used interchangeably for mass shootings because the report does not claim to include at all incidents of "mass killings or shootings in public places and therefore is limited in its scope."[10] Their report specifically excludes gang and drug related violence, which other groups include when reporting mass shootings.

It is unclear why the FBI does not have a definition for mass shooting, but they may think creating a separate category for mass shootings is unnecessary. Since they use their data to prepare law enforcement officers and gauge the likeliness of these events, a separate category for mass shootings may seem redundant and not useful for their purposes. Also given the wide range of mass shooting definitions created by other organizations, the FBI might not want to create

[8]Pete J. Blair and Katherine W. Schweit (2014), "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000 - 2013." Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington D.C. 2014.
[9] Pete J. Blair and Katherine W. Schweit (2014), "Active shooter Incidents, 2000-2013," 5.
[10] Pete J. Blair and Katherine W. Schweit (2014), "Active shooter Incidents, 2000-2013," 5.

their own definition in fear of backlash from individuals or organizations that might find their definition too narrow or too wide. Nonetheless, their definition of mass murder serves as the framework for most definitions of mass shootings. The FBI define mass murder as "four or more victims slain, in one event, in one location."[11] Since a mass shooting is a more specific type of mass murder, this definition seems like a good place for most organizations to start when creating their own definition.

The Gun Violence Archive (GVA) is a nonprofit organization that collects "raw data" on gun violence within the US and is heavily cited by various media groups.[12] The GVA, created in 2012, describes themselves as "an independent research and data collection group" whose current mission is to "provide free online public access to accurate information about gun-related violence in the United States."[13] The definition they use for mass shootings is "four or more [people] shot and/or killed in a single event, at the same general time and location, not including the shooter"—which they state is "derived" from the FBI definition.[14] This is clear given how similar this definition is to the definition of mass murder. The GVA definition is important because GVA's data is commonly cited by trusted news sources like the New York Times[15] and

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[11] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Mass Murder with Firearms: Incidents and Victims, 1999-2013*, by William J. Krouse and Daniel J. Richardson, R44126 (2015), 2.
Congress defined mass killing as three victims instead of four in 2013 in response to the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. However, the definitions I am focusing on use four victims in their definition, despite this update.

[12] "General Methodology," Gun Violence Archive, Accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology

[13] "General Methodology," Gun Violence Archive, Accessed December 12, 2018.

[14] "Mass Shootings," Gun Violence Archive, Accessed February 3, 2019 http://www.shootingtracker.com/
While they say is it taken from the FBI definition, the FBI has no standard definition for mass shooting. The assumption is that they took this definition from the FBI's definition of mass murder.

[15] The Editorial Board, "511 Days. 555 Mass Shootings. Zero Action from Congress," *New York Times,* November 6, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/10/02/opinion/editorials/mass-shootings-congress.html

CNN.[16] Both organizations frequently reference the GVA and use statistics from this site. The GVA claims their definition is a "purely statistical threshold" and purposefully does not take other variables into consideration.

Another definition that is commonly referenced is the one created by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) in 2013, which was included in a report to Congress containing statistical information regarding mass shootings and analysis of their collected information. They based their definition on the FBI's definition of mass murder and the research the CRS did on mass shootings. The CRS defines public mass shootings as "incidents occurring in relatively public places, involving four or more deaths—not including the shooter(s)—and gunmen who select victims somewhat indiscriminately. The violence in these cases is not a means to an end such as robbery or terrorism."[17] In this definition, the CRS makes several important distinctions and refines "the relatively broad concept of mass shooting (which could potentially involve a wide variety of actors targeting victims for any number of reasons) into a narrower formulation: public mass shootings."[18] The biggest difference in this definition from that of the GVA is this distinction between public and private mass shootings.

This distinction between public and private is extremely important, especially when collecting data on these types of incidents. Public mass shootings indicate that the shooting occurred in a public and potentially well-populated location, rather than private property or

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[16] AJ Willingham and Saeed Ahmed, "Mass shootings in America are a serious problem—and these 9 charts show just why" *CNN,* November 6, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/13/health/mass-shootings-in-america-in-charts-and-graphs-trnd/index.html)

[17] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Public Mass Shootings in the United States: Selected Implications for Federal Public Health and Safety Policy,* by Jerome P. Bjelopera, Erin Bagalman, et al*,* R43004. (2013), 1.

[18] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Public Mass Shootings in the United States, (2013).*

within an individual's home. This distinction may seem trivial, but it clarifies the type of violence that is occurring. Public mass shootings exclude incidents of familial or domestic gun violence, which would be characterized under private, or not-public, mass shootings. The GVA does not make these distinctions. In their statistics they include private mass shootings, such as domestic and gang violence, which leads the population to believe the type of public mass shootings we are used to seeing in the news are happening more and more frequently, if not almost every day.[19] But the shootings that the GVA report are not all the same types of violence. The CRS recognizes that there is an important difference between these categories, which is reflected in their definition.

This distinction matters because there are more private mass shootings within the United States than there are public ones, and they occur more frequently. Domestic or gang violence does not receive the same type of media attention as mass shootings, but they occur far more often. By conflating public and private mass shootings without clarification, the public is misled about the type of violence that occurs. This is not to underplay how serious the issue of private mass shootings is, but to clarify this distinction, as my research will focus only on public mass shootings. The definitions used by the GVA and other similar online trackers do not provide the necessary distinctions for me to use them to develop a working definition in my research. And while the CRS does make this distinction between public and private, there are other issues with their definition that make me hesitant to adopt it for my research.

One issue I have with the definitions from both the GVA and the CRS is the numerical cut off for a shooting to be considered a mass shooting. In both definitions, mass shootings must

[19]"Mass Shootings," Gun Violence Archive.

include at least four victims. (Their definitions of victim are different, however, which I will discuss in the following paragraph). The CRS admits that this number is "a somewhat arbitrary threshold," and this distinction comes directly from the FBI's definition of mass murder.[20] In a mass murder, the minimum of four deaths is required for classification because anything less than that would be considers a single, double, or triple homicide. However, this number does not translate so easily into the definition for a public mass shooting,[21] since these shootings often happen in crowded places with lots of people in the area—all these people are potential victims of the shooter. The number of people who are shot or killed is not related to the intentions of the shooter, which is to shoot and harm as many people as possible. Therefore, having a requirement of four victims ignores the incidents where many bullets were fired, but few hit their mark.[22] An example of this type of incident occurred in Old Bridge, NJ, on August 31, 2012 when a 23-year-old man, armed with two guns, an automatic pistol and an assault rifle, opened fire in a supermarket killing two people.[23] Another example occurred on October 8, 2010, when a 41-year-old shooter opened fire on a school playground into a crowd of nearly 230 children—wounding two. Despite the potential of more people being injured in both events, neither would not be considered a mass shooting according to most definitions, even though the shooter intended to harm more people. I argue that these two examples qualify for inclusion into mass shooting statistics because the intent of the shooter was the same as all other mass shooters. These events just happened to be less harmful.

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[20] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Mass Murder with Firearms, 2.*

[21] Just to reiterate that the GVA does not claim to be defining a public mass shooting, I am treating it that way because many places use their definition as if it is describing public mass shootings and rarely do sources make it clear that their statistics could include gang or domestic violence.

[22] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi H. Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 26.

[23]Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 159.

Another issue under consideration is the way the shooting victims are defined. The GVA includes individuals who were wounded in their victim count, while the CRS only considers fatalities.[24] Since the CRS based their definition on the categorization of mass *murder*, it makes sense that their definition would only include deaths. There is a case to be made, however, that the difference between someone being shot and killed or just wounded is a matter of happenstance and should not be used as a distinction for what is or is not considered a mass shooting. If incidents where four people have died are the only shootings considered, incidents are ignored that many people would classify as a mass shooting. For example, on July 17, 2012, a 44-year-old man opened fire with a semiautomatic rifle at the Copper Top Bar in Tuscaloosa, AL and wounded seventeen people.[25] No one died from this shooting and so this event would not be included in the CRA's statistics, despite it fitting the rest of the definition. The GVA, on the other hand, does include those wounded in their victim count and acknowledges that the death of an individual is a matter of chance and not indicative of the severity of the situation.

Despite these shortcomings, the CRS makes important and valuable distinctions. One distinction in the CRS definition is the relationship between the shooter and the victims. By stating that the shooter picks victims "somewhat indiscriminately," the CRS definition distinguishes mass shootings from situations where shooters target their family and friends, or gang/drug related violence. In these latter cases, the shooter is not targeting random individuals, but people they know.

[24] Neither group included the shooter in the victim count, which is common in mass shooting definitions. The shooter's death, while linked to the mass shooting, is often considered suicide and not included in the mass shooting category

[25] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 156.

The CRS also makes a distinction about the violence itself. The CRS clarifies that they are only considering events in which the shooting occurred as an isolated event, not as byproduct of some other type of crime. For example, in the case of a robbery, the goal of the perpetrator is to steal some item. If in the process of trying to do this, they end up killing several individuals, the violence was not the goal, but rather was a byproduct of this other crime. In this example the robbers may have stolen what they wanted without harming anyone and would have still succeeded in their goal; the violence is not necessary. But in the case of mass shootings, the goal of the shooter is to harm as many people as possible, without other motivation. Terrorist acts also fall into their own category since the motives of the terrorist group is to overthrow the government or create unrest in the country, not just harm random people, though this might be a tool that a group uses to create unrest. By excluding these other acts of violence, the CRS is excluding incidents in which violence is a byproduct of some other motivation rather than the motivation itself and terrorist acts, which fall into its own category.

While both the CRS and GVA are frequently referenced and cited by news sources, most use the GVA for their statistics. Media sources most likely use the GVA or other online databases more frequently because of the immediacy of the statistics. The CRS last put out reports on mass shootings in 2013 and 2015, but they have not produced more up-to-date reports. The FBI puts out yearly reports on active shooters but, as stated previously, they do not have a definition for mass shootings and plainly state within the article that their numbers should not be used in place of mass shooting statistics. In comparison, most online databases have incredibly up-to-date information. When news sites use the statistics from the GVA or another website to add data to their story, or to create visual images such as charts and graphs, they use that source's definition of a mass shooting. Generally congressional sources are mentioned in the article, but

are not accompanied by any numbers, while the GVA is used for their statistics. Most news sources do not justify their choice in definition, and occasionally, a news source will create their own definition and generate their own statistics from that definition.

Thus, there is a disconnect between the statistics reported in the news and online and what Congress or the academic world consider to be a public mass shooting. This leads to a gap between public belief and reality, especially among those who consume more news and social media. By using GVA or other similar databases, news sources trade specificity in definition for immediate statistics. The GVA lacks a lot of specificity in their definition and includes a lot of incidents that never get reported widely (such as gang or domestic violence). While there is nothing wrong with having a broad definition (as stated earlier, most people think of mass shootings as a broadly defined event), most consumers of these statistics are not aware of the various distinctions. Without this knowledge, the public is led to believe that *public* mass shootings occur at a much more frequent rate than they do.

In hopes of obtaining better, more accurate data of public mass shootings, I will be using the following definition for my research:

> A mass shooting is an incident of targeted violence carried out by one or more shooters at one or more public or populated locations. Multiple victims (both injuries and fatalities) are associated with the attack, and both the victims and location(s) are chosen either at random or for their symbolic value. The event occurs within a single 24-hour period, though most attacks typically last only a few minutes. The motivation of the shooting must not correlate with gang violence or targeted militant or terroristic activity.[26]

[26] Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 28

This definition comes from *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Reality* by Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi Elsass, and it addresses the concerns found in the other definitions. The authors sought "to unite various definitions used to explain this phenomenon, extracting those portions that are beneficial to understanding these events while excluding those fragments that are at odds with each other or general idea of mass shootings."[27] Unlike the GVA definition, this one distinguishes public and private violence and makes distinctions similar to those in the CRS definition. The main difference between the CRS definition and this one is the number of people needed to quantify a mass shooting. Schildkraut and Elsass' definition does not specify a number of victims since the number killed, wounded, or physically unscathed in a mass shooting is due not to the shooter's intention but to happenstance. This definition includes spree killings (killings that happen in multiple locations within a 24-hour period), and shootings that are committed by multiple people, but excludes serial killings. It also directly excludes violence that has other motivations, such as gang activity or terrorism.

This definition identifies what most people consider to be a mass shooting and is ideal for my research. Since I am concerned with the identity of the shooters, this definition allows me to look at the commonality of these individuals through likeness in crime and excludes incidents that fall outside of the scope of this work. Throughout this paper, I will be using this definition and all my data on mass shootings is derived from this definition, unless otherwise stated.

[27] Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings,* 28

Chapter Two: Gender and Masculinity

The buzzwords "fragile" and "toxic" often precede masculinity in everyday conversations and online. The frequent use of these phrases (fragile masculinity and toxic masculinity) raise questions around masculinity in general. What does it mean to simply be masculine? Can masculinity exist on its own, and what does it look like? Before answering these questions and unpacking masculinity, I elaborate on the differences between sex, sex category, and gender, as articulated by West and Zimmerman in their article "Doing Gender." This will provide a theoretical framework for further exploration into what it means to be a man and to be masculine.

While gender and sex are sometimes used interchangeably, they are often differentiated by the former being defined socially and later being defined biologically. Sex "is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males"—generally these biological criteria include the type of genitalia or sex chromosomes an individual possesses.[28] An individual's sex category, alternatively, is the sex that other people believe someone to be, based on the individual's presentation, such as clothing and mannerisms. Rarely is an individual exposed to someone's genitalia as part of the social practice of identifying someone's sex. Instead, we judge one another's sex based on visual cues, such as hair and dress. Someone's sex and sex category can, and often do, line up, but not always. Individuals who dress and look more androgynous or trans individuals are commonly

[28] Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2, (June 1987): 127, accessed March 27, 2019, http://www.jstor.org/stable/189945.

placed in a sex category that is not that same as their sex. "Categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identification displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category;" for example, wearing dresses is a practice that is commonly associated with women; therefore, when we see someone wearing a dress, we often categorize them as female, until other features contradicting this claim become apparent.[29] Determining someone else's sex category is often done without thought. We use expressions like sir and ma'am when addressing strangers, and it is only when we are unsure about someone's sex category that we become aware of this binary process. This happens frequently with children and babies whose sex category might be contested because there are fewer "identification displays" available. However, some parents combat this by putting bows on a female baby's head or by piercing their daughter's ears—providing others with a way of categorizing their child.

Gender, on the other hand, is defined as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category".[30] Plainly stated, gender is how an individual experiences and expresses their sex category. Gender is often described as performative, a display of an individual's femininity or masculinity. West and Zimmerman argue that we are always "doing gender," because in each action or social interaction, our gender is being evaluated. As an individual monitors their own and another's gender, a "self-regulating process" begins.[31] Through this process we appropriate "gender ideals (by the valuation of those ideals as proper ways of being and behaving)" and "gender identities that are important to individuals and that they strive to maintain."[32] Through socialization,

[29] West and Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," 127.
[30] West and Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," 127.
[31] West and Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," 142.
[32] West and Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," 142.

"gender ideals" become the basis for criticizing someone else's gender performance. A woman failing to be feminine or a man failing to be masculine becomes a point of concern because the individual is not following what is "proper." Gender can be and often is central to someone's identity, which can lead to conflict when how someone identifies and performs their gender does not conform to societal expectations. Those who do not conform often receive criticism and societal pressure because they "violate" a social norm.

It is the creation of these gender identities, the formulation of masculinity, or what it means to "be a man," that I am most interested in for my research. Gender as "a powerful ideological device, which produces, reproduces, and legitimates the choices and limits that are predicated on sex category"[33] affects the choices we make as individuals and how we experience and interact with the world. I will examine these influences and how they impact individuals. For my purposes, I will focus on the male identity and masculinity.[34] Despite overlapping in gendered experiences, there is no universal masculinity, no set of distinct traits that all men must perform and embody in order to be masculine or fulfill their gendered expectation—rather, "masculinity personifies the construction of personal history up to a specific point in time and exemplifies the unification of self-regulated practices."[35] The same is true of femininity. As gendered individuals, we are taught throughout our lives, in ways that are both direct and indirect, how to perform out gender. This expression may change as we get older and is subject

[33] West and Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," 147.
[34] In this paper, I am considering the male identity and masculinity based on the experiences of cisgender men. Trans or nonbinary men may have a different relationship with masculinity that may manifest in ways distinctly different from cisgender men, but since the all of the mass shooters are cisgender men, I am specifically considering how masculinity manifests for this particular category of men.
[35] James W. Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Little Field Publishers), 80.

to criticism from others, which may shape how we perform gender in the future. We "self-regulate" by seeing how people respond to our gender expression and adjust accordingly. These practices, combined with the social world that the individual encounters, set up a variety of gendered norms and expectations. In *Masculinities and Crime*, Messerschmidt explains that

> Although masculinity is always individual and personal, specific forms of masculinity are available, encouraged, and permitted depending upon one's class, race, and sexual preference. Masculinity must be viewed as a structured action—what men do under specific constraints and varying degrees of power.[36]

An individual's various social identities impact how they respond to and engage with masculinity. The pressures on a black man and a white man to be "manly," for example, might manifest in different ways and, thus, put different pressures on the individual. While the individual is impacted by masculinity in a personal way, masculinity "through interaction becomes institutionalized and men draw on such existing, but previously created, masculine ways of thinking and acting to construct a masculine identity in any particular situation."[37] In this way, masculinity is fluid and can change depending on the circumstance. The way a boy interacts with his mom is different than how he acts with his friends or his partner—but in all these interactions he is performing his expected gender.

All of these different social relationships come with their own rules and restrictions that are regulated by gender. Furthermore, "while there is a complex, interlocking of masculinities, these masculinities are quite clearly unequal," with certain ones holding more power or higher expectations in certain situations. This "combination of the plurality of masculinities and the

[36] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 81.
[37] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 81.

hierarchy of masculinities" lead to the examination of hegemonic masculinities and "the subordination of non hegemonic masculinities."[38] Essentially, not all men achieve the same social status because of their gender, but rather society rewards and punishes men based on their gender performance, creating different levels of status among males.

The concept of hegemony originally comes from Antonio Gramsci, who used the term "to refer to ascendancy […] of one class over other classes."[39] Hegemony regulates the structure of power, by creating and perpetuating specific ideologies that allows specific groups to gain and maintain power. Gramsci uses hegemony as a way of describing the dominating trends in society as intentionally manufactured and diffused throughout culture. Social institutions promote these dominant view points and perpetuate "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group."[40] A major feature of hegemony is this idea of social consent, which can be more effective than force or coercion at controlling people, and it is what makes hegemony so powerful. Hegemony creates a power structure that everyone consents to, passively by living in the culture and not questioning the status quo, or actively by supporting, promoting, and perpetuating hierarchical norms. Hegemony allows the dominate class to "set limits—mental and structural—with which subordinated classes 'live' and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them."[41] By setting these limits, the dominant class sets up a status quo that ideally those who are subordinated will not question but accept. While Gramsci

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[38]R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no.6 (December 2005): 846, accessed March 27, 2019, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640853.
[39] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 81
[40] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 81
[41] James Lull, "Hegemony," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications), 34.

characterized hegemony primarily by this implicit consent, force sometimes is used when groups forbid to "consent." Individuals who do not consent are those who refuse—or actively question—the status quo and encourage other to do the same. If the dissent is powerful enough, or the "dominant ideology is weaker than social resistance," then hegemony fails, and a different power takes its place.[42]

Masculinity is "not a pattern of simple domination based on force"—rather, "the hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony"[43] Hegemonic masculinity, therefore, is defined by Messerschmidt as " the ascendency of a certain form of masculinity" that is present throughout most, if not all, major aspects of our lives—such as mass media, religion, economic structures, and education.[44] The "socially dominant masculinities" also possess specific features including ""cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives" as well documented examples of their social power.[45]

Hegemonic masculinity is the "dominant form of masculinity to which other types of masculinity are subordinated, not eliminated"—and is an prioritized version of masculinity that "emphasizes practices towards authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence."[46] "Subordinated masculinity," on the other hand, are the other types or forms of masculinity, but they lack the same dominating quality that hegemonic masculinity possesses.[47] Gay men, for example, have different societal expectations for their masculinity, and society has, historically, responded to the masculine expression of gay

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[42] Lull, "Hegemony," 34.
[43] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 846.
[44] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82.
[45] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 846.
[46] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82.
[47] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82.

men with violence as a way of keeping this "lesser version" of masculinity in check. Hegemonic masculinity does not eliminate subordinated masculinities but demonstrates societal power over them. "The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a catchall nor as a prime cause; it is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process," and is used to investigate the way men interact with and are subjected to greater society.[48] These terms "'hegemonic' and 'subordinated' masculinities also permit investigation of the way men experience their everyday world from a particular position in society and how they relate to and attempt to construct differently (or in fact reject) the cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity."[49] Essentially, depending on a man's place in society, he may conceptualize masculinity differently than a man in a higher place of power. A subordinated man may attempt to "reject" certain masculine ideals because they are inaccessible to him, while man benefiting from hegemonic masculinity may support these ideals.

Often men act in ways that promote and sustain hegemonic masculinity because they benefit from this social power. Since "hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of this ascendancy," it makes sense that most men would want to maintain their superior position in society—even at the cost of the "subordination of women" and other forms of masculinity.[50] It is through "practices that reflect their particular position in society" that men maintain hegemonic masculinity and by not questioning their superior position but instead justifying and promoting this inequality.[51]

[48] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 841.
[49] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82.
[50] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82.
[51] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82.

Connell and Messerschmidt argue that "the cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity need not correspond to the actual personalities of most men" [52] and that "hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men"[53] because these are concepts and ideals rather than a specific role that all men occupy. In fact, as Connell and Messerschmidt claim, most men do not exemplify the ideals of hegemonic masculinity but rather this a goal they believe in, strive for, and think they ought to be. Connell and Messerschmidt argue that

> well supported is the original idea that hegemonic masculinity need not be the commonest pattern in the everyday lives of boys and men. Rather, hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity […], symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them.[54]

Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal, the dominating ideal, of what it means to be a man. While most do not fully encompass this ideal, as Connell and Messerschmidt state, there is a greater societal expectation that influences men to act in specific ways, care about certain things, and express their emotions in a particular way. Societal expectations are not exclusive to men. We all have specific ideals and standards that we are pressured to uphold, and many aspects of our lives, such as our gender, race, or class, can affect what these ideals are. In this research, I am analyzing what expectations are placed on men and how these expectations, specific to men, have manifested themselves in such a negative and violent way, that they may contribute to mass shootings.

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[52] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 82
[53] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 838.
[54] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 846.

While all men are subjected to hegemonic masculinity, very few men commit a mass shooting. There are a variety of factors apart from masculinity that contribute to mass shootings with in the United States. Given that the vast majority of mass shootings being committed by men, I think it is worthwhile to explore what about their socialization is unique to men and how a shooter's own view of his identity, particularly his masculinity, factors into this immensely violent act.

Chapter Three: Masculinity and Crime

In his book *Masculinities and Crime*, James Messerschmidt describes the connection between the performance of one's masculinity in any given situation and the creation of criminality. Men commit a disproportionate number of crimes compared to women—the disparity increasing as the crime becomes more violent. Messerschmidt argues that "gendered power is central to understanding why men commit more crimes and more serious crimes than women."[55] Since "gender identity is firmly embedded in the social context and in the recurrent practices whereby social relations are structured," it plays a significant part in how individuals relate to others and society in general.[56] As people are constantly performing their gender, they adjust to familiar ways of interacting with others and develop certain "patterns" of how they ought to act with specific people in their lives, given various situations.[57] While each situation might be different, "there are patterned ways that masculinity is represented and enacted" and "specific forms of masculinity are constructed in specific situations, and practices within social settings produce, reproduce, and alter types of masculinity" [58] Each situation contributes to an individual's own gender performance and inform how the individual decide to act depending on social expectations, approval, and criticism. Because gender is a constant loop of presenting oneself and receiving feedback on their gender (through various subtle and not-so subtle means), "we 'do gender' in response to the socially structured circumstances in which we live and within different social milieu diverse forms of masculinity arise, depending upon prevalent structural

[55] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 84.
[56] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 83.
[57] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 83.
[58] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 83.

potentials and constraints."[59] Therefore, "different types of masculinity exist in the school, the youth group, the street, the family, and the workplace. In other words, men do masculinity according to the social situation in which they find themselves," which includes crime or violence.[60] While men "do gender" or construct a form of masculinity, they may "simultaneously construct forms of criminality."[61] Crime becomes a tool for men to use to enact their masculinity or as Messerschmidt claims, "for many men, crime may serve as a suitable *resource* for 'doing gender'—separating them from all that is feminine." [62]

Crime is generally not someone's first option when it comes to representing gender. After all, most people go through their entire lives without committing any major crimes. What Messerschmidt is suggesting, though, is that when men lack other ways of "doing gender," crime becomes an option, a last resort to reclaiming their gender in a situation that has robbed them of their masculinity. Messerschmidt argues that:

> Because types of criminality are possible only when particular social conditions present themselves, when other masculine resources are unavailable, particular types of crime can provide an alternative resource for accomplishing gender and, therefore, affirming a particular type of masculinity. 84

Since an aspect of West's and Zimmerman's concept of "doing gender" is having to be held accountable for your gender at any moment, situations arise where men's masculinity is questioned and they feel like they ought to respond. For example, statements like "boys don't cry" call into question a crying boy's gender. If the boy continues to cry, he "loses" his

[59] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 83.
[60] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 84.
[61] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 84.
[62] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 84.

masculinity. If the boy stops crying, he proves that he is a man, reaffirming his masculinity. The boy is accountable for his gender—despite partaking in an activity that has seemingly nothing to do with gender (crying). A man's response to his masculinity being called into question can greatly vary depending on how threatened the man feels. Some men chose crime or violence in response, while other men do not see the same stimuli as a threat, depending on the social factors present. What may lead one man to feel as though his masculinity is called into question may not have the same effect on a different man, since each man has their own unique values.

Depending on a variety of social factors, boys and men respond to peer pressure in a plethora of ways. As an example, say a group of older boys are pressuring a younger boy to steal a pack of gum. There are a lot of factors in this situation that might pressure the younger boy. The older boys might hold a greater social standing than the younger boy, or the younger boy might want their approval or access to their exclusive group. The older boys might pressure the younger one by saying that he's a coward if he doesn't take the gum or that he doesn't have the guts or balls (terms that are gendered in their use) to steal. All of these statements call into question the younger boy's masculinity. That being said, different boys might react in different ways. The boy might take the gum, if his need to prove his masculinity is greater than his fear of repercussion. By taking the gum, he is reaffirming the type of masculinity the older boys have created. He agrees that he is a man by taking the gum. A different boy might refuse, because his fear of punishment is greater than his need to prove his masculinity, but this may cause him social humiliation and emasculation since he was unable to prove his masculinity. In this case, the older boys' masculinity is still reaffirmed in the way that it has the power to make this boy feel powerless. Or maybe another boy refuses but does not view his masculinity as attached to the older boy's words. They could call him a coward all they want, but he doesn't feel

emasculated. Perhaps he defines himself on doing the right thing, such as not stealing and obeying the law. In this situation, there are two different types of masculinity at play. This boy refuses, as opposed to fails, to reaffirm the older boys' version of masculinity. Through this action he demonstrates another masculinity that is not defined the same way as the older boys define theirs.

In this example, "the taken-for-granted 'essential nature' of a man or boy can be questioned, undermined, and threatened in certain contexts, those situations where he lacks resources for masculine accomplishment."[63] In the previous example, the boy's only option for "masculine accomplishment" would be stealing the gum. The older boys don't give he any other option—unless the older boys' social power is not strong enough to call into question the younger boy's masculinity. This is an example of a boy turning to criminality to perform, ensure, or prove his individual masculinity. Therefore, "crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity" and the same occurs with violence.[64] Some men may turn to violence as a way of demonstrating their masculinity, when they feel as if they have no other option. While this example of boys stealing gum is rather simplistic and trivial compared to mass shootings, it demonstrates the social forces of masculinity and that the way men view their own masculinity in any given situation affects their reactions and interactions.

As I will argue in the following chapter, men who commit mass shootings do so to demonstrate their own masculinity when all other options have seemingly been taken away from them. They use violence as a tool and resource to "accomplish" their masculinity. An aspect of

[63] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 84
[64] Messerschmidt, *Masculinities and Crime,* 85

hegemonic masculinity that is essential to understanding mass shootings is its connection to power. Hegemonic masculinity holds up the powerful male as the ideal identity—someone in control and in charge. When men are put in situations where they are powerless, their masculinity is called into question. Therefore, some men turn to violence as a way of reasserting their power in any given situation. In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, I will discuss three mass shootings where the men used violence as a way of reasserting their masculinity or power in a situation that made them powerless.

When looking at these incidents of mass violence, a critical point is that these men felt powerless in their situation. However, violence was not the only action or way they could have responded. Instead, these men *felt* like they had no option rather than *literally* having no other choice. All of these men made the choice to respond violently, but this is not an excuse for their actions. The social factors that contribute to masculinity are powerful and can shape an individual's response to negative events, and I am looking at this phenomenon, but the individual is still responsible for his actions. I am seeking to see why these particular men chose extreme violence, but not seeking to absolve these men of their crimes.

Chapter Four: Aggrieved Entitlement and High, Insecure Self-esteem

In the previous chapter, I discuss how men use violence and crime as a way of demonstrating their gendered power in response to a situation that they have perceived to be disempowering. I will expand on this further, looking particularly at how men are socialized and how they internalize this socialization. The two major theories I will be describing are aggrieved entitlement and threatened high, insecure self-esteem. I will then look at common "stressors" that represent a breaking point in a shooter's life prior to committing the mass shooting. I will be looking at all of these theories through the lens of gender—arguing that hegemonic masculinity provides a framework that reinforces masculine identity while simultaneously critiquing masculine performance.

Aggrieved Entitlement

In Michael Kimmel's book *Angry White Men*, he introduces the concept of "aggrieved entitlement."[65] Kimmel has written a great deal about masculinity, mass shootings, and men's anger and violence in general and is heavily referenced among scholars in these topics. According to Kimmel, aggrieved entitlement is the motivation behind many mass shootings. Aggrieved entitlement is the melding of two major ideas, 1) that men are socialized in such a way that they feel entitled to certain realities, such as being in power, financially secure, and

[65] Michael S. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. (New York: Nation Books, 2015).

attaining heterosexual success, and 2) that when some men are denied these "realities" they respond with immense anger. They are aggrieved, distressed, and angry.

This sense of "aggrieved entitlement" leads many men to anger and a few of those many to extreme violence. [66] This entitlement sets men, particularly white men, apart from the rest of society and "what unites all these groups is not just the fact that they are men. What unites them is their belief in a certain ideal of masculinity."[67] The ideal of masculinity leads some men to believe they ought to be in power—that they are entitled to domination. This ideal manifests itself in many ways, from feeling entitled to a job or promotion to feeling entitled to women's bodies. Or, in extreme cases, feeling entitled to taking the lives of others.

Other groups within the United States do not possess this entitlement despite often being worse off. This might partly be why most of these violent acts, such as mass shootings, have been committed by men. Other groups, while feeling general oppression and marginalization and fending off political attacks the threaten their humanity, are not used to having the power or being treated in a way that acknowledges their potential for power the same way white men are used to. As Kimmel wrote, "Those who have nothing don't feel they deserve anything; those who already have something believe they are entitled to it."[68] This being said, marginalized groups do not have nothing, nor do they necessarily feel as if they don't deserve anything, but rather their equality is something that they have to struggle for, not something they feel like they are inherently entitled to. When their rights are violated, there is not the same shock or surprise that white men feel when they do not receive something they believe they deserve. Rather it is an

[66] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 18.
[67] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 13.
[68] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 24.

example of their oppression or marginalization. Because white men have not experienced the same daily occurrences of oppression, they respond more radically when their perceived entitlements are not met.

In many ways, we cannot deny that "white men's anger is 'real'—that is, it is experienced deeply and sincerely" given the violent reactions that occur.[69] To deny their anger would be to ignore their personal reality and the extreme emotions they are experiencing. This is does not make their anger "'true'—that is, it doesn't provide an accurate analysis of their situation."[70] In reality, white men "still have most of the power and control in the world, [and yet] they feel like victims."[71] Men, particularly white men, feel like victims because while they maintain a tremendous amount of social power, this power is being called into question. Feminist groups and activists question the power dynamics in society that favor men and seek to make male entitlement less socially acceptable. As societal shifts happen, the more some men will feel threatened by having to share their power with an ever-increasing group of people. They are victims because in their eyes, the world no longer allows them the opportunities they once had. This sense of victimhood can be extremely dangerous, as it leads people to feel that their violence is justified—that they are responding to an unfair world the only way they know how to.

Another component to this is the channeling of various emotions into anger. Instead of acknowledging one's fear, sadness, or loneliness, these feelings manifest in anger. As boys grow up they are told not to cry; not to display emotion. This is part of the societal creation of

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[69] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 9.
[70] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 9.
[71] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 17.

masculinity. Boys learn that their emotions are not acceptable unless in the form of anger or violence. Boys who are being bullied are told to fight back or stand up for themselves, to display their masculinity, their dominance, their aggression. When boys get into fights, it is seen as a natural part of the growing up process. Instead of learning how to cope with their wide range of emotions, they are taught that anger is the only valid form of expression. Alongside this, men are expected to be violent in certain circumstances. They are expected to fight wars, defend women, and prove their masculinity through violence. Boys are receiving the "same tired and impossible ideals of manliness and the same sense of entitlement" from their fathers.[72] And when this entitlement exists in an man's mind, and he does not receive it he "experience[s] a sense of violation."[73] This violation turns to anger and resentment, and "the smoldering rage which comes from being cheated [is extended] to the society which allowed us to be so cheated."[74] This is when violence occurs.

In the shootings I examine in this chapter, the men are angry. And they are angry in response to situations that are not unique to them, but unfortunate circumstances that are relatively commonplace. These situations include losing a job, relationship issues, being bullied, or reprimanded by a person in power. But the question is, when does this anger turn towards violence? Most individuals are upset when these sorts of thing happen to them, but rarely does anyone respond with violence, let alone mass violence. And most men do not respond with violence, so why do some? Some psychologists argue that there exists a connection between a male's self-esteem and their likely use of violence when their ego is threatened.

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[72] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 15.
[73] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 25.
[74] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 25.

High, Unstable, Self-esteem

In *Rampage Nation: Securing America from Mass Shootings,* Louis Klarevas analyzes mass shootings in the United States and argues that the reason some men commit shootings comes down to the shooter's self-esteem.[75] He bases his argument on a wealth of psychological research focused on the connection between ego and violence. Despite previous research in psychology and criminology that argued "low self-esteem is a driving force" in many violent crimes, Klarevas argues the exact opposite.[76] This new theory argues that it is high self-esteem rather than low self-esteem that is connected to violence. This argument is supported by the research Baumeister, Smart, and Boden did in the late nineties. In their article, "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," Baumeister et al. review previous literature that argued that low self-esteem is connected to violent crime. They argue that this previous research "suffer[s] from ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictory empirical evidence." Based on their own findings, they argue that "the major cause of violence is high self-esteem combined with an ego threat." Mass shooters, or at least some of them, fall into this category.

The first of two major arguments that Baumeister et al. refute is the belief that "people who lack self-esteem hope to gain it by violent means, such as by aggressively dominating others. In this view, violence would be a technique of self-enhancement, in the sense that it is used as a means of increasing one's esteem."[77] However, self-enhancement "appears to be weak or absent among people with low self-esteem," and "people with low self-esteem appear to be

[75]Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 29.
[76] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 114.
[77] Roy F. Baumeister, Laura Smart, and Joseph M. Boden, "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," *Psychological Review* 103, no. 1 (1996): 6.

ambivalent about rising in esteem, and they often avoid circumstances that might raise their self-esteem."[78] People with high self-esteem, on the other hand, are more motivated to seek self-enhancement because they view themselves as more worthy and entitled.

The other argument Baumeister et al. refute is that people with high self-esteem have "immunity to ego threats" while low self-esteem people are more vulnerable to them.[79] An ego threat is "when favorable views about oneself are questioned, contradicted, impugned, mocked, challenged, or otherwise put in jeopardy."[80] They instead argue that "the strong and sometimes irrational reactions of people with high self esteem to negative feedback have been abundantly documented."[81] Along with this documentation, there are studies that "suggest that people with high self-esteem are if anything more sensitive to criticism than people with low self-esteem" because those who have low self-esteem do not think highly of themselves and would not be as surprised or upset if others voiced thoughts similar to their own.[82] People with high self-esteem, since they have such a positive view of themselves, would be more offended if people expressed feelings different from their own. Along those lines, someone who thinks highly of themselves has more room for offence, because the criticism of others conflicts with how they see themselves, while someone with low self-esteem has a much lower bar in comparison.

Not only do people with high self-esteem have a greater chance of receiving feedback that is negative, (in comparison to their personal viewpoint) but people who have "favorable views of self that are unwarranted, exaggerated, or ill-founded would be especially prone to

[78] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 7.
[79] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 7.
[80] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 8.
[81] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 7.
[82] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 7.

disconfirmation by accurate feedback."[83] In this situation the person's view of their self is disproportional to reality, so they are especially vulnerable to negative feedback, because it is likely that people will express reality to them, causing conflict between how they view themselves and the world views them.

It is this conflict that Baumeister et al. argue leads to aggression;

> In this view, then, aggression emerges from a particular discrepancy between two views of self: a favorable self-appraisal and an external appraisal that is much less favorable. That is, people turn aggressive when they receive feedback that contradicts their favorable views of themselves and implies that they should adopt less favorable views. More to the point, it is mainly the people who refuse to lower their self-appraisals who become violent.[84]

While this article does not mention gender or masculinity, I argue that hegemonic masculinity can be used as a general framework for the construction of one's ego and the root of disconnect that occurs between mass shooters and society. A shooter's high self-esteem comes from the social entitlement Kimmel discusses. Men are raised in a society that sees them as valuable and worthwhile. Men are taught masculine ways of being that support and reinforce notions of superiority over other genders. Therefore, many men will have high self-esteem, based solely on the fact that they are men, because they are raised in a society that uplifts their gender, and they have internalized this entitlement.

A problem occurs when men believe that this part of their identity, their entitlement or superiority, is naturally inherent rather than socially normal. Men are not inherently superior to women, but the way people are in our culture supports this notion. If men were in fact inherently

[83] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 9.
[84] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 8.

superior to other genders, then there would be no conflict. The "favorable" perspective men have of seeing themselves as dominant would match reality. But because men's entitlement isn't natural but social, as society changes, as women and minority groups achieve equality, the more this entitled view of the world is called into question, and the more one's own power and identity feels threatened. "Accurate feedback will […] tend to disconfirm self-appraisals that are unrealistically positive,"[85] therefore, there is a greater chance of one's internalized entitlement (an unrealistically positive view of oneself) will be met with resistance from the outside world (in the form of accurate feedback, such as men are not superior to women). The more society shifts and the more equal our culture becomes, the more that men who hold entitled perspectives will be challenged and may be more susceptible to ego threats and possess "a pervasive vulnerability to threatening feedback" because their internal view does not match reality.[86]

Reinforcing unrealistic notions of superiority is only one way that masculinity leaves some men open to ego threats. Another issue occurs when some men are unable to unable to perform masculinity in a socially accepted and expected way. For example, a man who lacks heterosexual success will be emasculated because hegemonic masculinity punishes those who do not conform. But instead of his lack of heterosexual success damaging his self-esteem, it leads to a conflict between how he sees himself—as a man—and how the world criticizes him—as less than a man because of his inabilities. The person may react to this emasculation negatively because their criticism does not match how he sees himself.

High self-esteem alone does not make someone *vulnerable* to criticism—it just makes a person more likely to receive criticism that does not match their perspective, especially if they

[85] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 9.
[86] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 9.

have an inflated sense of self. How much a person cares or is impacted by criticism instead relies on different factors, such as who the person offering criticism is and on what the person is actually criticizing;

> such variations would presumably alter the subjective impact of bad feedback and ego threats, and as a result they would moderate the degree of aggressive response. Unlike inflated self-appraisals, which increase the frequency with which one encounters ego threats, these variables increase the importance of ego threats and hence magnify the hostile response.[87]

Essentially, the more someone values what someone else says, the more impact those words will have on them. In addition, one factor that contributes to how someone responds to "external appraisals" is the "degree of certainty" that person has about their own self-appraisal.[88] For example, if someone has an IQ over 160, they are most likely to view themselves as intelligent and be secure in this idea. Someone else calling them stupid would most likely have very little effect on how they view their intelligence, and they probably would not feel a strong need to defend themselves. But say someone thinks of themselves as particularly smart, but never scores high on tests. They may have an uncertain view of themselves. It is because of this uncertainty that someone may rely more on what others say to validate themselves. They are not validated by the test scores, so they need more reassurance, and when this reassurance is denied or contradicted despite the person having a positive view of themselves—the more likely the person will become defensive or aggressive. "Accordingly, those people with uncertain but positive views of self may also be the ones most prone to elicit defensive responses to ego threats—" and, regarding masculinity, these are the men who are more likely to commit mass shootings.[89]

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[87] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 9.
[88] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 9.
[89] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 9.

This is still quite a large generalization. But the article goes on to consider the choice people have when their sense of self is questioned.

> When favorable views of self are confronted with unflattering external feedback, the person faces a choice point. The affective response will depend on which path is chosen. One path is to accept the external appraisal and revise one's self-esteem in a downward direction. Sadness, anxiety, and dejection might well result from such a course. In contrast, the other path is to reject the external appraisal and uphold one's more favorable self-appraisal.[90]

When an individual rejects an outsider's perspective, they do so either because the individual's self -esteem is secure, meaning that they do not view the outsider as a credible source and therefore place no value in the criticism, or they reject the outsider simply because their criticism does not align with how they see themselves, while still valuing the criticism and being offended by it. Essentially, "instances of minor, slight, or minimal bad feedback could elicit strong reactions from such insecure egotists, whereas secure egotists would dismiss such events as too trivial to be worth a response."[91] To put this in the context of masculinity, a man's high self-esteem, as previously mentioned, comes from his socialization that supports male entitlement. How he performs his masculinity, though, which is open to criticism by others, may be insecure or uncertain—he may be insecure about whether or not his actions demonstrate his masculinity well enough to others. This leaves him constantly craving validation from other people and insecure when it comes to negative feedback. Some men may think that they deserve financial, social, and romantic success but when they do not receive it, they may question their own masculine performance. In this sense, those who are insecure or uncertain possess a "fragile masculinity."

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[90] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 10.
[91] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 10.

Baumeister et al. go on to conclude that there are two major reasons that people with high but insecure self-esteem choose violence. The first is that "aggression may be a meaningful and coercive response to the unflattering evaluation"[92] that is, they commit violence as a way of attempting to change someone's mind. Like kids on a school playground, if one boy calls the other a derogatory name, and the insulted boy fights back, he is attempting to prove that he is not whatever name the boy called him. It's a means of persuasion. The second reason is "a successful violent attack achieves a symbolic dominance over the other person, and so it affirms one's esteem to the extent of being superior to the victim. Violence may therefore be one form of self-affirmation, which is a common response to ego threats."[93] In this case, physically dominating someone is used as a way of affirming one's identity. It proves to the attacker that their sense of self is right and diminishes the offender's criticism.

Both of these reasons are displayed in mass shootings. While "it is not enough simply to assert an identity; that assertion must also be validated," in the case of mass shootings, these men have been unable to find validation in their identity.[94] So when these men fail to find validation, and society keeps denying them validation, all that is left to do is assert, and this is where violence comes in. In concordance with Messerschmidt's argument that men perform crime as a way of demonstrating their masculinity when all other ways do not seem like viable options, this perspective argues that violence is the way these men have chosen to validate their identity, and thus, validate their masculinity.

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[92]Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 11.
[93] Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 11.
[94] Selina Doran and Mary Ann O'Grady, "Shattered Self-Images: Narcissism, Egotistical Suicide and School Shooters," in *Gun Violence in American Society: Crime, Justice, and Public Policy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016), 24.

In the book, *Gun Violence in American Society: Crime, Justice, and Public Policy,* Selina Doran and Mary Ann O'Grady argue, "shooters seek to redefine their "fragile male identities" through their actions. Prior to that, perpetrators ensure their constructed 'selves' are showcased by sending by sending multi-media packages to news media outlets or uploading material to the internet."[95] By demonstrating their identity through violence they achieve symbolic dominance, and they attempt to coerce by creating and sending manifestos. The point of coercion in aggression is to stop someone negatively evaluating the individual, but in the case of shootings, the people who negatively evaluated the shooter are dead, so they hold no power. While the victims are rarely the people who criticized the shooter, to the shooter, they represent all those who have criticize them. Generally, shootings are targeted at a society that has done the man wrong. While actual people are killed and hurt in the process, it isn't necessarily about the victims; they are symbolic to the shooter. Killing others is his way of asserting dominance in a world that robbed him of it. And if the shooter commits suicide, they have no way of maintaining their image; therefore, they leave that responsibility to their manifesto.

In the next chapter I discuss the various stressors that commonly occur as the instigation for the shooting. These events do not represent the full picture behind someone's motivations but are a visible breaking point. These stressors are also not all encompassing, rather they are just the most common breaking points that occur prior to mass shootings.

[95] Doran and O'Grady, "Shattered Self-Images," 24.

Chapter Five: Stressors

Prior to committing a mass shooting, generally some "stressor" occurred in the shooter's life.[96] In their article, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Mass Murderers in the United States," Deniese Kennedy-Kollar and Christopher Charles list the major types of stressors that occurred prior to a mass murder—financial, romantic, social, psychological and other. They define stressor "as any devastatingly negative experience, real or imagined, that threatened the subject's hegemonic masculine identity and influenced the mass murder incident."[97] These categories indicate an area in the shooter's life where he felt he had lost power. The stressors can exist independently or in combination with others. In several cases, psychological stressors, such as mental instability, were present along with another type of stressor. For my research I will be

[96] Deniese Kennedy-Kollar and Christopher A.D. Charles, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Mass Murderers in the United States," *The Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice* 8, no. 2 (January 2012): 66, accessed March 27, 2019, ResearchGate.
[97] Kennedy-Kollar and Charles, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Mass Murderers in the United States," 66.

focusing on financial, romantic, and social stressors, along with psychological ones as they co-occur with the ones previously mentioned.

Financial stressors include being fired, passed over for a promotion, or being unemployed for a substantial period of time—essentially some incident that threatened a shooter's financial means. Hegemonic masculinity perpetuates the idea that men must be financially secure. Historically, the man's role in his family is as a "bread-winner," and many men still feel the pressure to be the providers for their families. Men who cannot support themselves receive harsh criticism from society. The inability to financial support himself can be hugely emasculating. The failure to support himself and family can be a significant factor in the decision a man makes to commit a mass shooting. Typically, the shooter will go to his place of work (or previous place of work) to start his rampage—indicating his anger is directed at the people who he sees as causing his financial distress. The following are two examples of mass shootings that had financial stressors.

On December 18, 1997, a 41-year-old man, after being fired from his job at the California transportation department in Orange, CA, returned to his workplace with a hand gun, assault rifle, and shotgun, and proceeded to kill four workers and wound two others. The shooter tried to flee the scene but was killed in a shootout with the police.[98] On March 6, 1998, a 35-year-old returned to work at the Connecticut Lottery Headquarters armed with a knife and handgun. He had just returned from medical leave and had been demoted. The shooter, about thirty minutes after arriving, left his office and went to the executive suites where he shot and killed 4 people.

[98] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 116.

He then committed suicide.[99] In both examples, the shooter's financial stability was jeopardized or altered, causing frustration that manifested into rage and contributed to the shooter's motivation for committing the shooting.

Romantic stressors include relationship problems, break ups, divorces, or the inability to find companionship—a general failing to be romantically involved with other people. Hegemonic masculinity promotes the heterosexual ideal that straight man ought to be desired by women. The expectation on men to have sex or be involved with women is tremendous, and men are often socially rewarded for their "conquests." Men that fail to attract women are often seen as undesirable and receive significant social shame from their peers. This, along with hegemonic masculinity's subordination of women and objectification of women in our society, leads to an overall dehumanization of the female. Many men who experienced a romantic stressor also felt entitled to the female body and felt as if they were being unfairly rejected. This is in line with how hegemonic masculinity treats femininity as inferior, submissive, and as a reward for "proper" masculinity. The following are two examples of romantic stressors.

On June 29, 1984 in Dallas, TX, a 39-year-old male had his advances rejected by a woman in a club, the shooter left and returned with a pistol and proceeded to shoot and kill six people and wound one other. He then fled and was found at his friend's house a few hours later and arrested by the police. He is currently incarcerated after being sentenced to life in prison.[100] In Menasha, WI, a 27-year-old had gotten into a fight with his ex-fiancée. On May 3, 2015, armed with two handguns, he biked to the heavily populated Trestle Trail Bridge. The shooter

[99] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 116.
[100] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 101.

fired into a crowd of around 100 people—killing three and wounding one. The shooter then committed suicide as law enforcement rushed to the scene.[101] In both examples, failures to attain heterosexual success, either through denial or conflict with a past partner, contributed to the men's frustration and potentially contributed to their violent response.

Social stressors include bullying, harassment, and isolation—a general inability to find social acceptance, particularly from one's peers. The media commonly discuss social stressors as a factor in school shooting. Mass shooters with social stressor get depicted as isolated individuals who were unable to connect with society. While this does not accurately describe all mass shooters, some of them do fall into the category of men who were unable to connect with their peers. Hegemonic masculinity promotes men having high social status, a role of being in charge and above others. Socially ostracized men cannot climb the social ladder and become subordinated because of this. In social situations they have no power, no control and receive abused because of it. The next two examples demonstrate how social stressors can be a factor that in men becoming violent.

On November 2, 1999, a 40-year-old man returned to his job at the Xerox Corporation in Iwilei, HI with a pistol and opened fire on his coworkers. This was in response to alleged harassment he had received on the job. He killed his supervisor and six of his coworkers. After the shooting, he fled and was pursued by the police. After a five-hour standoff with law enforcement, the shooter surrendered. He was sentenced to life without parole and is currently incarcerated.[102] In Santa Fe Springs, CA, on June 5, 1997, after believing his sexual orientation

[101] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 172.
[102] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 122.

was being mocked and arguing with one of his coworkers, a 38-year-old Omni Plastics employee shot and killed two of his coworkers and wounded four others. [103] He was heard shouting, "I am not gay!" during the shooting. He then drove away and committed suicide two hours later.[104] After the shooting, his coworkers spoke to the police about the shooter saying that he had a temper and was "weird," often seen sitting alone in his car during lunch and several hours after work "staring into space."[105] These comments suggest that the shooter was not particularly close to his coworkers and did not have any strong social bonds in his place of work.

In all these cases, the men were subordinated by masculine expectation. Their perceived and internalized failure to uphold hegemonic masculinity manifested in violent responses. In the next three chapters I will explore three different mass shootings at length. I analyze the shooters' manifestos, lives prior the shooting, and the shooting itself through the perspectives of aggrieved entitlement, and threatened ego, as well as indicating the stressors present. I will discuss how all these factors combine in each individual case to demonstrate the possible affect that hegemonic masculinity had on these shooters.

[103] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 114-115.
[104] Paula Story, "2 Dead, 4 Wounded in Workplace Shooting," WorkplaceViolence911, accessed March 27, 2019, http://www.workplaceviolence911.com/docs/workplaceshooting.html.
[105] Story, "2 Dead, 4 Wounded in Workplace Shooting."

Chapter Six: Isla Vista, CA

On May 23, 2014, 22-year-old Elliot Rodger went on a killing spree that left six people dead and fourteen others injured. His spree occurred in several locations in Isla Vista, CA and included stabbing, shooting, and hitting people with his car. He stabbed his three roommates to death before sending his manifesto to several people (including his parents and therapist) and uploading a video to YouTube. He then drove to the Alpha Pi sorority house, where he shot three women who happened to be passing by, killing two of them. He continued on to a deli, where he proceeded to shoot at pedestrians and buildings while driving recklessly. He shot and hit people

with his car until he was pursued by the police, and he crashed into another vehicle. As the police closed in, he committed suicide in his car. [106]

In her article "Fragile masculinity; social inequalities in the narrative frame and discursive construction of a mass shooter's autobiography/manifesto," Chrystie Myketiak uses critical discourse analysis to examine the manifesto left by the shooter. Myketiak argues that the shooter's construction of self "hinges on a fragile form of contemporary masculinity that uses violence as a way to prove self-worth, dominance and superiority." [107] It is clear in his manifesto that he felt rejected by women and it was this internalized rejection that led him to plan the shooting. Myketiak summarizes the manifesto as follows,

> In the autobiography or manifesto called *My twisted world: The story of Elliot Rodger* that he circulated on the day of the murders he alternates between referring to himself as a weak, invisible, good guy and a magnificent, superior god who posits that a beautiful, blonde girlfriend will provide him with recognition from others. As the text progresses, he gives up on the idea of a girlfriend, believing that women have persecuted him, and plans a 'Day of Retribution' to be enacted primarily towards women, whom he blames for rejecting him, and secondarily towards the men he believes that women prefer.[108]

Rodger's emphasis on "heterosexual success" and frustrations with the "racial hierarchy" he created reinforce the narrative told by hegemonic masculinity.[109] He felt as though he was performing his masculinity well and was receiving no reward for doing so. His entitlement is

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[106] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 168-169

[107] Chrystie Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity: Social Inequalities in the Narrative Frame and Discursive Construction of a Mass Shooter's Autobiography/manifesto," *Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences*, Crime and Society, 11, no. 4 (August 9, 2016), accessed March 27, 2019, doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2016.1213414.

[108] Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity."

[109] Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity."

clear—he deserves heterosexual success, and "he positions himself as more deserving of heterosexual success than other minority ethnic men."[110] Romantic stressors often demonstrate an entitlement to women's bodies. Men who commit mass shootings due to romantic stressors possess an entitlement similar to those who commit sexual assault. Women are objectified into objects of men's pleasure, and when they deny men access to their body, violence occurs. Rodger "conflates women and sex" by saying that "he deserves it more."[111] "It" here refers to both sex and women. To him there is no difference between the two: "women are sex and sex is women because they serve the same function. He views women as something to be 'got' or 'had', and himself as entitled to both—women and (hetero)sex." [112]

Rodger's manifesto is filled with misogynistic and racist language. Myketiak argues that Rodger uses racist descriptors in an attempt "to establish his dominance by describing the other man as 'inferior'"—attempting to raise himself above others by placing them beneath him. While he is mixed race himself, "he emphasizes being 'half-white'; the association of whiteness with beauty and desire is reconfirmed throughout the text."[113] Rodger views his own whiteness as desirable and solely desires white women. His 'half-whiteness' puts him above black men (and other men of color) and it only adds to his anger that women chose men of color, who he sees as undesirable, over him. After all, he possesses some amount of whiteness and, therefore, in his eyes, superiority. He also sees himself as superior to Asian men, despite being 'half-Asian'. In his manifesto, he describes the rage he felt seeing an "Asian guy" talking to a "white girl." He

[110]Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity."
[111] Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity."
[112] Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity."
[113] Myketiak, "Fragile Masculinity."

sees this part of him as a potentially reason that women ignore and shun him, his whiteness being his redeeming quality and his Asian-ness being what holds him back.

Rodger's focus on gender and race in his manifesto demonstrates how he views his own masculinity. He sees himself as entitled and deserving. In Myketiak's conclusion she states that

> The instability of his masculinity is at the core of the narrative, which is first fragile then toxic. He understands masculinity as something that is proved to others […] and he attaches his self-worth to how he thinks others perceive his masculinity, which is confirmed in the final sentences of the text when he writes: 'I will punish *everyone*. And it will be beautiful. Finally, at long last, I can show the world my true worth.

Rodger's fragile masculinity is demonstrated by his admittance that he has been unable to meet the expectations set by hegemonic masculinity. Because he does not achieve "heterosexual success" he is emasculated by women who reject him and men who do find success. Because he feels he must prove himself, his masculinity turns toxic. His envy turns to revenge. He refuses to stay emasculated and chose violence as a way of forcing his masculine superiority over those who denied him. It is through this violence that he tries to gain control.

Chapter Seven: Virginia Tech

On April 16, 2007 one of the deadliest mass shootings occurred at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. By the end of his rampage, the 23-year-old senior Seung-Hui Cho killed thirty-two people and injured seventeen others. The shooting began at 7:15 am when Cho went to the West Ambler Johnston residence hall and killed Emily Hilscher, a freshman who had just returned to campus, and Ryan Clark, the RA who responded to the gun shot. The police

responded to this incident prior to Cho continuing his massacre, but they believed that her death was an act of domestic violence, and Hilscher's boyfriend, who was off-campus at the time, was their main suspect. Since their primary suspect was not on campus, the university decided to not cancel any classes. No one had seen Cho in the dorm and nothing connected him to Hilscher, so while the police were in the process of tracking down Hilscher's boyfriend, Cho was preparing for his next attack.

The shooter returned to his dorm, changed his clothes, deleted his email, removed his computer hard drive, and then went to the post office where he mailed his manifesto to NBC News.[114] The package, including video clips and photographs, was Cho's way of explaining his actions and intentions to the world.[115] He then returned to campus and entered Norris Hall. He chained the three main entrances closed and left a note that said bombs would detonate if someone attempted to gain access to the building.[116] He proceeded to the second floor where five classes were currently in session.

At 9:40 a.m. Cho entered the first classroom, shooting the professor and then the students. Cho then went across the hall opening fire on the second classroom, but this time he walked up and down the aisles, aiming at students he had missed initially. He then went to the third classroom, pushing pass the barricade of desks that was intended to prevent him from entering the room. He proceeded to shoot at the students in this room before attempting to gain

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[114] Cho had bought his guns at a store near campus, while his medical history should have prevented him from being sold a gun, he was able to pass a background check twice. Rampage Nation

[115] Cho's manifesto arrived at NBC two days after the shooting and NBC news decided to play parts of the video clips on air—a decision that was met with much criticism. The "network executives felt that the news value outweighed the nation's need for sensitivity" and they believed that this may provide the nation with answers to why Cho committed this atrocity. Through these documents, many people have analyzed Cho's motives behind why he committed this mass shooting.

[116] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 135-136.

access to another classroom. In the fourth classroom, several students managed to prevent the gunman from entering the room, using their bodies to keep the door closed. He never gained access to this room and all the students in that classroom survived. The fifth and last classroom Cho went to was blocked by Professor Livio Librescu, a Holocaust survivor, who managed to keep the door closed, holding off the shooter long enough for ten students to escape by jumping out of the window. Librescu was killed when Cho shot through the door and entered the classroom. Cho shot four of the remaining six students. Cho then cycled back through the classrooms, shooting at the remaining survivors. This rampage lasted no more than fifteen minutes total before Cho committed suicide. He had shot 174 rounds, killed thirty people, wounded seventeen. All of those who were killed were shot at least three times. Out of the sixty-two people present during the massacre (not including students in the fourth classroom), only thirteen avoided being shot.[117]

It is clear based on Cho's life and manifesto that he suffered from both social and psychological stressors. Before breaking down aspects of Cho's manifesto and connecting his shooting to a similar pattern of deep resentment and aggrieved entitlement, I will elaborate on his history of mental health. Throughout Cho's education there were signs that he had issues connecting to others and making friends. Cho's family immigrated from Korea to the United States when he was eight. In the third grade, he had "unusual speech patterns and an abnormal degree of shyness"—these traits were brushed off as a part of him adjusting from the move and learning English as a second language. Social problems followed Cho throughout his education, however, and at the suggestion of the school, in the seventh grade Cho's parents had his mental

[117] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 305.

health assessed.[118] This assessment "determined that he had severe social anxiety disorder 'rooted in acculturation challenges—not fitting in and difficulty with friends."[119] Around a year later, the summer following the shooting at Columbine High School, Cho wrote a paper expressing "similar homicidal-suicidal thoughts," and the school recommended that his family have his mental health evaluated again.[120] Following this appointment, he was diagnosed with major depression and selective mutism. He started taking anti-depression medication and started seeing a counselor on a regular basis. Just before his eighteenth birthday, however, he stopped these practices, claiming, "There is nothing wrong with me."[121]

During his junior year of college, Cho had similar social issues. Cho repeatedly emailed and texted a female student and then showed up to her dorm room dressed in a disguise—events that disturbed the female student. The girl's RA "alerted the campus police" who talked to Cho and told him to stop contacting the girl. In the following weeks, Cho stalked two other female students resulting in another conversation with the campus police. After this conversation, "Cho told one of his suitemates, 'I might as well kill myself,'" resulting in his suitemate contacting the campus police, concerned for Cho safety. The officers decided that a behavior health screening was necessary and "a Virginia judge ruled that Cho 'presents an imminent danger to himself as a result of mental illness'" and ordered him to "pursue outpatient treatment."[122] That same day Cho went to the counseling center on campus, but that was the last time he ever went there. He never scheduled a follow-up visit, and the center never checked up on him. The remaining year

[118] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 90.
[119] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 90.
[120] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 90.
[121] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 90.
[122] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 92.

prior to the shooting, Cho did not have another issue with the campus police, and no one followed up to confirm that he was receiving outpatient treatment (which he was not). Despite no more run-ins with authorities, as he took classes in the English Department, his intended major, he wrote stories that his classmates and professors found "gruesome" and "unsettling." During the fall of his senior year, Cho wrote a story eerily similar to the events that would occur in April.

Despite Cho's history of mental illness, he was able to pass the background check that allowed him to buy two guns, several magazines, and "hundreds of rounds of ammunition."[123] According the federal law, "a person 'adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to any mental institution' is prohibited from procuring a firearm." Cho, however, was able to buy guns because "the state of Virginia misinterpreted the federal statutes prohibiting firearm purchases by the mentally ill as applying only to individuals ordered into *inpatient* treatment," therefore, Cho's court ordered outpatient treatment was not considered in the background check.

While my research focuses primarily on gender and masculinity as a common trait among mass shooters, it would be a grave error not to mention mental illness at all. In his book, *Rampage Nation: Securing America from Mass Shootings,* Louis Klarevas uses a data set of 111 "gun massacres" ("mass shooting in which six or more victims die") that occurred between 1966-2015. Out of this data set Klarevas asserts that thirty-two mass shooters "received a formal diagnosis of a mental disorder from a psychiatric professional," while fifty-four others "exhibited

[123] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 92.

signs indicative of mental illness."[124] Out of the remaining twenty-two shooters, "the gunman in eleven of those incidents either committed suicide or died as a result of a gunfire exchange with police—also known as 'suicide by cop'—offers *prime facie* evidence of psychiatric instability."[125] Five other mass shooters had a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse, leaving only six shooters who had no "reported signs of mental disorder." Based on these numbers, ninety-four percent of mass shooters in Klarevas' data set had some history of mental instability prior to committing the mass shooting.

However, when discussing the potential link between mass shootings and mental illness, let me be extremely clear that these two do not have a causal relationship. Mental illness does not cause mass shootings or violent action in general. Just as in the case of masculinity, "mental illness affects the judgment of those who decide to go on shooting sprees; but on its own, it does not bring about the massacre of innocents."[126] By ignoring all other social factors that impacted the shooter, an incomplete picture is formed that further stigmatizes mental health disorders and can prevent people from getting necessary help because they are afraid of the social stigma attached to mental illness.

Very few crimes are committed by people who have a mental illness, "only about four percent of all violent crimes and five percent of all homicides are committed by persons who have been diagnosed with a serious psychiatric disorder beforehand."[127] This fact, contrasted with the knowledge that "approximately sixty-two million Americans experience some form of

[124] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 111.
[125] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 111.
[126] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 112.
[127] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 110.

mental illness in any given year,"[128] demonstrates that mental illness is not the reason or the cause behind people committing a mass shooting. In the case of mass shooters, "in many instances, the disturbing behaviors are noted by lay persons"—not professionals.[129] Though due to a variety of factors, "many people with mental-health problems tend to avoid seeking professional care, a formal diagnosis is often unavailable, and as such our understanding is limited to the evidence at hand."[130] Therefore, in fifty-four of the 111 shootings in Klarevas' data set, these individuals were speculated to have some form of mental illness but had received no legitimate diagnosis. While their friends, family, or colleagues may claim to have noticed some type of sign indicating a mental health issue prior to the shooting, it is not certain that the shooters were mentally ill. Similarly, in the cases of suicide by cop, whether the shooter intended to be killed by the police when he decided to commit a mass murder is unknown. However, to ignore mental health completely as a factor involved in mass shootings would be inaccurate.

While Cho had issues with his mental health, his destructive actions have clear connections to hegemonic masculinity and threatened ego. His display of emotions was limited to rage—no other emotion seemed to come from him. This rage can be felt in his manifesto, writings in class, and, of course, extremely violent actions. With no avenue to adequately address his emotions, Cho's rage manifested into violence. As previously mentioned, despite attempts at medication and therapy, Cho did not see these as viable pathways—or necessary ones. He rejected the possibility of treating his mental health. His rage was targeted his peers and professors, people that he felt had never accepted or appreciated him. In one of the videos he

[128] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 112.
[129] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 112.
[130] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 112.

claimed, “You have vandalized my heart, raped my soul, and torched my conscience. You thought it was one pathetic boy's life you were extinguishing. Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ to inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people.”[131]

The way Cho viewed his life and the world becomes clear in these words. Firstly, he sees himself as a victim—vandalized, raped, and torched. Cho sees himself as a victim of social injustice, displaying aggrieved entitlement**.** He goes on to say, “You decided to spill my blood. You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option. Now you have blood on your hands that will never wash off…”, essentially taking no responsibility for his actions.[132] Despite being the one to spill the blood of others, he views himself as the victim, responding in a way that he thinks is proportional to what has been done to him. His words also reinforce the notion that Cho saw violence as his only choice. Society left him powerless and the only way to reject this was through mass violence. The only way left to assert his identity and his masculinity was through violence. He also criticized how privileged his peers were. While Cho’s family always made sure Cho had money, they were by no means wealthy, and Cho was conscious of how hard his family worked for their means. According to Cho, his peers were spoiled rich kids with BMWs, who spent money on fancy clothes and nice food, who went to parties and had sex.[133] He did not believe that his peers deserved any of these things. He was resentful and felt as though they actively excluded him from the group. His focus on wealthy students may have come from a

[131] Rachel Kalish and Michael Kimmel, "Suicide by Mass Murder: Masculinity, Aggrieved Entitlement, and Rampage School Shootings," *Health Sociology Review* 19, no. 4 (December 2010), accessed March 27, 2019, doi:10.5172/hesr.2010.19.4.451.
[132] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 123
[133] Klarevas, *Rampage Nation,* 274.

place of envy, wanting the things that he never had, or as further proof that society was punishing him.

He also describes himself as "one pathetic boy" in one sentence and as "Jesus Christ" in the next. This seeming contradiction in his identity can be explained by a high, but insecure ego. He saw himself as a Christ-like figure, a martyr, while also believing that others saw him as a "pathetic boy." Through violence he hoped to demonstrate his true identity, a martyr who would inspire others on the level of Christ. To believe that about himself, he must have had an extremely inflated view of himself. And it was because no one else acknowledged his greatness that the conflict between his internal and external world began. Cho did not see himself at fault for his lack of social standing, rather he blamed society for not accepting him. A different part of Cho's life that indicated his saw himself as disproportionately great were in his writings.

Cho was an English major and was passionate about writing according to his sister.[134] He sent a publisher a proposal for a book and was rejected. On top of this literal rejection, when Cho shared his writings in his classes, his fellow students and professors had very few positive things to say, and Cho hardly listened to their feedback. Most were horrified by the gore and violence. Some students even stopped attending classes they had with him so they would not be subjected to Cho's work. His poetry teacher, after students expressed discomfort at Cho's presence and work (he was also known to take pictures of other students during class), had Cho switched out of her class.[135] The next semester, his creative writing professor recommended that he drop the

[134] Virginia Tech Review Panel. 2009. *Mass shootings at Virginia Tech: addendum to the report of the review panel, presented to Governor Timothy M. Kaine, Commonwealth of Virginia*. Richmond, Va: Virginia Tech Review Panel.
[135] Virginia Tech Review Panel. *Mass shootings at Virginia Tech.*

class.[136] No one seemed to appreciate his writing on the level that Cho thought it ought to be praised. His work was another area where his view of himself and the world's view of him did not match up.

Lastly, Cho constantly failed to meet masculine expectations. He was physically unimpressive, socially isolated, and had no heterosexual success. His attempts at revealing his greatness through his writings failed over and over again. He chose to approach female students by stalking them or leaving weird messages on their social media, and often the police were contacted. And after one of these incidents where campus police told him to stop contacting a student, Cho said that he might as well die, indicating that he saw himself as worthless without heterosexual and/or social success. His decision to kill his classmates and professors demonstrate his choice not to accept himself worthless, but instead to reject the claims that he had failed personally and assert that society had failed him. Like other mass shooters, he felt as though he had to" act out of a distorted sense of unfairness and disappointment stemming from their own actual inadequacies and unsatisfied needs for attention, adulation, power and control." (272) Cho had no social standing; no power. He was overlooked and unseen by his peers and on the rare occasions that he was noticed, it was never for any positive reasons.

Chapter Eight: Charleston, SC

[136] Virginia Tech Review Panel. *Mass shootings at Virginia Tech.*

On June 17th, 2015, Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist, went to the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC and killed nine people and wounded one other. The shooter intentional chose this sacred location because of its historically black congregation. On the evening of the shooting, Roof attended a bible study at the church. He was welcomed by the members and after sitting with them for nearly an hour, he stood up and opened fire. Over the next six minutes, the shooter reloaded his gun five times, and bullets found bodies over sixty times.[137] When Roof left the church, he expected to be met by the police and planned to kill himself before the officers could.[138] No police were present when the shooter exited the church, and so instead of killing himself as he had intended, Roof fled the scene. The shooter was arrested the following morning in Shelby, NC. In Roof's trial, he was charged with thirty-three offenses including nine counts of first-degree murder, one count of "possessing a firearm during the commission of a violent crime," committing a federal hate crime, and committing civil rights violations. Roof was sentenced to death and is currently "incarcerated at the United States Penitentiary in Terra Haute, IN, pending mandatory appeals of his death sentence."[139] Unlike the previous shootings addressed in earlier chapters, Roof did not commit suicide. Since the shooter is still alive, his actions can be understood from his own words and explanations after the fact. My analysis of this shooting and his motives will come from statements he made during his trial and his interview with the FBI. I will also be drawing on his manifesto that he posted online prior to the shooting.

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[137] Alan Blinder and Kevin Sack, "Dylann Roof Found Guilty in Charleston Church Massacre," *New York Times*, December 15, 2016, accessed March 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/15/us/dylann-roof-trial.html.
[138] Kevin Sack and Alan Blinder, "Jurors Hear Dylann Roof Explain Shooting in Video: 'I Had to Do It'," *New York Times*, December 9, 2016, accessed March 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/09/us/dylann-roof-shooting-charleston-south-carolina-church-video.html?module=inline.
[139] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 173.

Firstly, Roof was a white supremist, meaning that he believes that white people are naturally superior to other races. Any rise in social status of another racial group directly threatens this "inherent" superiority[140]. White supremacists view other races as naturally inferior and defend inequalities among races because white people, as naturally superior people, deserve more than those inferior to them. White supremacists tend to view inequality that favors white people as "natural" and any moves made by groups to decrease the gap in equality is seen as an attack on whiteness/white people.[141]

Roof is not the first or last to attack the innocent in the name of white supremacy. In 1999, a shooter opened fire in a Jewish community center wounding five people.[142] In 2009, an 88-year-old man opened fire in the U.S Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.[143] And in the past month, though not within the U.S., a shooter in New Zealand opened fire in two mosques in Christchurch, NZ, killing fifty and wounding fifty others.[144] Some individuals do not think these shootings are connected to masculinity, despite all of these shootings being committed by males. It seems as though all these men were acting out of their misguided racial frustrations, not gendered ones. While racism was a core part of all of these attacks, racist ideology and masculinity cannot be so easily separated and masculinity plays a significant role in white supremacy. When he was asked why he shot ten innocent people, Roof responded,

> "Well I had to do it because somebody had to do something because, you know, black people are killing white people every day on the streets, and they rape white women, 100

[140] Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 264.
[141] Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 264.
[142] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 121.
[143] Schildkraut, ed., "Encyclopedia of Mass Shootings Events, 1966-206," 145.
[144] Ben Westcott et al., "Dozens Killed in Christchurch Mosque Attack," *CNN World*, March 16, 2019, accessed March 27, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/asia/live-news/new-zealand-christchurch-shooting-intl/index.html.

> white women a day," he told the agents. "The fact of the matter is what I did is so minuscule to what they're doing to white people every day, all the time."[145]

Clearly, Roof sees himself as a defender of his race and a defender of white women. White supremist groups, just as Roof said, believe "the fate of the white race hinges upon the need for the real white men to act" and white men "are encouraged to become real men by standing up and protecting white women."[146] As a necessary and long over-due defender, he did what he thought needed to be done. While he held extremely misguided and racist beliefs, his emphasis on protection indicate a connection between masculinity and his decision to act.

Our society views concepts like strength, defense, and protection as responsibilities for men. Men are drafted for wars, expected to open jars, and kill unwanted bugs in the house. These traits are not inherently negative. In the best light, men are called upon to protect the innocent—a trait that can be viewed as valiant and heroic. Positive examples include boys standing up to bullies for someone else—defending those who cannot defend themselves. Equating strength and capability with masculinity is indoctrinated in our society; policies such as "women and children first" prioritize those who are deemed vulnerable in dangerous situations. What follows from such policies are a two-fold assumption, that women are inherently more vulnerable and less capable than men, and that men ought to be able to defend themselves (and others) while being strong on their own. And the more people believe these gender role stereotypes, the more policies like these will be implemented, and the less they will be questioned. Men as defenders

[145] Sack and Blinder, "Jurors Hear Dylann Roof."
[146] Kimmel, *Angry White Men,* 246

becomes socially expected. Therefore, many men internalize this belief and think they are and ought to be defenders and protectors.

As I stated, this can manifest itself positively, but in the case of white supremacy and other hate groups, this notion of protecting the innocent is weaponized. By deciding who needs protecting and who they need protection from, white supremacists create an enemy and target. Often the enemy is an already oppressed group, and those who need protecting are white females and/or children. Violence throughout history has been justified on the basis that men were protecting themselves. People who have committed violence against gay people, immigrants[147], and black people[148] (just to name a few) historically have used the justification that they were simply protecting their women and children. The excuse that someone was defending their community from a perceived threat is not new. Many white supremacists turn to violence claiming that they are protecting the innocent. In the case of the church shooting, the innocent were white women, and the enemy was the entire black community. White supremacists claim that other racial groups need to be banned, barred, and if it comes to it, disposed of, in order to keep white women safe.

It is clear the Roof has internalized this masculine expectation to protect his community. In his brief exploration of racial relations within the US, instead of drawing the conclusion that black people are still grossly mistreated in this country, Roof came to the opposite conclusion. His internet search of "black on white crime" reinforced his notions of white supremacy. The

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[147] Katie Reilly, "Here Are All the Times Donald Trump Insulted Mexico," *Time*, August 31, 2016, accessed March 27, 2019, http://time.com/4473972/donald-trump-mexico-meeting-insult/.

[148] Michael O'Donnell, "Commander v. Chief: The Lessons of Eisenhower's Civil-rights Struggle with His Chief Justice Earl Warren," *The Atlantic*, April 2018, accessed March 27, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/commander-v-chief/554045/.

fear or belief that white people were becoming "second class citizens" led Roof to action.[149] What guides many white supremacists to action is both the belief that they are superior and the fear that the world is not treating them as such—a perspective that is eerily similar to aggrieved entitlement. White supremacists, like Roof, are unable to see their immense racial privilege and respond to perceived social changes among racial groups as a direct threat to themselves.

Roof repeatedly states that he "had to do it," as if he had no choice. The only way Roof felt that he could prove his manhood was through killing the perceived threat. He turned to violence as a way of demonstrating his masculinity. By describing the event as necessary, Roof demonstrates that he felt as if he had no choice. While he clearly had a choice, he was unable to see an alternative—his masculinity depended on his actions. This shooting was Roof's calculated attempt at restoring power to white people. His attempt to protect his community by destroying another. Roof saw himself and his race as a victim and therefore felt justified in taking the 'necessary' steps to defend himself.

[149] Sack and Blinder, "Jurors Hear Dylann Roof."

Conclusion

In these three shootings, the shooters had high views of themselves. They equated themselves to Gods, martyrs, and defenders. They all struggled to conform to societal expectations, especially when it came to masculinity. While maintaining high self-esteem, they became increasingly aware of the seeming (but not real) threat they were under. In the case of Rodger and Roof, the perceived danger was men of color. Roof thought that white women needed protecting, while Rodger criticized women for their choice in men. In the case of Cho, his lack of social appreciation or acceptance made him believe he was incapable of achieving any status. They all thought that the world had treated them unfairly. Cho and Rodger felt individually attacked while Roof felt attacked as a white man. Their identities were in danger, and the only option these men saw was extreme violence. They chose violence because it was a final way of asserting their masculinity and dominance. They sought to prove that they were worthy of what life had denied them.

In summation, hegemonic masculinity socialized these men in such a way that they believed that they were entitled to certain things in life (such as a job, social success, and heterosexual success). This entitlement may be internalized by men, creating high self-worth that leads them to expect certain positive outcomes in life. When men's self-worth is based on beliefs that are inconsistent with reality, they face greater negative feedback. Furthermore, when men are denied things that they think they are entitled to, or are punished because of their lack of masculinity, the more their internal viewpoint is contradicted by reality. The more unstable a man is in his belief of himself or his power, the more likely he will respond with violence. Violence becomes a way for some men to attempt to demonstrate their power and assert their

masculinity. It becomes a means to make his internal perspective seen and accepted by others. Mass shootings are often proceeded by stressors in the shooter's life that led them to a breaking point. These stressors are often connected to a man's ability to successfully uphold hegemonic masculinity.

After tragedies like mass shootings, conversions revolve around questions of who, why, and what can be done. In this paper I argue that the "who" refers to certain men, particularly men who have been socialized to feel entitled and superior due to their gender. The men who, because of their socialization, think of themselves as God-like and have an exaggerated view of themselves that is not based on reality. They are men whose masculinity is fragile and have been told that they do not meet masculine expectations. It is these aggrieved, entitled, and insecure men that commit mass shootings.

While there is not and will never be a justification for a mass shooting, they keep occurring. My argument is that some men chose violence as a means of coercion and symbolic domination. They use coercion to attempt to change the minds of others, who perceive them as non-masculine. Symbolic domination attempts to reaffirm to the shooter that they are indeed worthwhile and confirm their own self-perspective. Shooters often target locations that are symbolic of their shortcomings or places that they hold responsible for negative outcomes in their life.

What can be done?

When it comes to mass shootings, my research suggests no simple solutions. My work does not encompass all the factors that may contribute to mass shootings and gun violence. The

research I have done focuses on how our conception of masculinity may play a role in mass shootings. Given the connection that I argue exists, I believe an important step in minimizing mass shootings is to redefine masculinity, support scientific research on gun violence and gun policies, and hold men accountable for lesser forms of violence.

According to the American Psychological Association, "preliminary evidence suggests that changing perceptions among males of social norms about behaviors and characteristics associated with masculinity may reduce the prevalence of intimate partner and sexual violence" and they advocate for similar interventions to reduce gun violence.[150] By advocating for the continual change of what it means to be a man, a societal shift may occur that condemns violent reactions and supports healthy expressions of emotion. I think progress has been made. Today we see fathers raising their sons differently than they themselves were raised. We see male role models who wear their masculinity in a comfortable, secure way. This security does not come from power, it comes from an internal acknowledgement of self-worth that is not based on the supremacy of their gender but on other aspects of their life. As the dominant culture changes the way we view men and our expectations of masculinity alter, hegemonic masculinity will change as well. This is not a quick solution. But it is one that I think everyone can partake in.

Be aware of how we treat boys, what we allow them to get away with and what we regulate. Also pay attention to how we raise girls and what we teach them to expect and tolerate in men. By creating spaces that do not teach or tolerate entitled behavior at a young age, we demonstrate healthy expressions of emotion—we give men a multiplicity of ways to express

[150] American Psychological Association. (2013). *Gun violence: Prediction, prevention, and policy.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/ reports/gun-violence-prevention.aspx

their gender that doesn't include or promote violence. This includes taking all acts of male violence more seriously. Sexual assault and domestic violence in the United States is prevalent, but rarely do survivors of male violence receive justice. By failing to hold men accountable for violence that perpetuates their power through abuse, male entitlement runs unchecked. Allowing men to get away with "smaller" acts of violence, we perpetuate the idea that violence is ok and even acceptable. Through addressing all forms of violence, starting at a microlevel, we can attempt to stop larger acts of violence, such as mass shootings, from occurring.

Advocacy for increased gun control legislation often follows each mass shooting. While mass shootings become events that people can rally behind to urge gun control legislature, I argue that we should look at gun violence on a larger scale. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide and homicide was the second and third leading cause of death for people between ages fifteen and thirty-four in the United States in 2017, respectively.[151] There were more deaths by a firearm in both suicides and homicide than by any other method. While mass shootings are an extreme example of gun violence, considering other forms of gun violence that are prevalent in the Unites States is integral in creating affective gun laws. Further research must also be done to determine what proposed solutions are effective. Susan B. Sorenson and Daniel W. Webster argue that "scientifically rigorous evaluations are not available for many of these [gun] policies."[152] "Despite the substantial human and economic costs of gun violence in the United States and the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of gun regulations" gun lobbyist have great political influence of the government and research on gun violence and

[151] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2005) [2019 Apr 6]. Available from URL: www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars.
[152] American Psychological Association. (2013).

policies therefore receive little government funding.[153] By supporting research on gun violence, we can examine the effectiveness of various solutions and determine the best way to decrease gun violence in our country.

These changes are not for the sake of mass shootings—but for humanity. By giving men healthier ways of expression, we can decrease suicide among men. By decreasing entitlement, we increase the belief in equality and are more likely to respect women and other marginalized groups. For this to happen, men must want to change. But not all men do. Hegemonic masculinity gives men social power, which is not a simple thing to give up. But men have to analyze the cost of this power and decide whether the price is worth it.

[153] American Psychological Association. (2013).

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