

2020

## **Mass Murderers: A Case Study Analysis of Social Media Influence and Copycat Suicide**

Stephanie Ann McKay  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Stephanie McKay

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Eric Hickey, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty  
Dr. Jerrod Brown, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty  
Dr. Victoria Latifses, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2020

Abstract

Mass Murderers: A Case Study Analysis of Social Media Influence and Copycat Suicide

by

Stephanie McKay

MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, Francis Marion University, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

May 2020

## Abstract

The frequency of mass murder has increased over the past decade, with nearly half of all mass murderers committing suicide. Previous researchers have found imitations of mass murderers which relate to suicide contagion, media contagion, and copycat effects; however, there remains a gap in the literature pertaining to the connection between copycat suicides of mass killers and the influence of social media. The purpose of this study was to provide a greater understanding of U.S. public mass murderers who commit copycat suicides based on the influence of social media. The constructivist conceptual framework guided the examination of a purposeful sample of 12 American mass murderers who committed suicide. The research questions aligned with Murray's transcendent fantasy theory and Bandura's social learning theory, and included an analysis of publicly available data. Six themes were identified among public mass murderers in the United States who committed suicide: (a) preoccupation with previous mass murderers, (b) suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts and planning and prior suicide attempts), (c) extreme isolation and computer use (social media, Internet, and violent video games), (d) presence of copycat behavior, (e) fame-seeking fantasies and media attention, and (f) preoccupation with the Columbine shooters. These findings contribute to existing research about mass murder, copycat behaviors, and social media influence. Bringing greater awareness of mass murderers, copycat suicides, and social media influence to the public, law enforcement, media outlets, and other stakeholders will promote improved identification and intervention of potential mass killers, as well as the educated distribution of information related to mass murder via social media, so that improved actions and reactions occur in society, enhancing positive social change.

Mass Murderers: A Case Study Analysis of Social Media Influence and Copycat Suicide

by

Stephanie McKay

MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, Francis Marion University, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

May 2020

## Dedication

For my parents, Sara and Odell McKay, who have supported and encouraged me not only through this process, but my entire life. Words could not express the love I have for both of you and how appreciative I am for everything you have done for me.

For my Aunt Jeanette, who is my rock and my forever best friend. I am so very thankful and blessed to have an aunt that has always been a great listener and supporter. You are so much more than an aunt.

For my mentor, Billie C. Blackmon, who shared her love of criminal law with me and taught me more about life in a short amount of time than she will ever know.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to offer my deepest appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Eric Hickey and Dr. Jerrod Brown. The guidance that Dr. Hickey has provided me, not only through the dissertation process, but over the past three years is unmeasurable. He has encouraged me, laughed with me, and supported me through this process, which I am forever grateful. I am thankful to Dr. Jerrod Brown for his support and wealth of knowledge.

Table of Contents

List of Tables .....v

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....1

    Introduction.....1

    Background.....3

    Problem Statement.....5

    Purpose of the Study.....6

    Research Questions.....6

    Conceptual Framework for the Study.....7

        Transcendent Fantasy Theory.....7

        Social Learning Theory.....8

    Nature of the Study.....8

    Definitions.....9

    Assumptions.....12

    Scope and Delimitation.....13

    Limitations.....13

    Significance.....14

    Summary.....15

Chapter 2: Literature Review.....17

    Introduction.....17

    Literature Search Strategy.....18

    Conceptual Framework.....19

    Literature Review Related to Key Concepts.....20



Social Media .....	20
Media Changes and Mass Murder .....	22
Contagion .....	24
Behavioral and Social Factors .....	25
Mass Murderer Manifestos .....	28
School Shootings .....	29
Suicide.....	30
Firearms/Gun Control .....	32
Mental Illness/Mental Disorders.....	34
Media Aftermath.....	36
Summary and Conclusions .....	37
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	41
Introduction.....	41
Research Design and Rationale .....	42
Role of the Researcher .....	43
Methodology .....	44
Participant Selection Logic .....	44
Instruments.....	45
Data Collection .....	46
Data Analysis Plan.....	47
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	48
Credibility .....	48
Transferability.....	48

Dependability .....	49
Confirmability .....	49
Intracoder Reliability .....	49
Ethical Procedures .....	49
Summary .....	50
Chapter 4: Results .....	52
Introduction .....	52
Demographics .....	54
Data Collection .....	55
Data Analysis .....	56
Evidence of Trustworthiness .....	57
Results .....	58
Research Questions .....	58
Examination of Antecedent and Event-Specific Behavior .....	59
Cases 1 and 2: Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris .....	59
Case 3: Jeffrey Weise .....	68
Case 4: Seung-Hui Cho .....	71
Case 5: Robert Hawkins .....	73
Case 6: Stephen Kazmierczak .....	76
Case 7: Jiverly Wong .....	78
Case 8: Wade Michael Page .....	81
Case 9: Adam Lanza .....	82
Case 10: Elliott Rodger .....	86

Case 11: Christopher Harper-Mercer .....	91
Case 12: Devin Patrick Kelley .....	94
Common Themes in Antecedent and Event-Specific Behavior .....	96
Examination of Offender Communications .....	97
Summary and Transition.....	99
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations .....	101
Introduction.....	101
Interpretation of the Findings.....	102
Limitations of the Study.....	103
Recommendations.....	104
Implications.....	105
Discussion.....	108
Conclusion .....	110
References.....	112
Appendix A: List of Search Terms .....	133

List of Tables

Table 1. Presence of Themes Relating to Copycat Behavior and  
Social Media Influence .....99

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Forty percent of mass public shooters commit suicide following the event (Capellan, 2016; Lankford, 2015a; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Murray, 2017b; Silva & Capellan, 2019). Over the past ten years, the frequency of mass murder has increased in the United States (American Psychological Association [APA], 2016; Bonn, 2018; Follman, 2015a; Hickey, 2016; Rocque & Duwe, 2018). Fifty percent of all mass shootings over the past several decades have occurred in the United States (Capellan, 2016; Dahmen, Abdenour, McIntyre, & Noga-Styron, 2018; Lankford, 2015; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Murray, 2017b; Silva & Capellan, 2019). In addition, 30% of mass killings over the past ten years were inspired by media coverage of previous acts (Dahmen, 2018). Social media has become not only a source of immediate information but has also provided a space for individuals to voice their opinions, disseminate details, and provide a mechanism for messages of hate. The rise of technology in the 21st century has enabled instant access to almost anything.

The complex psychology of mass murderers coupled with technological advances have made it challenging for scholars to determine what motivates murderers' actions and means of processing information. Despite a significant amount of emphasis placed on gun control and mental illness to better understand mass murderers in the realm of scholarly research, research on social media and its influences and connection to copycat suicide of public mass murderers is lacking. Lee (2018) found an increase in the use of

social media in the United States and news of mass shootings on social media correlated with a rise in mass shootings.

To contribute to the literature regarding mass murderers and suicide, I conducted a qualitative case study designed to examine a purposeful sample of 12 U.S. public mass murderers who committed suicide. The media tend to place more emphasis on mass murderers than the victims through repeated coverage of mass murderers and their attacks, which fosters fame-seeking and suicide (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Rocque & Duwe, 2018). Imitating actions of mass murderers have led to the creation of terms such as the copycat effect and Columbine effect. Although imitation occurs in many ways, the influence of social media on copycat suicide remains unclear. Rather, the media's focus has been on the type of weapon used during the attack and the mass killer's mental state before or during the shooting (Hoffner et al., 2017).

The media projects news of mass shootings to the public within seconds through social media, live television, and other means of Internet dissemination. Social media is the primary source of information for the millennial generation (Pirkis et al., 2018). The rise of social media has presented numerous disadvantages involving crime. Mass media, including social media platforms, account for 95% of the information received by the U.S. population, with coverage of violent crime monopolizing media coverage in the hours and days following the event (Levin & Wiest, 2018; Schildkraut, Elsass, & Meredith, 2018). According to Meindl and Ivy (2017), occurrences of mass murder rise 20% to 30% in the 12.5 days following a mass shooting.

In Chapter 1, I present information regarding public mass murderers and how they imitate actions such as suicide based on the influence of social media. The gap in literature relates to the influence and connection social media has on copycat suicides in mass murderers. Two research questions guided this qualitative case study analysis of mass murderers. I provide a list of key definitions to support the research.

### **Background**

The frequency of mass murder has escalated in the United States over the past ten years (APA, 2016; Bonn, 2018; Hickey, 2016; Rocque & Duwe, 2018). The rise in this type of criminal act and subsequent media coverage often inspires more mass murderers. Portrayals of crime and violence in the media receives an enormous amount of attention from the public. Social media enables the exchange of information and opinions in a matter of second. Social media platforms allow mass murderers not only to post textual and video communications of their own, but research and reach other mass murderers.

The use of social media in the United States has increased at a tremendous rate. Over the last ten years, Facebook use has grown 300% to over 2 billion users, with Instagram and Twitter doubling in growth (Wright, 2018). The rise of social media and the role it plays in mass murderers' imitating behaviors have not received thorough scholarly study. Langman (2018a) stated that mass killers imitate the behaviors of previous mass killers. Research on imitation has involved suicide contagion, media contagion, and copycat effects; however, no comprehensive examination of the connection between the suicide of mass killers and the influence of social media has occurred.

Meindl and Ivy (2018) found the public's heightened awareness of mass killings correlates with higher risks of future attacks, something they refer to as contagion through generalized imitation. Lankford and Madfis (2018a) proposed that the media should refrain from the perpetrators' names and photographs because it promotes fame-seeking in people who are inspired by them. Mass killers plan their attacks and seek fame by killing and wounding more victims than their predecessors (Christensen, 2017; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lopatto, 2015). High-profile suicides in the media are relevant to mass killers because 40% of all mass murderers commit suicide (Capellan, 2016; Lankford, 2015a; Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Murray, 2017b; Silva & Capellan, 2019). The amount of media attention given to mass killers creates role models for individuals with similar beliefs (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b).

The World Health Organization (WHO) implemented guidelines for the media to follow regarding suicide coverage to prevent imitated acts, such as avoiding sensationalizing language in regard to suicide, not repeating a story that involves suicide and refraining from emotional photographs. Throughout 50 years of research on imitation and suicide, the WHO suggested limiting or changing the reporting of suicide. In relation to mass murders in the United States, how the media portrays the events of the attack and the perpetrator's actions and other information can inspire similar feelings or actions in others (WHO, 2019). Minimizing social media coverage of the perpetrators and their actions will decrease imitation and further attacks (Lee, 2018).

Adopting WHO guidelines, campaigns such as No Notoriety and Don't Name Them include suggestions to the media regarding reporting mass killers, including not



naming perpetrators or only showing photographs of at-large killers as a means to reduce fame-seeking and imitation. Coverage in line with the No Notoriety and Don't Name Them campaigns concerning imitation suicide and the actions of mass killers may enable scholars, researchers, law enforcement personnel, and mental health professionals to identify at-risk individuals before they commit acts of mass murder.

### **Problem Statement**

Notwithstanding the efforts made in research in regard to mass murderers, the number of such offenders and their acts of violence continues to increase in the United States. Copycat attacks have become well known to researchers and the general public as applied to mass murderers. Although previous researchers have explored media influence overall, scholarship on social media and its influence on the imitating action of suicide among these offenders is sparse. Comparing how social media portrays suicide for these offenders with the imitating actions of mass murderers who committed suicide provides insight into mass murderers and inspires future research.

Mass murderers are influenced by previous mass murderers (Dahmen, 2018; Rocque & Duwe, 2018), which is especially evident since the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado. Many public mass murderers have made reference to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Columbine killers, imitating many of the shooters' actions and adopting their perspectives and motives. Imitation is visible in terms of the steps they take in planning in attacks, the weapons they use, the way they dress, and the messages they leave behind using social media, YouTube videos, and manifestos.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide a greater understanding of U.S. public mass murderers who commit copycat suicide based on the influence of social media. Social media can affect numerous aspects of a mass attack, including weapon choice, clothing, location, and suicide. Study findings provide a better understanding of how mass murderers function and imitate actions such as suicide; future stakeholders might be able to use this information to reduce violence and decrease the number of mass murders in the United States. My hope is that law enforcement, school superintendents, teachers, and those in the mental health field can find greater knowledge as it relates to the overall makeup of individuals before they become mass killers and use violence as a means of expression, fantasy, or imitation. Finally, I provide insight into how media reporting can promote imitating actions in mass murderers, perhaps leading to more irresponsible coverage of these offenders and their attacks.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided this study on offender groups and social media, particularly with regard to the influence of social media coverage on copycat suicide by mass murderers. By emphasizing specific search criteria in line with the research questions, I narrowed my literature review to explore the gap in knowledge regarding connections between social media coverage of mass murderers and the subsequent suicides of later mass murderers.

*RQ1:* How does repeated media coverage of mass murderers influence copycat suicide?

*RQ2: How does social media portray the copycat suicides of mass murderers?*

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

Previous research has uncovered numerous aspects and characteristics of mass murderers; however, a limited number of scholars have focused on imitating factors on these offenders. The role the media plays in relation to these offenders and their actions has received study with regard to mass media (including print and national news outlets); however, scholarship is limited relating to the influence social media has on the imitating factor of suicide in mass killers. The transcendent fantasy theory and Bandura's social learning theory served as the foundation to the research. Incorporating both the transcendent fantasy theory and the social learning theory allowed me to structure my research related to imitation, suicide, and social media to answer the research questions.

#### **Transcendent Fantasy Theory**

Murray's (2017c) transcendent fantasy theory provided a basis for research regarding the escape from reality, fame-seeking, and suicide during the planning process of mass murder. Mass murderers plan their attacks well in advance (Anisin, 2018; Böckler, Roth, Stetten, & Zick, 2014; Fridel, 2017), allowing the fantasy they have created to mature and gain intensity (Murray, 2014). Fantasies for mass murderers can fall into four categories: revenge, escape, sadistic or sexual, and attention-seeking (Murray, 2017c). Mass murderers often have feelings involving worthlessness, anger, and revenge, and lack the control to manage these feelings, which ultimately manifests as attacks (Murray, 2017c). Fantasies ultimately consume them as a means to fill inadequacies, isolating them from the rest of the world except for those who can be

reached through social media or other means of Internet communication, ultimately allowing for little social interaction. The transcendent fantasy theory also serves as a means to identify how the fantasies of mass murderers relate to previous mass murderers' behaviors, such as acts of suicide, as inspired by media coverage. The role fantasy plays in a mass murderer's life is great. It is a place where these offenders cope with their extreme feelings and justify their actions.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory framed my research regarding the copycat nature of mass murderers in relation to their thoughts, suicidal ideation, experiences, and planning processes. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. One's actions are learned from others and their environment with both positive and negative models influencing new behaviors. Social media provides a place for people to voice opinions and intentions and connect with like-minded individuals. Mass killers plan their attacks over a period of time, studying the behaviors of previous mass killers, which allows them to observe and learn those behaviors.

### **Nature of the Study**

I have selected a qualitative case study approach to identify similarities among public mass murderers. A qualitative study should illustrate a specific population sample or phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The approach allowed for themes to develop with regard to the purposeful sample of 12 public mass murderers in the United States who committed suicide. The goal of this study was to provide an improved

understanding of copycat suicide and social media influence among this specific group of offenders. The case study design was useful when analyzing research articles, video files, newspaper articles, and reports, providing for coding of information to better produce new and rich data. From these data, I generated common words or phrases that contributed to the creation of themes for this study. Case study analysis encompasses a thorough examination of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Along with content analysis, the case study design enabled me to discover similarities among mass murderers, therefore allowing themes to develop in reference to the purposefully sampled 12 public mass murderers in this study.

### **Definitions**

*Active shooter:* An individual in the act of killing or attempting to kill persons with one or more firearms in a populated area (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2018).

*Columbine effect:* A media-coined term by which mass murderers draw inspiration from killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (Follman, 2015a).

*Copycat crime:* Crimes which follow protocols of previous mass murders publicized by the media (Helfgott, 2015).

*Copycat effect:* Similar to the Columbine effect, the copycat effect is what inspires mass murderers to commit acts similar to those they have seen in the media (Helfgott, 2015).

*Fantasy:* According to the American Psychological Association (2018), a fantasy is a mental experience that encompasses intense emotion and imagination. Fantasy often

involves an absence of logic and can range from healthy to delusional thinking (APA, 2018).

*Imitation and imitated crimes:* Individuals who commit crimes that are copied or mimicked through descriptions or observations of previous offenders (Meindl & Ivy, 2017).

*Leakage:* When an individual planning a mass murder relays intentions to a friend or another individual about plans or threats (Hamlett, 2017; Meloy, 2014; Meloy & O'Toole, 2011; O'Toole, 2009; Silver, Horgan, & Gill, 2018).

*Manifesto:* Some sort of documentation, either written or verbal, that is created, published, or left behind by a mass murderer (Hamlett, 2017).

*Mass media:* Several types of large audience media outlets comprise mass media, including radio, television, the Internet, newspapers, and magazines (Schildkraut, 2014; Swift, 2017).

*Mass murder:* The FBI, (2018) defined mass murder as the killing of four or more persons over a short period, usually by a single individual in one or more locations.

*Mass shooting:* Similar to mass murder, a mass shooting is a single act that involves the killing of four or more persons using a firearm in an act not related to any other criminal activity (FBI, 2018).

*Media contagion effect:* Theory that persons copy the actions of others by watching media coverage (Pew et al., 2019).

*Public mass murder:* Killing four or more persons in a public setting (Fridel, 2017). Public mass murderers include school shooters, workplace shooters, domestic terrorists, persons with psychosis, and hate-motivated offenders (Fridel, 2017).

*Public mass shooting:* The killing of four or more persons with a firearm in a public setting (Silva & Capellan, 2019). To meet the criteria for public mass shooting, an act must be unrelated to other types of violent crime, such as robbery or familicide (Silva & Capellan, 2019).

*Rampage school shooting:* A rampage school shooting is a mass shooting that takes place on a school campus perpetrated by one or more shooters who were or are students at the school (Schildkraut, 2014). Rampage school shooters kill multiple victims, whether random or targeted (Schildkraut, 2014).

*Social media:* A component of mass media, social media encompasses electronic communication used to share ideas, opinions, and videos through social networking, web sites, and web logs (Bubar, 2018; Ortiz & Khin, 2018).

*Suicidal ideation:* Individuals with suicidal ideation have thoughts of suicide, express suicidal thoughts, and/or have attempted suicide (Harris, Lello, & Willcox, 2017; Ioannou, Hammond, & Simpson, 2015).

*Suicide:* As defined by the WHO (2019), suicide is an act of self-harm by which individuals end their lives. Attempted suicide involves similar self-inflicted harm with the intention of ending one's life, albeit unsuccessfully.

*Suicide by cop:* Individuals who die via suicide by cop are those who refuse to surrender to law enforcement, knowing such an action will result in their death (Lankford

& Madfis, 2018a). An estimated 10% of mass murderers end their lives in this fashion (Lankford, 2015a).

*Suicide contagion:* Individuals affected by suicide contagion take their own lives in response to a previous act by a similar offender (Ortiz & Khin, 2018).

*Violent media:* Various types of media such as movies, video games, and literature that contain violence (Rocque & Duwe, 2018).

*Werther effect:* Taken from the book *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, describes suicides that occur due to media exposure (Ortiz & Khin, 2018).

### **Assumptions**

The primary assumption underlying this study is that mass murderers relate to previous mass murderers' behaviors through social media and their imitating actions, specifically suicide. An analysis of previous mass murderers who died from suicide can aid in determining if there are connections between social media and suicide in mass killers. Documentation left by these offenders, such as manifestos, journals, and videos, includes a significant amount of information unique to their opinions and beliefs. Bringing awareness to the public and the media to the influence social media has on imitation suicide in these offenders may provide a better understanding of suicide and media contagion.

A second assumption is that the use and popularity of social media and the Internet have increased to the point that the majority of millennials receive their information through social media. Repeating and sharing media coverage of violent



crimes through social media platforms to a large population generates far-reaching interest and confusion. Using a case study analysis of 12 U.S. public mass murderers who committed suicide also requires investigating whether suicide imitation was present and the influence of social media played in the mass killers' actions.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

I conducted this study to address the gap in the literature in terms of how social media influences copycat suicides among public mass murderers. Despite extensive research and analysis of the role the media plays in inspiring criminals, the use of social media and how it influences imitating acts of suicide in mass killers requires significantly more in-depth analysis. I explored this gap by examining mass killers who committed suicide in accordance with the FBI's current definition of mass murder. This study includes U.S. public mass murderers who committed suicide. I restricted the study's sample to public mass murderers in the United States. Careful assessment of available resources and information ensured adherence to delimitations before selecting the 12 individuals for this study.

### **Limitations**

Due to smaller sample sizes and typical absence of statistical computations, qualitative results are not directly transferable to broader populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Findings may not be applicable to other contexts. Detailed documentation of research methods, assumptions, and processes served to strengthen transferability. The lack of transferability of qualitative results also entails limitations

involving credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I did, therefore, take steps to improve the trustworthiness of my findings.

Examination of only one form of media, social media, limited sources of information on the 12 subjects. Some information was limited or unavailable due to denied Freedom of Information Act requests. Because all mass murderers in the study are deceased, I had to rely on information from third party sources. Much of the literature came from online sources, including newspapers, magazines, and social media websites. Finding reliable and publicly available data through the Internet was challenging; therefore, I took care to look for authentic and complete information.

### **Significance**

In this study, I addressed the influence social media has on copycat suicides among public mass murderers. Although much research is available in the area of print and national media coverage of mass murderers, social media and how it influences imitating actions such as suicide in these offenders had not received sufficient study. Providing a better understanding of social media and imitating actions in mass murderers such as suicide enables future scholars and researchers to further expand knowledge, potentially bringing awareness to the public, law enforcement, and media outlets of mass murderers' behaviors. The objective of this study was to provide scholarly research and findings that may someday aid in the reduction of public mass murderers and their attacks, therefore promoting positive social change.

## Summary

Immediate media coverage of mass murderers and their actions often includes limited facts and incorrect information due to desires to be first to report the incident and achieve better ratings (Schildkraut, 2016). The media is often not privy to investigative reports and other confidential information during or immediately following attacks, thus leading to inaccurate information for the public (O'Toole, 2009). The urgency with which the news media report mass murders leads to panic and misconceptions among the general public. The media tend to cover high-profile mass killings much more than other crimes or events, sometimes providing inaccurate details and inspiration for criminals (Knoll & Annas, 2016). The rise of social media has increased the speed of relaying extensive information regarding acts of mass murder, leading to increased frequency and repetition of copycat acts (Schildkraut, 2016).

Mass killers have acknowledged being influenced by previous mass killers, especially those who have received a significant amount of media coverage (Knoll & Annas, 2016). Soon-to-be mass shooters who have researched previous offenders may have fantasies of achieving more notoriety than the last killer, something they believe they can accomplish by killing more people (Knoll & Annas, 2016). The drive for more fatalities in turn escalates violence, which feeds the media and their storylines. The exposure social media has brought to this subject leads to ongoing emphasis on mass murderers and their actions. This type of media coverage allows for imitations to occur, including suicide.

I explored correlations between suicide, mass murder, and social media in a purposeful sample of 12 public mass murderers in this case study analysis. Through their extensive coverage of mass murderers and their actions, the media feed offenders' intentions of being famous. There is, therefore, a need in the United States to educate the media as well as the public with regard to mass attacks and the perpetrators of these attacks to reduce copycat crimes.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

There has been little emphasis on the role social media plays regarding the specific imitating action of suicide among public mass murderers. The immediate gratification individuals receive from social media has made the online outlet a powerful source of information. Aspiring mass murderers use the Internet and social media to research impending or previous mass murderers.

The complexity of mass murderers has made it difficult for researchers, media, and others to understand these killers' actions (Hagan, Podlogar, & Joiner, 2015; Helfgott, 2015; Lin et al., 2018; Meindl & Ivy, 2018). There are numerous factors that require further exploration, such as suicide contagion, media contagion, behavioral and social factors, and firearms and gun control. Ongoing media coverage of crimes such as mass killings, workplace violence, and hate crimes has inspired such actions in new offenders. Sensationalizing mass killings and other violent offenses through video games, television shows, and the media further inspires the copycat effect in these offenders. Having a better understanding of imitating behaviors in mass murderers, specifically suicide, contributes knowledge toward reducing the gap in the literature.

I conducted a qualitative case study analysis of 12 U.S. public mass murderers who committed suicide, with an emphasis on the influence of social media on these individuals. The purpose of the study was to examine and provide a greater understanding of public mass murderers who commit copycat suicide based on the influence of social media. Further understanding, in turn, provides future researchers with the ability to

expand and grow this area of study, perhaps eventually decreasing the number of public mass murders in the United States.

The media plays a role in potential criminals identifying with the behaviors of others; however, the use of social media and how it influences the specific imitating action of suicide in mass killers has yet to receive comprehensive analysis. Social media merits a thorough examination to obtain new, rich data as to how one receives and perceives information as it evolves. High profile suicides in the media have contributed to an increase in suicide rates in the United States (Capellan, 2016; Meindl & Ivy, 2018; Towers, Gomez-Lievano, Khan, Mubayi, & Castillo-Chavez, 2015).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy involved the use of multiple scholarly databases, government and organizational websites, and search engines. The most commonly used databases were PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, ResearchGate, Criminal Justice Database, SAGE Journals, ProQuest Central, and LexisNexis Academic, with Google Scholar and Google as the chief search engines. Frequently used keywords were *public mass murderer, mass murder, social media, suicide, suicidal ideation, mass shootings, imitation, contagion, mass killings, copycat mass murder, rampage shootings, media influence, school shooting, crime, media influence, and mass killings* (see Appendix A). Primary sources of information were peer-reviewed academic articles published since the year, 2015, as well as nonscholarly sources such as newspaper articles, social media, websites, and YouTube videos specific to the topic. Material published before January,

2015, provides historical data, including information related to the 12 mass murderers under study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Murray (2017c) invented the term transcendent fantasy theory to describe the cathartic role of fantasy and how these fantasies portray transcendent images over time to act as a coping mechanism for extreme feelings and justification of one's actions. Ranging from escape and revenge to fame-seeking and suicidal-homicidal ideation, fantasies often play a role in the mass killer attacks (Hamlett, 2017; Murray, 2011, 2017c). Planning attacks gives would-be offenders pleasure, minimizing their inability to cope with reality and bringing to life their skewed sense of reality (Murray, 2017c). They use fantasy as a way to cope with feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy and feed their hatred toward others (Harrop, 2015; Murray, 2017c). This self-created coping mechanism is, however, unrealistic and ultimately unfulfilling, thus requiring them to act on their fantasies to ease their discomfort (Murray, 2017a).

The assumption that mass murderers relate to previous mass murderers' behaviors through social media and their imitating actions, specifically with regard to suicide, is in line with Bandura's social learning theory, in that individuals learn new behaviors by observing others' actions. The concept of modeling and learning by observation comprises four processes: attention, retention, production, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Actions learned through modeling include aggressive behavior, moral thinking, and moral behavior. These types of offenders study previous mass killers' behavior, often imitating prior killers whom they see as martyrs (Langman, 2018a).

## Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

### Social Media

Social media encompasses websites and applications individuals use to communicate with others, including Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and online web logs. Social media allows individuals to express feelings of hate and violence in organized groups with similar interests (Bubar, 2018; Froma, 2015). An estimated 4.2 million anti-Semitic posts appeared on Twitter in 2017; the following year, YouTube removed around 8 million videos for behavior deemed unsuitable or offensive (Bubar, 2018). The use of social media platforms reached an all-time high in 2018, with 21% of Americans using Twitter to voice their opinions to a broad audience (Budenz et al., 2018). Social media has become a tool for not only the public to voice opinions, but also for the news media to spread information immediately, which increases the risk of the incorrect information that is rapidly repeated (Budenz et al., 2018; Lee, 2018). Reiterating stories of mass murders is especially a problem in the realm of social media.

**Media contagion effect.** Individuals who copy the actions of others from watching both mass and social media coverage often suffer from the media contagion effect, something apparent in mass shootings, suicides, and terrorist attacks (Pew et al., 2019). According to Lankford (2015a), suicide is a noticeable form of imitation in mass murderers after their attacks. Media coverage leads to fame that mass murderers seek through repeated attention to mass killings and attacks for multiple days or even weeks (Lee, 2018; Pew et al., 2019). Repeated media coverage not only inspires future mass murderers, but also imitative actions among these offenders (Cordell, 2019; Lee, 2018;



Pew et al., 2019). The frequency of mass murder escalates over 12.5 days following an attack covered by the media (APA, 2016; Lee, 2018). Predisposing persons to this type of violence can provide a model for potential mass killers to use (Cordell, 2019). The rise in the use of social media and the Internet has intensified copycat crimes because of media contagion.

**Fame.** Fame-seeking is a frequent motivation among mass murderers (Langman, 2018a; Persaud & Bruggen, 2018). Social media has become an intricate aspect of how mass killers manipulate the media and the public to gain notoriety (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lloyd, 2018; Lopatto, 2015; Persaud & Bruggen, 2018). Large amounts of attention by the media can lead others to view mass murderers as role models, as viewers may have similar feelings of carrying out a mass attack or fulfilling what they view as a calling (Chen, 2018; Helfgott, 2015; Langman, 2018a; Lee, 2018). Mass killers may also imitate language conveyed in manifestos, videos, and photographs from previous mass murderers through social media, as well as change their appearance for their attack (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Langman, 2018a; Wills, 2019). These documents enable followers to read and view videos repeatedly, promoting copycat behavior. The media provides mass murderers with free press and great amounts of repeated coverage surrounding the offenders and their attack (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Murray, 2011). The role media plays in providing fame to mass killers leads copycats to desire as much fame as their predecessors, if not more, resulting in more attacks (Christensen, 2017; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lopatto, 2015).

## **Media Changes and Mass Murder**

There is a recognized need for change in media coverage of mass murder and murderers; in response, several organizations have emerged to bring awareness to means of reducing the number of mass murders in the United States. According to estimates, if the U.S. media removed the contagion effect, there would be a one third reduction in mass shootings over the next 2 years (APA, 2016). Media outlets have a responsibility to inform the public; however, their means of doing so is open to interpretation (Hoffner et al., 2017; Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Meindl & Ivy, 2017; Radford, 2019; Schildkraut, 2014; Silva & Capellan, 2019). The new age of technology and social media has led to even more copycat crimes as a result of extended reporting of mass murders (Cordell, 2019; Lee, 2018). One suggestion is for the media to focus more on the overarching characteristics surrounding these attacks, instead of individual perpetrators and events (Jilani, 2019). In addition, the media needs to provide more coverage to the victims of mass tragedies than to the mass murderer (Cordell, 2019; Knoll & Annas, 2016; Leigh-Cooper, 2018; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2018). After the Orlando shooting in 2016, CNN anchor Anderson Cooper chose not to report the name of the mass killer or show a photograph of him, but to instead read the names of each of the victims of this mass tragedy (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Zarembo, 2016). Several other news anchors followed Cooper's lead, as did the former governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a). As evidenced by the contagion effect, there should be a reduction in the number of times the media reports perpetrators' names and displays photographs, as well as a lessening of the availability of writings or videos the offender

may have left behind through social media or any other sources (Cordell, 2019; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2018). Another recommendation is that social media users form an alliance to stop sharing and retweeting the names and faces of these offenders, which would contribute to minimizing exposure and the desire for fame through copycat actions (American Psychological Association, 2016; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a).

**Media reporting model.** The media reporting model includes several innovative approaches the media can use to report information surrounding a mass murderer and/or an attack. According to the model, the media should adhere to the No Notoriety Campaign, vastly reducing the publicizing of perpetrators' names and photographs (Cordell, 2019). Also, in line with the new reporting model for mass tragedies, media should not report on matters that involve mental health issues or motives unless they are proven facts (Cordell, 2019). Reporting inaccurate information to the public in situations such as mass murder can cause confusion and panic (O'Toole, 2009; Schildkraut, 2016; Wills, 2019). In addition, the new model of reporting mass murders involves making contact with survivors and the communities in which they live on a regular basis, not just on the anniversary of the attack (Cordell, 2019). Bringing attention to the anniversary of a mass tragedy in the media only feeds the infamy of the attack (Cordell, 2019; Neklason, 2019). Finally, this new model of reporting involves providing training and resources to journalists in covering crime, violence, and mass tragedies; this way, reporters have a better understanding of the most effective method for covering such events and perpetrators (Cordell, 2019; Perrin, 2016).

**No Notoriety campaign.** The No Notoriety campaign emerged in response to mass killers receiving significant amounts of attention in the media. Tom and Caren Teves developed the campaign following the killing of their son, Alex, in the Aurora, Colorado, theater shooting. Under the No Notoriety Campaign, the Teveses requested less media attention of the mass killer and a greater focus on the victims (Cordell, 2019; Knoll & Annas, 2016; Leigh-Cooper, 2018; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2018). Specifically, the media should limit the offender's name, photograph, and self-serving content from manifestos and other writings in lieu of focusing on the victims, therefore providing the perpetrator with less notoriety (Cordell, 2019; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Leigh-Cooper, 2018; Rowen, 2019; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2018).

**Don't Name Them campaign.** The Don't Name Them campaign is a collaborative organization founded by the ALERRT Center at Texas State University, the FBI, and the I Love Guys Foundation to promote the importance of not naming mass murderers unless they are at large (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training [ALERRT], 2019; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Meindl & Ivy, 2017). The Don't Name Them campaign aligns with No Notoriety in a belief that when media focus on perpetrators and their actions, a contagion effect occurs, producing more mass shootings (ALERRT, 2019). Don't Name Them encourages the media to focus around the victims and the families of the victims of mass killings (ALERRT, 2019).

### **Contagion**

Contagion is a term used to describe mimicking the behaviors of others, with the idea that those mimicked behaviors can serve as diseases affecting society (Lankford &

Madfis, 2018a). The difference between contagion and copycat with regard to mass murderers is that copycat refers more to imitation in one's behavior and is more clear-cut than contagion (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a). Contagion encompasses the copycat actions of others, as well as those people who have exposure to certain behaviors but do not act upon them (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a). These individuals can actually subject others to mimicked behaviors; as a result, those who are at risk of such behaviors may act upon these types of feelings (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a). Contagion may be apparent in cases of suicide and homicide (Lin et al., 2018).

### **Behavioral and Social Factors**

Environmental and psychological aspects are both important as related to understanding a mass murderer. Understanding those who commit crimes is complicated and requires knowledge and research into all areas of the offenders' lives (Helfgott, 2015). Studies have shown that mass murderers differ from other offenders in that 75% commit suicide or suicide by cop after the commission of their crime (Lankford, 2015b). Mass murderers who commit suicide often suffer from depression or some type of mental health problem (Lankford, 2015b, 2018; Wills, 2019). Mass murderers who commit suicide have feelings of extreme shame and weakness, which not only incorporates their inadequacies but their uncontrolled anger, as well (Lankford, 2015b). These offenders become fixated on a group of individuals, a belief, or a situation that they view as the cause of their problems (Lankford, 2018). They isolate themselves, having little to no social interaction (Ioannou et al., 2015; Wills, 2019). What interactions they do have primarily occur only through conversations with close friends and or family members in

which they express feelings and frustrations about a particular group of persons, actions known as *leakage* (Follman, 2015b; Knoll & Annas, 2016; Lankford, 2018; O'Toole, 2009; Silver et al., 2018; Wills, 2019). An estimated 44% of mass murderers leak information or discuss their attack before the event (Silver et al., 2018).

Mass murderers share other similarities and experiences, including bullying, humiliation, attention-seeking behaviors, suicidal ideation, interest in violent media, fascination with guns, rejection, and anger issues (Ioannou et al., 2015; Knoll & Annas, 2016; Lankford, 2018; O'Toole, 2009). These offenders cannot assess the situations and feelings of others around them, creating a paranoid sense of reality, grudge-holding, aggression, and anger (Knoll & Annas, 2016). They isolate themselves from others, which fuels their use of the Internet and organized groups with similar interests (Ioannou et al., 2015).

Social factors such as the environment in which one grows and matures greatly contribute to the dynamics of a mass murderer's thoughts and actions. Studies have shown that mass murderers are socially withdrawn and spend much of their time in isolation, with little to no social interaction with their peers and little outside social support (Knoll & Annas, 2016; Lankford, 2018; Murray, 2014, 2017a). These offenders resort to violent video games and the Internet to find a place where they believe that they belong (Lee, 2018). Their feelings of rejection and failure do not exist in the fantasy world they have created for themselves. In addition, mass killers have strained relationships with family members that lack intimacy, with recognized abnormal behavior with no response (O'Toole, 2009). A combination of these known factors, as

well as other distinct circumstances, allows perpetrators to manifest their feelings and fantasies into reality through their attack.

**Revenge fantasy.** Mass murderers who have hold feelings of extreme hatred toward a target group of persons often create a revenge fantasy (Hamlett, 2017; Murray, 2017c; Wills, 2019). This hate manifests over time during the planning phase of their attack, in turn feeding their fantasy. Mass murderers blame their defeats and inadequacies on others, usually fixating on a specific group against which extreme resentment and anger build over time (Murray, 2017c). When the murderers' hatred reaches its apex, they justify their well-thought-out violent acts.

**Escape fantasy.** Escape fantasy is a coping mechanism for things mass murderers view as being out of their control (Murray, 2017c). The escape fantasy they have created enables them to manage negative feelings from prior events they have kept to themselves, therefore causing them to isolate themselves socially (Murray, 2017c). The escape fantasy enables mass murderers to manage their feelings in the planning, creation, and implementation of their attack.

**Sadistic or sexual fantasy.** Mass murderers with sadistic or sexual fantasies may have misogynistic feelings, anger, and/or hatred for females (Murray, 2017c). These feelings toward women may stem from years of rejection, leading the maladjusted individual to feel weak, worthless, and inferior to females or other males (Helfgott, 2015; Murray, 2017c). The planning and fantasy stages allow time for thoughts of superiority, attention and notice, and bitterness to manifest into a calculated attack on a targeted gender group (Murray, 2017c).

**Attention-seeking fantasy.** Mass murderers with attention-seeking fantasies are a result of fixation on previous mass murderers and their actions, and being motivated to kill more victims than their predecessors (Christensen, 2017; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lopatto, 2015). During the planning stage of their attack, attention-seeking fantasy mass murderers will compose documents such as manifestos, videos, or other writings so that their future followers will have something to relate to and examine, further feeding the murderers' desire for infamy (Murray, 2017c).

### **Mass Murderer Manifestos**

Manifestos are written or verbal communications left by mass killers prior to their attack (Follman, 2015a; Fridel, 2017; Hamlett, 2017). This form of communication may provide significant information regarding the offender, motive, and thought process before their attack (Auxemery, 2015; Fridel, 2017; Hamlett, 2017). The media brings much awareness to these manifestos and their contents through the Internet, social media, television, and print sources (Cordell, 2019; Hamlett, 2017; Lankford, 2016; Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Often, law enforcement is unable to control the Internet posting and social media sharing of manifestos (Follman, 2015a; Lee, 2018). Exposing the public to certain aspects of mass killers and their attacks can have a significant impact on offenders' emotional states, producing feelings of fear and panic, and incentivizing future perpetrators to plan their attack (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Schildkraut, Elsass, & Stafford, 2015; Wills, 2019). Some mass killers send packages to the media, generally consisting of writings or videos, in an attempt to gain more fame (Auxemery, 2015; Hamlett, 2017). Seung-Hui Cho, the Virginia Tech mass shooter,



mailed a package to NBC just prior to his mass attack that included a 23-page written statement, 43 photographs, and 28 video clips in which he exhibited his anger and described his intent (“Cho Idolized Columbine Killers,” 2016; Hamlett, 2017; “Virginia Tech Shootings Fast Facts,” 2018). Mass killers may use the media to gain notoriety and to send their message through writings and videos after their death or capture (Follman, 2015; Fridel, 2017; Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Zarembo, 2016).

### **School Shootings**

School shootings receive the most media coverage of all mass killings (Pew et al., 2019). School shooters are fame-seekers who achieve more fatalities during their attack than other types of mass murderers (Christensen, 2017; Pew et al., 2019). On average, mass shooters take 5 minutes or less to leave behind life-changing destruction (Murray, 2017). School shooters are the most imitated of all mass killers, with more than 40 perpetrators using the Columbine attack as a precedent, as evidenced by references to Harris and Klebold in subsequent manifestos and videos (Cordell, 2019; Follman, 2015a; Follman, 2015b; Schildkraut et al., 2018). Sixty-eight percent of the public admitted to watching and reading the repeated coverage of the Columbine attack (Mears, Moon, & Thielo, 2017). The use of the Internet by school shooters contributes significantly to imitation, fame, and copycat behavior (Raitanen & Oksanen, 2018). The Internet provides all mass killers, and specifically school shooters, with a space to share opinions, ideas, and information with numerous like-minded individuals (Bubar, 2018; Helfgott, 2015; Langman, 2018b; Raitanen & Oksanen, 2018). Social media has made it possible

for extreme groups or communities to organize, even in the absence of geographical proximity (Bubar, 2018; Raitanen & Oksanen, 2018).

Hobbs (2019) identified multiple perpetrator similarities. Of the 39 most recent school shooters, 72% felt suicidal and 87% planned their attack in advance. The majority of school shooters have been victims of bullying at school, which can promote feelings and actions of aggression and suicide (Ioannou et al., 2015; Mears et al., 2017; Wills, 2019). Böckler et al. (2014) found that 88.1% of school shooters admitted to some type of social conflict that involved bullying; in addition, the detailed plan of the mass attack included the planning of their suicide.

### **Suicide**

Suicide rates in the United States increased by 33% between 1999 and 2017 (Weir, 2019). According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (2019), in 2017, 47,173 persons in the United States died from suicide, making it the 10th leading cause of death among Americans. Males are three times more likely to commit suicide than females; in addition, among males and females who attempt suicide, males are more successful (Holmes & Holmes, 2005). High-profile suicides receive repeated and vast exposure in the media (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a). Approximately 40% of mass public shooters commit suicide.

**Suicide Awareness Voices of Education.** Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) is a national nonprofit organization focused on suicide prevention. Established in 1989 by six persons who had lost family members to suicide, SAVE purported that awareness, as well as educational programs, are the tools needed to

prevent suicides (SAVE, 2019a). Members of SAVE have dedicated much time and effort into understanding and bringing awareness to the media and the influence on contagion and copycat suicides, in hopes of changing the means of reporting of violence and mass shootings that involve suicide (Jilani, 2019). The organization established guidelines for the media concerning how to report mass shootings involving suicides so as to reduce copycat behaviors (Jilani, 2019). Along these lines, SAVE indicates that media coverage of mass murderers provokes copycat actions in others, appearing as models for future acts of violence; in addition, the organization condemns stigmatizing mental illness through the violent behavior of mass murderers, which can deter persons from receiving mental aid (SAVE, 2019b). Further recommendations are for the media to reduce the number of times they use the perpetrator's name and photograph and increase the amount of coverage given to the victims and their families (SAVE, 2019b).

**World Health Organization.** The WHO is a government agency that sets guidelines and recommendations for the media in reference to how they report suicides, based on the theory that suicides may be imitative (Meindl & Ivy, 2017, 2018; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2018). According to the WHO (2019), 800,000 persons die from suicide around the world, with the United States having one of the highest suicide rates. The WHO proposal to the media consisted of not repeating a story involving suicide, refraining from emotional photographs, and avoiding sensationalizing language in regard to suicide or the story surrounding it, as well with regard to the details of the suicide (Meindl & Ivy, 2018; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2018). Finally, WHO recommended that the media should be aware of how they report celebrity suicides (Meindl & Ivy, 2018).

**The Werther effect.** The Werther effect is a common way to describe and understand imitation suicide through media attention (Capellan, 2016; Follman, 2015b; Ortiz & Khin, 2018; Pirkis et al., 2018; Schaffer, 2018). The concept sprang from the 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Von Goethe in which the protagonist committed suicide (Capellan, 2016; Follman, 2015b; Ortiz & Khin, 2018; Pirkis et al., 2018; Schaffer, 2018). Several suicides followed the book's publication, with individuals imitating certain aspects of the protagonist's suicide (Ortiz & Khin, 2018). As a result, the concept of suicide contagion or copycat suicide emerged (Schaffer, 2018).

### **Firearms/Gun Control**

An estimated 300 million guns are in circulation in the United States, a nation with more guns than any other country (Christensen, 2017). According to Gramlich (2018), three out of 10 Americans own a gun. Mass murderers use a firearm as their weapon of choice 75% of the time (Fox & Fridel, 2016; Wills, 2019). According to Everytown for Gun Safety (2018), 2017 was the deadliest year for mass killings in the United States compared to previous years, with one third of mass killers having obtained a gun despite being legally prohibited from possessing any type of firearm. It has become common practice for the media to immediately refer to the type of weapon used during a mass killing without fully disclosing specifics, allowing for comparisons to previous mass killings and the weapons used (Schildkraut, 2014).

Gun control has become an ongoing issue and debate in the United States due to the increase of mass shootings and the media coverage of such acts (Silva & Capellan,

2019). Legislators and the FBI have discussed the right to carry as well as how to update regulations and laws concerning restrictions of obtaining firearms (Gramlich, 2018; Knoll & Annas, 2016; Schildkraut, 2014). The media place great focus on mass shootings, even though the incidents comprise a small amount of gun violence in the United States (Guggenheim, Jang, Bae, & Neuman, 2015). Much of the concern around mass murder centers on mental illness and the ability for persons with a prior criminal history to obtain firearms (Grinberg, 2016; Knoll & Annas, 2016). Mass killers have little to no problem obtaining a firearm legally because they often have had no official criminal record or psychological impairment (Fox & Fridel, 2016; Knoll & Annas, 2016). Since 1994, the United States rejected 3.5 million firearm applications due to the implementation of background checks through licensed sellers (Everytown Research Organization, 2018). Of note, however, is that nearly 22% of gun owners purchased their firearms from unlicensed sellers with no background check required (Everytown Research Organization, 2018).

In 1994, President Bill Clinton passed into law the Federal Assault Weapons Ban with the hopes of reducing crime and violence in the United States (Fox & Fridel, 2016). This law was in effect for 10 years but had little impact on the number of mass shootings that occurred in the United States, although it did have a significant impact on the number of persons killed in these attacks (Fox & Fridel, 2016). Gun control organizations continue to reference this law in their efforts toward reducing firearm violence in the United States.

The media puts forth negative information concerning gun control, firearms, violence, mental illness, and mass killings. Coverage centers on guns as a specific area of concern, with commentators and citizens seeking to determine a motive or solution. The media's choice of coverage is significant because the public is prone to watch and read information about crime and violence (Levin & Wiest, 2018; Wills, 2019). Ongoing mass and social media coverage of mass killings over a period of days or even weeks can lead to negative thoughts by viewers, as well as serve as a trigger those who have been planning a similar or copycat attack (Lee, 2018; Pew et al., 2019). The unnecessary fear conveyed by the media inspires a sense of urgency for the public to react in uneducated ways, putting the focus on a specific cause for mass killings (Wills, 2019). Focusing on one specific area of concern in a situation that has multiple factors means that relevant issues may go unnoticed.

### **Mental Illness/Mental Disorders**

The media is quick to label a mass killer as mentally ill or as having some sort of mental disorder without first obtaining the proper information, which places a greater stigma on mental illness (Budenz et al., 2018; Knoll & Annas, 2016). Despite the fact that only 3% of persons suffering from mental illness commit a violent crime (Knoll & Annas, 2016), members of the media tend to view mental illness and those suffering from mental disorders similarly, associating acts of violence with mental issues; however, that is not always the case (Knoll & Annas, 2016; SAVE, 2019b). There is a problem in assuming and reporting that an attacker is mentally ill or mad (Budenz et al., 2018; Dietz,

1986). Providing uneducated assumptions leads to more confusion and less relevant knowledge about mass killers and their actions.

According to the APA (2013), a mental disorder is a dysfunction or disturbance of one's emotional state or behavior. Mental disorders often leave persons with significant loss of social interaction or activities involving relationships (APA, 2013). Anxiety, depression, paranoia, and acute stress disorder are examples of mental disorders. Medication often moderates the distress caused by a mental disorder (Hickey, 2016).

**Narcissism.** Narcissism is a personality trait or, in its extreme form, a personality disorder (Bushman, 2018). An individual with a narcissistic personality exhibits a pattern of grandiosity, lacks empathy, and has a constant need for admiration (APA, 2013; Bushman, 2018). Studies have indicated that persons who exhibit narcissist tendencies often also exercise aggressive behavior, violence, and criminal behavior (Bushman, 2018). Mass shooters are more likely than any other criminal offender to exhibit narcissist behavior, illustrated in part by attacks being premeditated and planned for months in advance (Bushman, 2018). During this time, mass shooters reflect and focus on persons they feel may have rejected, bullied, or threatened their ego, their anger growing until they can no longer control it and are ready to implement the plan of attack (Ioannou et al., 2015; Lankford, 2018).

An estimated 14% to 20% of U.S. school shooters exhibited narcissist tendencies (Bushman, 2018). Mass murderers will often make narcissist statements, as evidenced by manifestos and videos left behind to relate the motive for their actions (Bushman, 2018; Hamlett, 2017). Perhaps inadvertently, the media support mass murderers' narcissism

with repeated coverage of the attacks and the perpetrators (Bushman, 2018; Hamlett, 2017).

**Depression.** Depression is a mental disorder that incorporates feelings of sadness, emptiness, and/or irritable mood that affects an individual's cognitive function with a link to suicidal ideation (APA, 2013). A common characteristic shared by mass murderers is depression due to feelings of constant rejection and failure throughout their lives (Fox & Fridel, 2016; Knoll & Annas, 2016; Lankford, 2015a, 2018). An estimated 7.6% of the general public over the age of 12 years has experienced depression at some point; in comparison, 12.5% of mass shooters have a formal diagnosis of depression, anxiety, or other disorders treated by medication (Fox & Fridel, 2016). Fueling their depression is the isolating environment they create for themselves. Such behavior, along with feelings of worthlessness and shame, facilitates depression with the possibility of lasting for an extended period. Mass killers plan their attacks over months or years, similar to the way individuals who commit suicide ponder and plan their death over time.

### **Media Aftermath**

The public may not be consciously aware of the enormous role the media plays in their everyday lives, shaping their opinions and actions. Social media has made it possible for a person to receive information within seconds, as well as read, watch, or share information countless times (Budenz et al., 2018; Elsass, Schildkraut, & Stafford, 2016; Raitanen & Oksanen, 2018; Schildkraut, 2016). The media places a large emphasis on violence and crime stories because this type of information receives the most attention from the public (Levin & Wiest, 2018; Richmond, 2019; Schildkraut et al., 2018). This



kind of attraction and urgency can promote feelings of panic, fear, and aggression (O'Toole, 2009; Schildkraut, 2016; Wills, 2019). Moral panic involves feelings of real or perceived threats that can produce unforeseen hostility and concern and make individuals feel unsafe in environments such as schools, churches, or other populated areas (Schildkraut et al., 2015; Wills, 2019).

The perhaps inadvertent message the media is sending is that the more devastating a mass shooting, the more publicity and attention it will receive (Lankford & Madfis, 2018; Lee, 2018; Pew et al., 2019; Rocque & Duwe, 2018). Extensive coverage only feeds the egos of individuals with similar interests who are watching and reading the reported information, therefore causing more mass attacks or copycats (Cordell, 2019; Lee, 2018; Meindl & Ivy, 2017; Meindl & Ivy, 2018; Rocque & Duwe, 2018; Rowen, 2019; Wills, 2019). The repeated coverage of mass killers and their attacks also promotes the desire for fame in others with similar ideations (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lloyd, 2018; Lopatto, 2015). The media's control of what and how often they report incidents, as well as the language used, are areas of increasing concern due to the widespread use of social media. The media can be insensitive in regard to trigger or high-impact words regarding a specific topic to promote a story or grab the attention of individuals, which can lead to the formation of labels and stigma surrounding the offender (Budenz et al., 2018; Hamlett, 2017).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Repeated and shared social media coverage has provided a blueprint of sorts for potential mass murderers through constant information surrounding a perpetrator,

including name, photographs, motives, and actions. This vast amount of information, in turn, allows individuals to post comments and share the information with vast numbers of individuals in a matter of seconds (Raitanen & Oksanen, 2018). The enormous impact social media has on the public, as well as the spreading of information concerning mass attacks, increases the number of these crimes (Lee, 2018). An estimated 86% of adults are Internet users and 90% of teenagers use the Internet daily (Ortiz & Khin, 2018). Public mass murderers are complex individuals with different motives and psychological makeups than any other type of offender (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b). The incidence of mass murder is increasing in the United States, bringing with it a growing need to better understand these types of attackers and attacks (Bonn, 2018; Follman, 2015b; Hickey, 2016; Rocque & Duwe, 2018).

Although suicide is only one outcome following a mass murder, it is one of the most important with regard to suicide contagion and media contagion. The connection between suicide contagion and media contagion is evident in acts of mass murder (Chen, 2018; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lee, 2018; Meindl & Ivy, 2018; Perrin, 2016), indicating the need to recognize and understand the magnitude of social media's impact on the public's awareness, opinions, and thought processes (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Meindl & Ivy, 2017; Ortiz & Khin, 2018; Radford, 2019). Despite awareness of media contagion and mass murders and murderers, a large gap in research exists with regard to social media and its influence on imitation suicide among offenders (Lankford, 2015; Meindl & Ivy, 2018). Links between suicide and mass murder are apparent, with both acts planned over an extended period. Recognizing the similarities between the two

issues will allow for better understanding and action to change the way media portray mass murderers.

The expectation is that the findings of this study will provide rich data upon which future researchers and scholars may expand. Secondary stakeholders seeking a better understanding of mass murderers, social media, and imitation suicide include members of the media, law enforcement, and educators as they take steps to reduce the frequency of mass murders in the United States. Having a more comprehensive understanding of the contagion associated with mass murder coverage may allow mass and social media to adopt a more educated approach to reporting and sharing information.

Numerous movements have emerged due to mass tragedies in the United States as a means to bring awareness to the media, encouraging more emphasis on the victims and family members and less on the perpetrators. It is extremely important that social media, as well as mass media, also adopt means of respectfully reporting information on mass attacks and the individuals who commit them. Media coverage contributes to the creation of copycat offenders, making these disturbed individuals more aware of prior mass murderers and the details of their crimes.

The media have made moves to limit or censor the coverage of celebrity suicides and the perpetrators and victims of sexual assault (Follman, 2015a; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Meindl & Ivy, 2017). News organizations have also identified imitative behaviors in the public, such as smoking and alcohol use (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b). Thus, there is a growing need to be more responsible with regard to certain information about mass tragedies (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Lopatto, 2015).

Social media has made the need to carefully consider coverage much more difficult (Cordell, 2019). Social media outlets should place equal efforts on the portrayal of mass murders and mass murderers (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b; Lloyd, 2018). The repeated information given to the public in a matter of seconds is overwhelming, often leading to confusion and panic (Schildkraut, 2014; Wills, 2019). The issue of social media coverage surrounding mass tragedies merits further examination to produce positive social change and reduce violence in the United States.

In Chapter 3, I describe the role of the qualitative researcher in sample selection, reading, coding, analyzing, verifying, and reporting data. I offer a review of researcher biases and ethical issues, as well as an explanation for the number of cases, inclusion criteria, and participant selection. Chapter 3 further provides for a review of data collection methods and an outline of data coding analysis procedures to answer the specified research questions. Finally, Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reliability of the study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to provide a greater understanding of U.S. public mass murderers who commit copycat suicides based on the influence of social media. I will examine publicly available data about 12 public mass murderers that includes written or videotaped communications and social media use concerning imitation and/or suicide. The goal of this study is to discover similarities among mass murderers who committed suicide following their attacks, as well as the role of social media through influencing actions as a means to answer research questions guiding the study.

In this chapter, I restate the rationale for the qualitative case study design and explain the role of the researcher as the reader, with remaining emphasis placed on coding, themes, and analysis. The criteria for participant selection will be based on copycat suicides among public mass murderers and social media. Statements of intention and imitation from social media accounts, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube videos will undergo analysis. Mitigation methods, such as triangulation and reflexivity, will be a means to minimize bias. As the researcher, I must use accurate and representative case selections with minimum bias.

Criteria for case selection include the following: The individuals selected must meet the FBI's definition of mass murderers in the United States, the mass murder must have occurred in a public place, and the offender must have committed suicide. The definition of mass murder used for the purposes of this study is the killing of four or more individuals, usually by one or more individuals in one or more locations over a short

period. I will select 12 cases from a population of individuals with material publicly available from various databases, web sites, research articles, and books. Publicly available data is necessary for this study due to the participants being deceased, making ethical concerns minimal. I, as the researcher, will be the only instrument of data collection in this study. There will be no issues of power relationships or misleading participants, and any concerns involving access to said research will be nonexistent.

Relying on information left by mass murderers as well as background material from various sources can be a risk because all individuals used for this study are deceased. I plan to collect and code data to answer the two research questions involving copycat suicide, the media, and mass murderers. Finding similarities among the participants through this method will allow for common themes to develop.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Findings from this study should answer the following research questions:

*RQ1:* How does repeated media coverage of mass murderers influence copycat suicides?

*RQ2:* How does social media portray the copycat suicides of mass murderers?

The objective of this study is to obtain a greater understanding of public mass murderers who committed suicide and the influence social media had on acts of copycat suicide. Secondary concepts used to augment and interpret this research will include mass murder and gun violence, mass murderers and mental illness, fame-seeking and mass murderers, suicide and the media, violent crime and the media, and suicide contagion.

These concepts will provide a broader perspective of the actions of the 12 public mass murderers chosen for this study.

A qualitative multiple case study approach will serve as the foundation for the study. Case study analysis allows for a review of a contemporary phenomenon through examples relating to a specific area related to the topic (Yin, 2014). Using a case study approach with multiple subjects will allow me to draw comparisons through data analysis. Purposeful sampling in the study will enable me to select cases that provide a rich understanding of a topic.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The primary instrument in a qualitative study is the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, my roles will consist of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I will also investigate publicly available data, which I will use in data collection for this study. Beyond reading and coding data, I will be responsible for identifying fantasy based on Murray's four types of fantasies in mass murderers: revenge, escape, sadistic or sexual fantasy, and attention-seeking fantasy. Using publicly available data in this qualitative case study with no personal, professional, or power relationships between researcher and sample means there will be no dual relationships during the study.

The potential for bias is greater in qualitative studies than quantitative studies because of researcher bias, thus showing the need for objectivity in a study (Creswell, 2014). Researchers must recognize their personal beliefs and address any prejudices. When data collection and analysis come from a single individual, the researcher must take measures to prevent misinterpretation. Conducting several rounds of coding is one

way to boost the accuracy of analysis and reduce bias. Maintaining detailed documentation and regular self-checks will aid in this process.

Researchers have an ethical obligation to obtain current information regarding selected cases used for the study (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Organizing this research through coding will be a consistent process with each case to avoid any bias and maintain structure within the research process. The coding process will begin by detailing three categories of interests: demographics, antecedent behavior, and event-specific behavior. This information will provide a better understanding of the subjects, allowing for themes to develop.

I will use a master codebook to record words and phrases used by each participant that are significant to the purpose of this study. NVivo 12 software will be used as a reliable way to analyze data, as it will allow for coding and analysis of themes from both text and videos, thus enabling better organization of material.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I selected a purposeful sample of 12 public mass murderers who died of suicide after their attacks in the United States to ensure I achieved data saturation. According to Creswell (2014), a minimum of five subjects in a qualitative study is essential to reach saturation. The FBI's definition of mass murder as an event in which four or more individuals are killed served as qualifying case criteria. For purposes of this study, the mass murders must have occurred in a public place. These two criteria narrowed my search of mass murderers.



Excluding offenders from other countries other than the United States was in line with the criteria used for this study; also excluded were mass murderers who did not commit suicide after their mass attack. These restriction criteria allowed me to center on a specific population sample to increase reliability, validity, and generalizability. Finally, there was a focus on social media and the influence it has on suicide and other forms of imitation.

In identifying cases for this study, the first step was searching the Internet for databases of U.S. mass murderers. I used the *Mother Jones* database as a source and reference list of mass murderers in the United States, as it is extensive with numerous variables regarding the demographics and behaviors of mass murderers. After identifying the purposeful sample, I researched each individual to obtain as much information as possible. Searching each individual's name in combination with search terms (see Appendix A) led to a wide range of information. I used several resources to gather information in this study, including scholarly journals, publicly available documents, books, nonscholarly sources through the media, and public records, thus increasing transferability to avoid bias.

### **Instruments**

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in a qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To reduce the bias associated with this form of data collection, the researcher must follow four key components: criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Validity issues arise in qualitative studies due to the process in which information is gathered. The researcher in a qualitative study is the key

instrument; therefore, I gathered, examined, and recorded all of my data carefully in a database to avoid any bias or duplication. I collected, coded, and recoded my data as well as highlighted similar verbiage or concepts, therefore aiding in reflexivity and allowing for more credible data collection. Coding and note-taking of the data enabled me to create a list of common words or phrases from which themes emerged.

It was important for me to code and organize the data in a structured method using the same process for each participant. I used Microsoft Excel to organize findings about each individual's demographics, antecedent behavior, and event-specific behavior. I kept a master codebook to identify relevant linguistic phrases or words, which enabled me to recognize similarities or imitation in each of the cases. As a single researcher conducted this qualitative study, subjectivity could be a concern. Using multiple sources of data with numerous rounds of coding helped to eliminate any personal biases.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data from publicly available outlets and scholarly journals regarding the purposeful sample of 12 public mass murderers who died from suicide. The publicly available documentation included social media posts, videos, journal entries, and oral statements. Scholarly journals allowed me to obtain a solid foundation of information surrounding each subject and supplement the material retrieved from the publicly available data. Before formal coding or analysis, I read each document and watched each video a minimum of three times. This repetition increased my familiarity, enabling me to establish categories and themes and to recode data. As a researcher, it is imperative not to base opinions on experiences or the emotions involving an event when reliable

information is not available (Meloy, 2015). I kept any bias or personal beliefs in check by reading and coding materials several times and methodically examining data analysis to eliminate any assumptions.

**RQ1.** I researched, read, analyzed, and coded publicly available data to identify the connection between mass murderers and repeated media coverage, and how social media coverage influenced the imitating act of suicide in these offenders. I also examined information about the behaviors of these individuals before, during, and after their mass attacks to develop themes in relation to similar characteristics.

**RQ2.** I researched, read, analyzed, and coded publicly available data to explore and identify themes relating to the portrayal of suicide in mass murderers through social media. I further examined copycat behavior, suicide contagion, and media contagion related to social learning theory with regard to social media.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The type of data used for this research consisted of publicly available material obtained from numerous sources, including books, journals, diaries, videos, letters, notes, and other forms of personal communication by members of the purposeful sample. Descriptive and analytical coding and note-taking allowed me to analyze data and compile a list of common items or words from the content analysis. I entered all words, phrases, and codes into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to better see common characteristics. Using multiple types of sources and coding data by computer allowed for accuracy. I used the same data analysis and coding process for each of the subjects in this

study to reduce the potential for bias. I used NVivo 12 to assist in coding large amounts of materials for each of the 12 cases.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Achieving trustworthiness will involve obtaining, researching, and analyzing an enormous amount of literature. Triangulation methods further enhance confirmability. I was careful to accurately represent any communications from the 12 subjects used in this study, which aided in eliminating researcher bias and enhanced validity.

### **Credibility**

One means of strengthening the internal validity of research findings is by using multiple reliable sources and theories, with repeated coding and analysis. According to Creswell (2014), achieving triangulation requires accuracy and validity. Using multiple sources with repeated coding aids in reflexivity, bringing awareness to any personal influences that may be present to enhance credibility. I selected 12 cases to ensure I achieved saturation in the study from the selected sample.

### **Transferability**

To ensure the transferability or generalizability of results, I coded and analyzed data multiple times in regard to the sample population from preexisting criteria. I included detailed descriptions of the sample population, which allows for similarities to be easily seen by others. Such detailed descriptions can enable future researchers to compare and apply data to similar populations.

**Dependability**

I achieved dependability in this study by reading data multiple times, repeating the coding process, and note-taking. This repetition enabled me to compile a list of common words and phrases used by the selected mass murderers, allowing for themes to develop. Having detailed notes in a researcher's content analysis provides for relevant archival data. Highlighting similar verbiage in documents helped in making the data collection more credible. In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed account and description using identical identifying criteria of each of the 12 cases to ensure consistency in the data.

**Confirmability**

Objectivity and reliability are necessary for a study to have confirmability. I presented the data accurately to avoid bias. I used quotes from the participant's communications to assist in the themes of imitation present in the study.

**Intracoder Reliability**

I achieved intracoder reliability through multiple rounds of continuous coding with repeated analysis, as well as using NVivo 12 software. I also used note-taking of data as a means of achieving intracoder reliability. These repeated actions were means to ensure results reliability and reduce the risks of human error from stress, fatigue, or distraction.

**Ethical Procedures**

Because the participants in this study are deceased, there were no ethical concerns with regard to the treatment of participants. This study had minimal risks, as materials being freely available to the public meant privacy and confidentiality were not an issue.

Prior to beginning data collection, I obtained permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Confidentiality agreements were not an issue in this study because all of my subjects are deceased. I will store all data on a private, password-protected computer for 5 years, after which time I will delete all files. Using publicly available data ensured there are no conflicts of interest.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 included clarification regarding how data collection and analysis provide information sufficient to answer the two research questions. The central phenomenon was public mass murderers and the influence of social media on offender suicide and other forms of imitation. I validated the study and my role as the researcher. Continuous self-reflection and numerous rounds of coding and recoding allowed me to eliminate any prejudices I may have had while conducting the study.

The Internet was the primary source of information to conduct and gather research relating to the purposeful sample of 12 cases. Individuals used in this study met specific criteria, including the commission of mass murder in a public place and subsequent suicide. I used the two research questions as a guide in collecting and coding data in reference to the purposeful sample.

Chapter 3 included the identification of data collection procedures, as well as search engines and databases that served as sources of data. I provided a detailed account of the steps taken to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and intracoder reliability in this study. Incorporating a process of rereading, coding materials

multiple times, and analyzing with triangulation is important. Relying on thorough notes enabled me to identify common themes from the content analysis.

In Chapter 4, I present a more detailed account of my data collection. A description of the analysis procedures appears, as well as the results of the study through a detailed account of categories, codes, and themes. Finally, a discussion of the results and the research process show how I was able to answer the research questions.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The frequency of mass murders in the United States continues to rise, with school shootings happening at an average rate of one per week (APA, 2016; Bonn, 2018; Hickey, 2016; Steinkoler, 2017). An estimated 40% of mass public shooters commit suicide following their attack (Capellan, 2016; Lankford, 2015a; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a, Murray, 2017b; Silva & Capellan, 2019). The media give extensive coverage to violent crime, with mass shootings receiving widespread attention and continuous coverage, creating confusion among viewers and citizens (Levin & Wiest, 2018; Schildkraut et al., 2018). The repeated coverage of mass attacks promotes fame-seeking and suicide (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Rocque & Duwe, 2018), as violently disturbed individuals believe they must die either for more coverage, thus achieving fame, or garner comparisons to previous mass murderers they have admired and tried to emulate.

Social media and technological advancements have changed how many people receive, process, research, and relay information. Immediate sources of information may include writings, thoughts, and images of and related to mass shootings. Irresponsible reporting may inspire copycat events and attacks, expanding the damage and death toll well beyond the initial attack. Mass murderers use social media and the Internet as tools for hate, research, peer connection, and video games as well as a place to share common interests, no matter how skewed. The isolation inherent with the use of digital devices to express extreme feelings, research mass murderers, and post photographs with guns as well as video rants has only heightened how social media influences people's feelings



and actions. Social media has become a training ground for future mass murderers. The complexity of these offenders, combined with the convenience of social media, necessitates ongoing research into numerous areas of concern.

The media's role in reporting criminal activity and perpetrators has expanded in the United States and throughout the world. Although researchers have found evidence linking media coverage and future criminals through the identification of previous offender's behaviors, there is a need in the United States for further examination into social media's influence on mass murderers' imitating actions, such as suicide.

I examined 12 public mass murderers in the United States who committed suicide and the influence social media played specifically on the imitating factor of suicide, including copycat suicides. I conducted a qualitative analysis using research articles, reports, newspaper articles, video files, journals, writings, and manifestos from each of these 12 mass murderers to identify common themes and content. Allowing themes to develop enabled me to identify similarities among this purposeful sample, thus furthering scholarly knowledge of this particular group. Using data analysis focusing on demographics, antecedent behavior, event-specific behavior, and communications of the 12 offenders, as well as analysis of social media influence enabled me to recognize similarities and common behaviors. The research questions were as follows:

*RQ1:* How does repeated media coverage of mass murderers influence copycat suicide?

*RQ2:* How does social media portray the copycat suicides of mass murderers?

This chapter begins with a description of the study subjects, followed by the data collection and data analysis procedures. Next, I reveal data recording strategies in detail, outlining the steps taken during these processes as well as analyzing and coding strategies. I then address issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

I present findings for each of the 12 study subjects, which entails discussions of antecedent behavior and event-specific behavior relating to mass shooting events. I also discuss similarities in terms of study subjects' communications, both written and verbal. Focusing on copycat behaviors with a concentration on suicides of offenders, I provide a list of six themes and other similarities relating to social media influence. The chapter concludes with an account of how the findings answered the research questions.

### **Demographics**

Study participants were 12 individuals who committed mass murder in the United States, after which they took their own lives. They carried out their attacks in a public place and used at least one firearm. I created an Excel spreadsheet to build profiles of each offender pertinent to three key areas of interest: demographics, antecedent behavior, and event-specific behavior. I identified the fantasy type of each individual according to the transcendent fantasy theory, information I also placed into the Excel spreadsheet. Finally, I examined any communications left by the 12 offenders, including manifestos, blogs, videos, journals, suicide notes, Internet posts, and writings, recording relevant words and phrases in a master codebook and NVivo 12 to identify similarities.

All 12 perpetrators were male. The study subjects ranged from 16 to 41 years of age at the time of their crime, with all attacks occurring in public. Attack locations included elementary schools, high schools, colleges, shopping malls, businesses, and religious dwellings. Eight of the 12 individuals examined committed school shootings; one attempted a college shooting mixed with attacks throughout a neighborhood. Two of the 12 individuals committed their mass attacks in a place of business, with the remaining two committing mass killings in a house of religion.

### **Data Collection**

I used the *Mother Jones* database to identify mass murderers who met the criteria for my study. I collected data regarding each of the offenders who committed suicide after committing mass murder in the United States according to the definition used by the FBI. I focused on offenders who openly admitted admiring previous mass murderers and imitated prior offenders' actions as a way to seek fame or revenge. I compiled an Excel spreadsheet of data I collected and coded for each of the offenders after reading all materials three times, highlighting words or sections of text while taking notes. This allowed me to become more familiar with each offender as similarities and themes emerged. I underwent the same process for each of the mass murderers in the purposeful sample. Placing this information into an Excel spreadsheet facilitated the organization of a large amount of material, thus allowing for similarities and evidence of imitation to emerge. I maintained a master codebook to identify relevant phrases or words as further means of finding similarities and/or imitations, as well as complementing the Excel spreadsheet detailing antecedent behavior and event-specific behavior among these mass

murderers. I used NVivo 12 software to assist in coding large amounts of data, allowing qualitative analysis of themes to emerge.

I approached the gathering and coding of the data in accordance with the research questions that addressed copycat suicides among mass murderers and the portrayal of copycat suicides in social media. Data coding was also a means to connect social learning theory with copycat behavior and suicide and media contagion in terms of social media influence. Finally, data coding allowed me to associate transcendent fantasy theory with the antecedent and event-specific behavior of the 12 individuals. Direct quotations from various writings and videos of the 12 individuals appear within this chapter to illustrate ideas involving imitation, fantasy, and use of social media. The perpetrators appear in chronological order according to the date of their offense.

### **Data Analysis**

After reading all data and watching all relevant videos several times, I was able to identify ideas that represented similarities, copycat behaviors, and the use of social media outlets in the purposeful sample. I used descriptive and analytical coding to compile a list of common items or words from the content analysis of the data, which allowed for themes to develop. I examined the behaviors of all offenders prior to and during their attack based on transcendent fantasy theory and social learning theory specific to copycat behavior, suicide contagion, and media contagion concerning social media. I was able to identify the type of fantasy that dominated each of the offender's thoughts based on transcendent fantasy theory. I used social learning theory to explore the offenders' planning processes, which gave them time to observe, learn from, and imitate the

behaviors of previous mass murderers. Direct quotations from manifestos, YouTube videos, journals, blogs, and online posts sufficient to answer the two research questions appear in the Results section of this chapter. I found evidence of six themes directly relating to copycat behavior of mass murderers and social media influence supported by the theoretical framework, as identified in the Results section.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

As outlined in Chapter 3, I took steps to ensure trustworthiness. For credibility, I used multiple reliable sources, repeatedly reading and coding each. Using the triangulation method allowed me to achieve credibility. I used numerous reliable sources, direct communications from each individual, and multiple theories. Repeated coding and analysis of the data served to ensure the utmost credibility, bringing awareness to any personal influence or bias that may have been present.

In this study, I addressed a specific population in the United States with a purposeful sample of 12 public mass murderers. I described my role as the primary instrument in this study as well as detailed my study and data collection processes, increasing transferability. I coded and recoded my data and highlighted similar verbiage or concepts, which allowed for more credible data collection. Notetaking enhanced this process, as did recording information into an Excel spreadsheet, allowing for themes to develop. Using Microsoft Excel allowed me to organize the data in a structured manner, using the same three categories for each offender: demographics, antecedent behavior, and event-specific behavior. Finally, I used a master codebook to record any relevant

phrases or words found in the communications of the 12 offenders, subsequently importing the data into NVivo 12, which allowed for the identification of similarities.

I implemented several processes to achieve dependability in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 3, these methods included reading data multiple times, coding, recoding, and note-taking. Following these processes allowed me to compile a list of common words and phrases, allowing themes to develop. Using identical identifying criteria for each of the 12 offenders enabled consistency in data collection. Using two software programs, Microsoft Excel and NVivo 12, allowed for the recording and interpretation of the findings, with the maintenance of a master codebook serving to organize the data. Future researchers could use and expand upon this study based upon these documented processes.

To achieve confirmability of my findings, I used triangulation for objectivity and reliability. I reported my results for each of the 12 offenders as accurately as possible. I examined my personal feelings and opinions before, during, and after researching, exploring, and analyzing each member of my purposeful sample. To ensure reliability and validity and reduce the risk of human error and or distraction, I used note-taking with repeated analysis through multiple rounds of coding.

## **Results**

### **Research Questions**

*RQ1:* How does repeated media coverage of mass murderers influence copycat suicide?

*RQ2:* How does social media portray the copycat suicides of mass murderers?

## Examination of Antecedent and Event-Specific Behavior

### Cases 1 and 2: Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris

On April 20, 1999, 17-year-old Dylan Klebold and 18-year-old Eric Harris, both students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, carried out a detailed mass attack against their school using bombs, rifles, and shotguns. They referred to this attack as “NBK,” after the movie *Natural Born Killers*. Evidence of a long-thought-out plan is apparent in journals, writings, diaries, and videos (which they called “Basement Tapes”) in which they discussed the terror they sought to inflict (Langman, 2014a).

In his journal, Dylan Klebold made a list of tasks necessary to carry out the attack, exhibiting great planning:

- File off clip.
- Buy suspenders.
- Buy cargo pants
- work out carrying gear plan BDay shit
- Find out how to carry Tec-9
- Get pouches-geologist in yer old closet.
- Get napalm containers
- Buy straps Figure out how to carry knife
- Practice in-car gearups
- Get bullets
- Get shells-.00
- Give Reb powder

Buy Adidas soccer bag(s)

Give Reb glass containers

Fill up gascans

Find volatile combo. of gas & oil

Look for voltage amplifier, Internet or Radioshak

Buy “wrath” t-shirt

Buy punk gloves. (Shepard, 2019)

Klebold and Harris’s fame-seeking and revenge fantasies manifested over an extended period until their attack occurred. The teenagers first set bombs in the school cafeteria to cause a diversion; when the bombs failed to go off, they resorted to shooting people outside the school. Klebold and Harris committed suicide in the library, after killing 13 people and wounding 21).

Using the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing as a reference, Klebold and Harris planned a large-scale killing to produce much destruction, sorrow, death, and notoriety. These desires are evident in their journals and writings, as they wrote about making their attack into a movie and wondered who the director would be in the movie. In one of the Basement Tapes, Klebold stated:

Directors will be fighting over this story. I know we’re gonna have followers because we’re so fucking God-like. We’re not exactly human-we have human bodies but we’ve evolved into one step above you, fucking human shit. We actually have fucking self-awareness. (Langman, 2014a)



Klebold and Harris discussed that only Steven Spielberg or Quentin Tarantino should direct the film about their story (Langman, 2014a).

The media expressed strong opinions and ideas in regard to the attack, making this the dominating feature of all news media outlets for many days and weeks. The Columbine attack continues to be the most-referenced school shooting in U.S. history (Neklason, 2019). Perpetrators and would-be killers have spoken of this mass attack in nearly 74 mass shooting plots (Follman, 2019).

**Dylan Klebold.** Klebold was born in Lakewood, Colorado, on September 11, 1981 (Lenoir, 2019). Often described as being odd at a young age, he was extremely shy and passive (Lenoir, 2019). Klebold lived with his parents and older brother. He liked girls but did not act upon his feelings. Klebold would only relay these feelings in his journal entries and label them, for example, “My 1st Love?????”. He expressed the following:

OH my God... I am almost sure I am in love...with \_\_\_\_\_. Hehehe... such as strange name, like mine... yet everything about her I love. From her good body to her almost perfect face, her charm, her wit & cunning, her NOT being popular. Her friends (who I know)-some -I just hope she likes me as much as I LOVE her. I think of her every second of every day. I want to be with her. I imagine me & her doing things together, the sound of her laugh, I picture her face, I love her. If [crossed out] soulmates exist, then I think I've found mine. I hope she likes Techno...:-)  
\_\_\_\_\_, I love you

-Dylan. (Langman, 2019b)

Klebold suffered from depression and suicidal tendencies with feelings of loneliness (Lenoir, 2019; Margaritoff, 2019). He referred to his depression in his journal, stating, “Fact: People are so unaware... well, Ignorance is bliss I guess... that would explain my depression” (Wills, 2019). According to Wills (2019), Klebold likely suffered from some sort of personality disorder, likely schizotypal. His narcissist tendencies and grandiose thoughts were evident in his journals, in which he sometimes compared himself to God (Langman, 2014a). Klebold wrote:

Some god I am.... All people I ever might have loved have abandoned me, my parents piss me off & hate me... want me to have fuckin ambition!! How can I when I get screwed & destroyed by everything??!!! I have no money, no happiness, no friends... Eric will be getting further away soon...I'll have less than nothing...how normal. I wanted to love... I wanted to be happy and ambitions and free & nice & good & ignorant.... Everyone abandoned me... (Langman, 2019b)

Klebold craved fame and revenge (Follman, 2019). These desires were apparent in one of the “Basement Tapes,” as he predicted:

The most deaths in U.S. history. We're hoping. We're hoping. I hope we kill 250 of you. It will be the most nerve-racking 15 minutes of my life, after the bombs are set and we're waiting to charge through the school. Seconds will be like hours. I can't wait. I'll be shaking life a leaf. (Langman, 2014a)

In his journal and videos, Klebold often used words such as *anger*, *rage*, *shy*, and *depressed* to describe his feelings (Langman, 2014a). As the planning of their attack progressed, the adolescents' use of the Internet for bomb-making instructions and an obsession with violent video games increased. In his journal, Klebold expressed negative feelings about his parents and society. He felt as though he was an outcast and did not fit anywhere. His feelings of loneliness grew into feelings of revenge, as evidenced in the following post:

Society is tightening its grip on me, & soon I & \_\_\_ will snap. We will have our revenge on society, & then be free, to exist in a timeless spaceless place of pure happiness. The purpose of life is to be happy & be with your love who is equally happy. Not much more to say. Goodbye.

Almost happiness is slavery- the real people (gods) are slaves to the majority of zombies, but we know & love being superior.

I didn't want to be a jock. I hated the happiness that day have - & I will have something infinitely better.

I love her & she loves me.

(By the way, some zombies are smarter than others, some manipulate...like my parents.)

I am GOD, \_\_\_ is GOD

the zombies will pay for their arrogance, hate, fear, abandoned, & distrust.

(Langman, 2019b)

Although their personalities were very different, as reflected in their journals, Klebold and Harris had a mission that would ultimately change the way the world and the media would portray mass shootings and or violent crimes. They both possessed extreme anger that was easily ignited (Langman, 2014c). The connection they shared strengthened as their plan progressed to fruition. Their obsession with fame and revenge dominated the final months of their lives.

**Eric Harris.** Harris was born in Wichita, Kansas, on April 9, 1991. His father was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force, which meant the family had to move quite often; his mother stayed home to take care of Eric and his older brother, Kevin (Margaritoff, 2019). Harris resented that, as soon as he made friends, the family would have to move (Langman, 2014c). He exhibited extreme anger throughout his adolescence, even having to attend anger management classes after he and Klebold were arrested for breaking into a vehicle and stealing items (Langman, 2014c).

Harris expressed in writing his feelings of hate, control, and being more powerful than anyone else in the world (Langman, 2019a; Margaritoff, 2019). He began using the Internet to post hate-filled rants, combining music lyrics and off-color jokes (Langman, 2014c). He made numerous references to Adolf Hitler and Nazism:

If you recall your history the Nazis came up with a ‘final solution’ to the Jewish problem. Kill them all. Well, in case you haven’t figured it out yet, I say ‘KILL MANKIND’ no one should survive. by the way, this Nazi report is boosting my love of killing them more. Like the early Nazi government, my brain is like a sponge, sucking up everything that sounds cool and leaving out all that is

worthless. That's how Nazism was formed, and that's how I will be too! I'm a racist and I don't mind. Niggs and spics bring it on to themselves. I love the Nazis too... by the way, I fucking can't get enough of the swastika, the SS, and the iron cross. Hitler and his head boys fucked up a few times and it cost them the war, but I love their beliefs and who they were, what they did, and what they wanted. I know that form of government couldn't have lasted long once the human equation was brought in, but damn it, it sure looked good. Nazism would be fucking great if it weren't for individualism and our natural instinct to ask questions. (Langman, 2019a)

Despite his admiration of Hitler, Harris was concerned with originality. He expressed in his writings:

I always try to be different, but I always end up copying someone else. Everything others do always will affect us, no matter what we think. In this day and age, it is almost impossible to be original. People do act on and believe in what they see, but they are still influenced by others. My thoughts are the most original and distinctive part of my character. It can be hard to be original in our generation. (Langman, 2019a)

Harris created a webpage on which he threatened to kill a former friend, Brooks Brown. Brown's father reported the site to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, along with his son's knowledge of Harris making pipe bombs (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, 2003). Harris was extremely narcissistic and would lie and manipulate people with no remorse (Langman, 2019a). He wrote:

My belief is that if I say something, it goes, I am the law. If you don't like it, you die. I feel like God and I wish I was, having everyone being OFFICIALLY lower than me. I already know that I am higher than most anyone in the fucking welt [German: world] in terms of universal Intelligence. I am fucking armed. I feel more confident, stronger, more God-like. (Langman, 2019a)

Harris fantasized about violence, from eliminating most of humanity to committing rape (Langman, 2019a). He expressed how and why he wanted to kill most people:

YOU KNOW WHAT I LOVE!!!? Natural SELECTION!!!!!!!!!! God damn it's the best thing that ever happened to the Earth. Getting rid of all the stupid and weak organisms..... but its all natural!!! YES! I wish the government would just take off every warning label. So, then all the dumbasses would either severely hurt themselves or DIE! And boom, no more dumbasses. You all better fucking hide in your houses because I'm comin for EVERYONE soon, and I WILL be armed to the fuckin teeth and I WILL shoot to kill and I WILL fuckin KILL EVERYTHING! NATURAL SELECTION. Kill all retards, people with brain fuck ups, drug addicts, people who can't figure out who to use a fucking lighter. Geeewd! People spend millions of dollars on saving the lives of retards, and why. I don't buy that shit like "oh, he's my son, though!" so the fuck what, he ain't normal, kill him. Put him out of his misery. He is only a waste of time and money, then people say 'but he is worth the time, he is human too.' No he isn't, if he was when he would swallow a bullet cause he would realize what a fucking

[illegible] he was.” NATURAL SELECTION. Fucker should be shot. Same thing with all those rich snotty toadies at my school. Fuckers think they are higher than me and everyone else with all their \$ just because they were born into it? Ich denk NEIN [German: I think not]... Everyone should be put to a test, an ULTIMATE DOOM test, see who can survive in an environment using only ‘smarts’ and military skills. Put them in a Doom world, no authority, no refuge, no BS copout excuses. I want to kill everyone except about 5 people. (Langman, 2019a)

Included in Harris’s fantasies were rape and sadism. He expressed detailed plans of how he would carry out his violent thoughts:

Maybe I just need to get laid. Maybe that’ll just change some shit around. That’s another thing. I am a fucking dog. I have fantasies of just taking someone and fucking them hard and strong. Someone like where I just pick her up, take her to my room, tear off her shirt and pants and just eat her out and fuck her hard... I want to grab a few different girls in my gym class, take the into a room pull their pants off a fuck them hard. I just want to overpower and engulf myself in them... Who can I trick into my room first? I can sweep someone off their feet, tell them what they want to hear, be all nice and sweet, and then “fuck’em like an animal, feel them from the inside as [Trent] Reznor said. Oh – that’s something else... that one NIN [Nine Inch Nails] video I saw, “Broken’ or ‘Closer or something. (Langman, 2019a)

Fame was important to Harris. He wanted the public to view his writings and videos without police editing; along with Klebold, he also wanted a movie made from his

life story (Langman, 2014a). His fame-seeking was so intense that he wanted he attention and recognition for himself, as evidenced by this website post:

YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE I HATE!!!? Jan binay however the fuck you spell her spoiled ass name Ramsee!!!! We don't care! Good fucking riddens!!! What the fuck do you expect if you fucking put your kid in all these beauty pagents when shes 4 years old!! SLUUUUUUUUUUUT!!!!!! I bet her damn dad did it. Fuckin perrrv. (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, 2003)

Harris referenced the video game *Doom* and discussed how he and Klebold's attack or revolution would resemble the video game, with bombs exploding as he kissed his shotgun like the players in *Doom* (Langman, 2014a). He repeatedly used the word respect in his writings, relating how he felt he had not received the respect he should have gotten from others, comparing himself to God (Langman, 2019a).

### **Case 3: Jeffrey Weise**

On March 21, 2005, a 16-year-old student at Red Lake Senior High School in Red Lake Minnesota, walked into the high school, where he shot and killed seven people before killing himself. Prior to going to the school, Jeffrey Weise shot and killed his grandfather and his grandfather's girlfriend while they were sleeping. He used a 22-caliber pistol to carry out his crime.

Weise was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1988 to unwed parents. Weise lived with his father until he was 3 years old, and then moved with his mother to another city to live with her and her boyfriend. She tended to overindulge in alcohol. When Weise was 9 years old, his father killed himself during a standoff with police (Langman,



2016b). Two years later, Weise's mother was in a severe car accident that left her with brain damage, sending the 11-year-old to live with his grandmother for the next 2 years until her death (Langman, 2016b). A year later, Weise, who suffered from depression, was hospitalized for suicidal thoughts (Davey, 2005). Peers considered him to be a loner who spent most of his time on the computer (Davey, 2005). Weise played video games, was active on Neo-Nazi Libertarian websites, and kept an online journal. He said:

So fucking naïve man, so fucking naïve. Always expecting change when I know nothing ever changes. I've seen mothers choose their man over their own flesh and blood. I've seen others choose alcohol over friendship. I sacrifice no more for others, part of me has fucking died and I hate this shit. I'm living every mans nightmare and that single fact alone is kicking my ass, I really must be fucking worthless. This place never changes, it never will. Fuck it all. Right about now I feel as low as I ever have. I don't think it's a big secret why, really. My biggest disappointment and downfall came from what was supposed to be the one thing to lift me from the grave I'm continually digging for myself. Nah, never. Only the worthy are saved, y'know. I don't know, but what I do know is I'm a retarded fuck for ever believing thing would change for me. I'm starting to regret sticking around. I should've taken the razor blade express last time around... Well, whatever, man. Maybe they've got another shuttle comin' around sometime soon? (Jeffrey Weise, 2006)

Weise was obsessed with guns, violence, and Hitler. His writings expressed violent tendencies along with admiration for Hitler and other previous mass murderers.

On Neo-Nazi websites, he referred to himself as todesengel, which means angel of death in German (Younge & Goldenberg, 2005). Weise approached Nationalist forums requesting to join their organizations. He often discussed his Nazi fascination on his website:

Well, I stumbled across the site in my study of the Third Reich as well as Nazism, amongst other things. I guess I've always carried a natural admiration for Hitler and his ideals, and his courage to take on larger nations. I also have a natural dislike for communism. (Jeffrey Weise, 2006)

He went on further to post:

You encounter a lot of hostility when you claim to be a National Socialist, but because of my size and appearance people don't give me as much trouble as they would if I looked weak. I already had a fist fight with a communist not to long ago over me being what I am (I also won), but it was worth it. I don't try to hide what I am from anyone, if they're going to start something over it then fine, I'm not backing down; Nor am I hiding.

Either way, I was wondering if there was a way to become a more active member, besides posting on this board. I can't really think of anything else to do. I could do some recruiting, but a lot of the people I socialize with are against Nazism wholeheartedly. I managed to sway a few opinions in the favor of the movement non the less, and there is also a few of my "friends" who only like Hitler because they think Nazi's are "cool." Which I agree with, don't get me wrong, but they aren't as serious about it as I am.

Any ideas?

I may young, but I'm willing to help. (Jeffrey Weise Online, 2006)

At the time of the attack, Weise had been expelled from school, suspected of making threats of a mass shooting at Red Lake High School on the anniversary of the Columbine massacre (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). As a result, he was homeschooled until the day of his attack. Weise admired the Columbine killers, e-mailing friends that he wanted to recreate their attack (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). He also created and posted online an animated film that recalled Columbine, with a hand-drawn character shooting people before committing suicide (Davey, 2005). While expelled, Weise planned his attack, manifesting his fantasies of revenge and sadism.

On the day of the attack, Weise killed his grandfather and his girlfriend; stole his grandfather's police car, bulletproof vest, and gun; and headed to Red Lake High School to carry out his plot (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). Weise killed an unarmed security guard upon arriving at the school, followed by randomly firing the gun into classrooms and down hallways. Weise committed suicide when confronted by police.

#### **Case 4: Seung-Hui Cho**

On April 16, 2007, a 23-year-old undergraduate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia, killed 32 people, including students and faculty (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). An immigrant from South Korea, Cho lived with his mother, father, and two siblings. He had extreme social anxiety and displayed disruptive behavior in a classroom setting. He would not speak and had received a diagnosis of selective mutism. In the eighth grade, Cho wrote a story describing how he

wanted to recreate the Columbine High School attack, prompting his parents to request a psychiatric evaluation on their son. The evaluating psychiatrist placed Cho on an antidepressant.

Cho was shy, depressed, and full of anger. He continued to be disruptive in school, at one time, caught photographing girls' legs under their desks. He was extremely isolated, having no relationships outside his immediate family, connections that became increasingly strained because of his strong dislike of his parents' religious views.

The secluded Cho planned his mass attack over an extended period. He was obsessed with the Columbine school shooting and thought of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold as martyrs and brothers (Langman, 2014b). In his manifesto, Cho wrote, "Generation after generation, we martyrs, like Eric and Dylan, will sacrifice our lives to fuck you thousand folds for what you Apostles of Sin have done for us" (Langman, 2014b). In a video, Cho ranted, "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" ("Cho Idolized Columbine Killers," 2016). Omitting his mental history on the background check, Cho purchased weapons and went to the shooting range often to practice (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

Cho's desire for fame and revenge continued to grow. His fantasies are apparent in his violent writings, negative feelings about society, and planned suicide (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Cho expressed extreme disgust, hatred, and anger toward individuals who were wealthy, stating:

You love to pretend to, but you Hedonists, Charlatans, Sadists, Rapists, Terrorists will never know the feelings of giving up your lives for a cause. You have never felt a single ounce of pain in your hedonistic lives. You will never give up a single can of your Bud Light, a shot of your cognac, or a half-drop of your own precious blood for another human being, only fuck the shit out of him and lie afterwards. You fucked us now we fuck you, now we kill you. (Langman, 2014b)

Although he admired the Columbine killers, Cho wanted his attack to be even greater (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Cho used a Glock and a 22 semiautomatic pistol to carry out his crime. He first went to Weston Amber Johnston Hall on the Virginia Tech campus, where he killed two people. Cho then went back to his apartment, gathered more ammunition, and deleted his Internet browser history. He put his manifesto—which consisted of pictures, writings, and a video—in a package, took it to the local post office, and mailed it to NBC News. Next, Cho returned to the school, entered Norris Hall, and finished his rampage. He did not speak at any time during the attack (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The mass shooting ended when he committed suicide in front of students upon law enforcement's arrival.

#### **Case 5: Robert Hawkins**

On December 5, 2007, a 19-year-old high school dropout killed eight people at the Westroads Mall in Omaha, Nebraska, before taking his own life. Robert Hawkins was born on May 17, 1988, in Suffolk, England, where he lived with his parents until moving to the United States as a child. He had an extensive history of depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and a drinking problem and was in and out of treatment centers

for years. At the age of 13, he made homicidal threats to his stepmother, which led to mental health care by the State of Nebraska (Konigsberg, 2007). He attempted suicide at the age of 14 (“Mall Gunman Admitted,” 2015).

Hawkins struggled with everyday life. He could not keep a job, friends, or even a girlfriend. He dropped out of school, later earning a general equivalency degree. Hawkins attempted to enlist in the military but was turned away due to his mental health history. He was a loner who played video games and had a strong desire to be famous, as evidenced in his suicide note. He also expressed admiration for Seung-Hui Cho via the social media board 4chan. In one post, he stated, “Later today, I’m going to bring my rifle to the Von Maur department store at Westroads Mall, Omaha Nebraska to try to beat Cho’s high score. I’m going to go out in style” (Hamilton, 2018).

Hawkins carried out his mass attack by first scanning the mall before returning fewer than 10 minutes later with a semiautomatic rifle he stole from his stepfather. He stepped out of an elevator on the third floor of the mall wearing all black and began shooting, firing more than 30 rounds before killing himself. Hawkins left behind a suicide note with portions directed specifically to his friends and family, as well as a document he called his “Last Will and Testament” (Weaver, 2007). The note to his family read:

family

I’m so sorry for what I’ve put you through I never meant to hurt all of you so much and I don’t blame any one of you for disowning me I just can’t be a burden to you and my friends any longer You are all better off without me. I’m so sorry for this. I’ve just snapped I can’t take this meaningless existence anymore I’ve

been a constant disappointment and that trend would have only continued. Just remember the good times we had together

I love you mommy

I love you dad

I love you Kira

I love you Valancia

I love you Cynthia

I love you Zach

I love you Cayla

I love you Mark. (p.s. I'm really sorry). ("Omaha Gunman Suicide Notes," 2007)

His suicide note to his friends stated:

friends

To all of my friends I'm so sorry for what I've done to you and put you through. I've been a piece of shit my entire life it seems this is my only option. I know everyone will remember me as some sort of monster but please understand that I just don't want to be a burden on the ones that I care for my entire life I just want to take a few pieces of shit with me. I love all of you so much and I don't want anyone to miss me just think about how much better you are off without me to support. I want my friends to remember all the good times we had together. Just think tho I'm gonna be fuckin famous. You guys have always been there for me I'm just good thig I'm gonna have to go this alone. You guys are the best friends anyone could ever ask for. That's all I have to say is that I fuckin you guys.

P.S. I didn't eat that fuckin sandwich or the toiolet thing either! ("Omaha Gunman Suicide Notes," 2007)

Hawkins left one last note that he entitled "My Will," which read as follows:

My Will

I'm giving my car back to my mom and my friends can have whatever else I leave behind. [he signed his name with his Social Security number] ("Omaha Gunman Suicide Notes," 2007)

### **Case 6: Stephen Kazmierczak**

On February 14, 2008, a 27-year-old alumnus of Northern Illinois University killed five people using a rifle and semiautomatic pistols before taking his own life during a shootout with police. Stephen Kazmierczak was born August 26, 1980, in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, to two parents and an older sister, Susan, with whom he had a conflicted relationship until his death (Northern Illinois University, 2008). He had an extensive history of mental illness throughout his life, suffering from depression and schizoaffective disorder and attempting suicide nine times, resulting in numerous hospitalizations (Northern Illinois University, 2008). Kazmierczak's erratic behavior extended to disruptions in school, where he exhibited anxiety, paranoia, anger, and extreme sensitivity. In school, teachers noticed themes of violence in his writings. He had minor infractions with the police, yet with no charges filed.

Following his graduation from high school in 1998, Kazmierczak attempted suicide, resulting in commitment to a treatment facility. His anger and aggression had become so uncontrollable, his family was afraid of him and did not want him to return



home. At one point during his hospitalization, he claimed to hear voices and have visual hallucinations. After Kazmierczak left the residency program, he was unsuccessful in holding a job, so in 2001, he stopped taking his medications and enlisted in the Army. He was active duty until someone discovered he had falsified his application, leaving out his mental health treatment history (Northern Illinois University, 2008). Kazmierczak returned to Illinois and enrolled in classes at Northern Illinois University, where he excelled, soon becoming a teaching assistant in the Sociology department. Despite a devotion to his studies, Kazmierczak played video games if he was not reading.

During this time, Kazmierczak endured numerous significant life changes. He began to get tattoos, including skulls, Billy the Puppet from the *Saw* movies, and a pentagram. He had an ongoing fascination with guns and mass school shooters, studying Seung-Hui Cho and the Columbine killers extensively. Despite having a girlfriend with whom he would go to shooting ranges, Kazmierczak was sexually active with multiple partners. He continued playing extremely violent video games such as *Call of Duty 4* and *Halo*, a first-person shooter game that uses sniper rifles as weapons.

Kazmierczak stopped going to classes to work as a correctional officer. He enjoyed the training he received at this job because it centered on how to use shotguns (Vann, 2009). He spoke to a friend about admiring Hitler, Ted Bundy, and Jeffrey Dahmer, discussing in detail the attacks by Cho and the Columbine killers (Vann, 2009). E-mails Kazmierczak sent to his former girlfriend pertained to the actions and writings of Cho. Shortly after his mother died, he lost his job. The more he isolated himself, the more

he researched mass murderers. His plan for an attack solidified and his revenge fantasy intensified, as did his desire for fame.

The night before the shooting, Kazmierczak called his ex-girlfriend, closed his e-mail accounts, took the SIM card out of his phone, and erased his computer hard drive, data law enforcement could not recover. The following afternoon, he entered the Cole Hall lecture hall wearing a black shirt that read “Terrorist,” a coat, and a black hat, shooting as he opened the doors. Students who moved he shot; those who remained still he did not. Kazmierczak showed no emotion during the shooting, ultimately killing himself during a shootout with law enforcement.

#### **Case 7: Jiverly Wong**

On April 3, 2009, a 41-year-old Americanized Vietnamese citizen used two handguns to kill 13 people at the American Civic Association immigration center in Binghamton, New York, before fatally shooting himself. Jiverly Wong was born in South Vietnam, immigrating to the United States with his parents in the late 1980s. Soon after their arrival, Wong’s father took him to a local hospital for hallucinations and delusions; however, the son received little treatment (Knoll, 2010). Wong had a difficult time adjusting to the move, as evidenced by arrests for fraud and forgery.

After becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1995, Wong moved to Canada, only to return to the United States. Wong was a loner, quiet, shy, angry, depressed, and full of rage. He experienced extreme delusions in regards to law enforcement, as he thought they taunted him, visiting his home. Wong had been married and divorced and had no

children. He lost his job with a vacuum manufacturer and had to go on welfare (“TV Station Gets Gunman’s Death Manifesto,” 2009).

Wong was obsessed with guns and would often practice at a shooting range (Knoll, 2010). As his isolation grew, with no communication with his friends and little with his family, his desire for revenge grew, as did his plan to act on his feelings of rage. He stopped eating for periods at a time and refused to watch television (Knoll, 2010). On the day of the attack, Wong mailed a letter, later called his suicide note. in which he stated:

Dear New Ten Now

I am Jiverly Wong Shooting the people.

The first I want to say sorry I know a little English. I hope you understand all of this. Of course, you need to know why I shooting? Because undercover cop gave me a lot of ass during eighteen years I got seven years and eight month delivery to grocery in the California came back New York on the August 2007.

Let talk about when I live in California. Such as ... copy used 24 hours the technique of ultramodern and camera for burn the chemical in my house. For switch the channel time...For adjust the fan. For made me unbreathable. For made me vomit. For connect the music into my ear.

Undercover cop usual coined some nasty was not true about me and spread a rumour to the receiver and some people know me conduce toward many people predudiced and selfish to me... cop made me lost my job... cop put me became poor. (Langman, 2016c)

Wong continued his rants about law enforcement in the note, giving examples of what he thought they had done to him over the years. His note revealed a man consumed with anger, rage, and delusions (Knoll, 2010). In the package sent to the local television station, Wong enclosed photographs of himself holding two guns and smiling, showing his gun permit and his driver's license ("TV Station Gets Gunman's Death Manifesto," 2009). He further stated in his suicide note:

From 1990 to 1995 New York undercover cop try to get a car accident with me. Such as when I driving on the highway and on the street undercover cop suddenly brake the car stop immediately at the of front my car... cop did it 32 time like that during 1990 to 1995 but I never hit the car.

Many time from 1990 to 1997 at the day time... cop exploit unknown English and went to my house knock the door for harass and domineer. Of course during that time cop coined something was not true about me and spread a rumour nasty like the California cop.

From August 2007 until now cop gave me not to much ass only one time cop leave a message un my voice mail and said «come back your country» after five minute I send a text message to the I said I will call the police and they send it back to me they said they are the police. (Langman, 2016c)

Upon entering the American Civic Association community center, a place where he had attended classes to learn better English, Wong immediately opened fire. He had barricaded the door of the building with his car so people could not get out. Wong wore a

bulletproof vest and dark glasses and did not speak during the attack. He shot himself when he heard police approaching (Knoll, 2010).

### **Case 8: Wade Michael Page**

On August 5, 2012, a 40-year-old former military psychological operations specialist and Army veteran walked into the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and opened fire, killing six people. Wade Michael Page used a semiautomatic pistol to carry out his attack, committing suicide after being wounded by law enforcement. Page was a known White supremacist who appeared to intimidate others. He used and belonged to various White power websites, including Stormfront and Hammerskin (McGreal, 2012).

Page was born on November 11, 1971, and grew up in Littleton, Colorado. His mother died in his early teens, and with no existing relationship with his father, Page lived with his grandmother and aunt until graduating high school (Chandrashekar, 2017). He joined the U.S. Army in 1992 and received assignment to a psychological operations unit at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (McGreal, 2012). During his 6 years in the military (1992 to 1998), Page showed an evident attraction to the National Alliance and the glorification of Adolf Hitler. He soon covered himself in White supremacist tattoos. Page felt as though racism was “reversed” in the military, in that White soldiers received worse treatment and more severe punishment than Black soldiers (Chandrashekar, 2017). The more he became involved in these racist movements, the more his military career was in jeopardy, as he began to exhibit poor performance, failure to report to duty, and drunkenness (McGreal, 2012). The U.S. Army did not ask him to reenlist, demoting him from the rank of Sergeant (McGreal, 2012).

Following his time in the military, Page continued his involvement with the Neo-Nazi culture, playing in bands that promoted Neo-Nazi hate music and posting messages under the name End Apathy on White supremacist websites such as Stormfront, one of the most active online hate forums (Heim, 2012). His presence in the Neo-Nazi music scene was well-known, as Page used his music and White supremacist websites as recruiting tools (Heim, 2012). Page had visited and left comments on the sites so many times that the Southern Poverty Law Center had been tracking him for nearly a decade (Chandrashekar, 2017).

Page was an unfriendly loner who made little eye contact with his neighbors. Many of his neighbors were afraid of Page because of his demeanor, his tattoos, and loud music full of rage and hate, which he played at all hours. During this period, his fantasies of revenge and hate toward individuals who were Black, Jewish, or from other minorities dominated his thoughts, as his isolation increased and his use of White supremacist websites became his only form of communication.

Page planned his attack on a Sunday morning when worshipers would be at the Sikh temple. As shown in video coverage from the temple, Page entered and starting shooting, killing six and wounding four. He shot himself in the head after exchanging gunfire with police, during which he sustained a wound to the stomach (Chandrashekar, 2017).

### **Case 9: Adam Lanza**

On December 14, 2012, a 20-year-old former student of Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, entered the school, killing 26 people; before the school

attack, he had shot and killed his mother at home. Adam Lanza used a rifle and a handgun to carry out his crime. He committed suicide at the scene before police could enter.

Lanza was born on April 22, 1992, the second of two boys. He suffered from psychological problems as a child, receiving a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome when he was 13 years old. He had challenges with developmental milestones and language delays and made very little eye contact with others (Steinkoler, 2017). His parents divorced when he was 10 years old, making his mother overly protective of her son. Lanza exhibited numerous problems in school, leading him to become homeschooled and later obtaining his GED (Steinkoler, 2017). Lanza displayed extreme mood swings and depression that required medication. He applied to a local community college, writing an entrance essay about pedophilia (Steinkoler, 2017). Lanza did not last long at college because of his violent outbursts and inability to concentrate, as well as his preoccupation with violent video games.

Lanza was antisocial and isolated, engaging only in video games, computer activities, and going to the shooting range with his mother, who believed these trips would be an opportunity to connect with her son. Lanza's obsession with guns grew, as did his obsession with mass killers. He created a 7-by-4-foot spreadsheet of 500 mass murderers, including the weapons they used, ranking them on the number of people they killed (Coleman, 2014). He admired the Columbine shooters, identifying them as his peers (Coleman, 2014). In his bedroom, Lanza created a shrine to Harris and Klebold that

included newspaper clippings, pictures, and other memorabilia (Coleman, 2014). On the forum, “Shocked Beyond Belief”, Lanza wrote:

One of the major reasons why Columbine is still a (relatively) popular topic in recent years is because of the potential it allows for speculation. This would not exist if they had lived because their actual thoughts and experiences, the contents of the basement tapes/Nixon tape, and everything like that would probably be well-known. (Coleman, 2014)

Lanza expressed strong feelings about society as well as his thoughts concerning mass murder on the forum “Shocked Beyond Belief” using the name Smiggles. NAME OF AUTHOR (YEAR) said:

Burn all the PS3, Wii, 360, Flatscreens, Smart phones, iPad...Literature is simply another coping mechanism for children who've been mindfucked by culturapists. They're carried to other worlds in the stream of semen.” This was followed by: I don't think there should be any age of consent, but since no matter what I say everyone will accuse me of just wanting to justify some latent pedophila I allegedly have. (Coleman, 2014)

He followed this message with, “I castrated myself when I was 15 to rebel against society” (Coleman, 2014).

Based on his posts, Lanza was infatuated with mass killers and the fame that followed their attacks, something for which he longed. Lanza's fame-seeking fantasy is evident throughout his posts on the “Shocked Beyond Belief” forum, including the following:



While Jared Loughner apparently is one of the very few mass murderers who is legitimately delusional (Although I haven't completely determined that yet: crimes which receive a lot of media attention sort of irritate me and I usually defer reading about them for a while). he would have likely said exactly the same thing if Jared Loughner had been phenomenally eloquent. Like everyone, he advises to treat the symptoms rather than determining whatever causes there may be.

Overall, he was fumbling around not saying anything meaningful.

The way which this particular incident is being treated is frustrating to me. Jiverly Voong inflicted a similar number of casualties with more than double the deaths not too long ago, and he was virtually ignored compared to this. I hate how the lives of state-sanctioned things are treated as if they're more valuable than that of anyone else. (Coleman, 2014)

He also expressed his thoughts about death and suicide:

It seems like an irrelevant question to be concerned about. No one can obtain knowledge about what happens after death, nor if anything is required to do for the deceased. If some ritual was necessary, no one could know about it nor have any knowledge about the requirements of it. Perhaps there's a magical platypus who requires that you burn a wooden effigy of a hamster so that the deceased can ride it to the gates of Valhalla. From observing other people who have died, the only conclusion which can be reached is that nothing happens. Treating death as if it's the end of everything would be the most prudent course of action because believing that something happens is contrary to the observable world of the life

which you are certain about having, thus deluding you into behaving in a way which could negatively impact your life. (Coleman, 2014)

On the morning of the attack, Lanza killed his mother while she was sleeping, destroyed his hard drive, and left a picture of himself holding guns to his head at home before heading to Sandy Hook Elementary School (Steinkoler, 2017). He shot his way through the locked doors of the school and began moving from classroom to classroom, wearing military attire and a mask, shooting children, teachers, and staff using his mother's rifle and handgun. He spoke during the attack, saying "Look at me!" and "Come over here and look at them!" referring to the children he had already killed (Steinkoler, 2017). His attack ended when he killed himself with a gunshot to the head.

#### **Case 10: Elliott Rodger**

On May 23, 2014, a 22-year-old college student killed six people in Isla Vista, California. Elliott Rodger was born in London, England, moving to the United States with his parents at the age of 5 years (White, 2017). His father was an up-and-coming filmmaker and his mother a research assistant. Elliott felt inferior to his father. His parents divorced 2 years after the move. During early childhood, Rodger suffered from depression, a possible mood disorder, and Asperger syndrome (White, 2017). He was extremely shy, narcissistic, socially awkward, and extremely jealous of those with wealth, despite coming from a privileged family. Rodger expressed extreme dislike toward his stepmother. He was under ongoing psychiatric care, although he rarely followed the advice. At the age of 11, Rodger discovered the Internet, social media, and video games, which changed his life (White, 2017). Rodger stated in his manifesto:

It was at eleven years old when I first started using the internet on a regular basis. The internet was still considered a new phenomenon at the time. Before eleven, I roughly knew how to browse websites and use email, but once I fully immersed myself in it, it really fascinated me. The popular social networking tool at that period was AOL instant messenger, or “AIM”. I made my first AIM account on my mother’s computer, and she would let have one hour a day to explore it. I joined a few chat rooms. The prospect of talking to strangers from a computer was new and astounding to me. (Rodger, n.d., p. 30)

He described his love of video games, writing:

Now that I was able to play World of Warcraft at my mother’s house with no limitations, aside from school and homework, I became very addicted to the game and my character in it. It was all I cared about. I was so immersed in the game that I no longer cared about what people thought of me. I only saw school as something that took time away from WoW. I became very bored at school, mainly due to the fact that I was still the invisible quiet kid. To alleviate this boredom, I started to act weird and annoying to people just to gain attention. ...

World of Warcraft was the only thing I had left to live for. My grades at Crespi dropped dramatically. I just didn’t care anymore. I hated that school. I didn’t think about the future. The only thing I gave any serious thought to was my WoW character. I had become very powerful in the game, and I was in one of the best guilds. With this guild, I participated in lots of five-hour raid events to collect better gear and armor for my character. (Rodger, n.d., pp. 41, 47)

His obsession with video games only enhanced his isolation as he grew increasingly frustrated. Rodger documented his anger toward girls; because he was still a virgin, he felt women did not notice him and that he was inferior to other men. He wrote, “The more lonely I felt, the more angry I became. The anger slowly built up inside me throughout all of the dark years” (Rodger, n.d., p. 56). He left behind a 137-page manifesto he titled *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliott Rodger* in which he documented his life, including his loathing toward women and his hatred of men for, he thought, making him feel inferior. Rodger acknowledged his revenge and fame-seeking fantasies, which intensified over time. He wrote:

I developed a very high sex drive, and it would always remain like this. This was the start of hell for me. Going through puberty utterly doomed my existence. It condemned me to live a life of suffering and unfulfilled desires. Even at that young age, I felt depressed because I wanted sex, yet I felt unworthy of it. I didn't think I was ever going to experience sex in reality, and I was right. I never did. I was finally interested in girls, but there was no way I could ever get them. *And so my starvation began.* (Rodger, n.d., p. 47)

As time went on, his fantasies became more vivid and detailed:

I began to have fantasies of becoming very powerful and stopping everyone from having sex. I wanted to take their sex away from them, just like they took it away from me. I saw sex as an evil and barbaric act, all because I was unable to have it. This was the major turning point. My anger made me stronger inside. This was when I formed my ideas that sex should be outlawed. It is the only way to make

the world a fair and just place. If I can't have it, I will destroy it. That's the conclusion I came to, right then and there. (Rodger, n.d., p. 47)

Rodger continued to obsess about his interactions with and observations of females, writing:

This is how girls are, and I was starting to realize it. This was what truly opened my eyes to how brutal the world is. The most meanest and depraved of men come out on top, and women flock to these men. Their evil acts are rewarded by women; while the good, decent men are laughed at. It is sick, twisted, and wrong in every way. I hated the girls even more than the bullies because of this. The sheer cruelty of the world around me was so intense that I will never recover from the mental scars. Any experience I ever had before never traumatized me as much as this. (Rodger, n.d., p. 48)

These observations manifested into extreme hatred, as Rodger related:

My hatred and rage towards all women festered inside me like a plague. Their very existence is the cause of all of my torture, pain and suffering throughout my life. My life turned into a living hell after I started desiring them when I hit puberty. I desire them intensely, but I could never have them. I could never have the experience of holding hands with a beautiful girl and walking on a moonlit beach, I could never embrace a girlfriend and feel her warmth and love, I could never have passionate sex with a girl and drift off to sleep with her sexy body beside me. Women deemed me unworthy of having them, and so they deprived me of an enjoyable youth, while giving their love and sex to other boys. In all of

those years I suffered a life of sexual starvation and unfulfilled desires. I will never get those years back. My life has been wasted, all because women hate me so much. (Rodger, n.d., p. 117)

Writing about his current state, Rodger documented his revenge against women in language indicative of narcissism:

I had nothing left to live for but revenge. Women must be punished for their crimes of rejecting such a magnificent gentleman as myself. All of those popular boys must be punished for enjoying heavenly lives and having sex with all the girls while I had to suffer in lonely virginity. (Rodger, n.d., p. 118)

Before driving to Isla Vista, Rodger stabbed to death his two roommates and their friend. He e-mailed his manifesto and a video he called “Day of Retribution” to his parents, some acquaintances, professors, and mental health workers. He had well documented his plan in the manifesto and a series of videos he posted to YouTube (Helfgott, 2015; White, 2017). He wrote:

I realized that I had to start planning and preparing for the Day of Retribution, even though I hadn’t yet had any idea of what day that would be.

My first act of preparation was the purchase my first handgun. I did this quickly and hastily, at a local gun shop called Goleta Gun and Supply. I had already done some research on handguns, and I decided to purchase the Glock 34 semiautomatic pistol, and efficient and highly accurate weapon. After I picked up the handgun, I brought it back to my room and felt a new sense of power. I was

now armed. Who's the alpha male now bitches? I thought to myself, regarding all of the girls who've looked down on me in the past. (Rodger, n.d., p. 112-113)

Upon his arrival in Isla Vista, Rodger first tried to enter a sorority house to inflict pain on the women he perceived as having rejected him. When he was unable to enter the building, he began shooting women on the sidewalk. Next, he drove around Isla Vista, shooting at people and using his vehicle as a weapon (White, 2017). After a police chase and an exchange of gunfire, Rodger shot and killed himself (White, 2017). Rodger used knives, handguns, and his vehicle as weapons during his attacks (White, 2017).

#### **Case 11: Christopher Harper-Mercer**

On October 1, 2015, Christopher Harper-Mercer, a 26-year-old student at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, shot and killed nine people, including eight students and one professor. After police wounded him in a shootout, he killed himself. Christopher Harper-Mercer used several guns to carry out his attack. He was fixated on religion and identified himself as a White supremacist, expressing his disgust with society, government, and various religious views (Norton, 2015).

Harper-Mercer was born July 26, 1989, in Southern California. His parents divorced during his adolescence, after which he lived with his mother and had no relationship with his father. His overly protective mother struggled financially, and his behavioral problems caused her much hardship. Diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at a young age (Anderson, 2017), Harper-Mercer was placed in a school for children with behavioral problems, graduating in 2009 (Healy & Lovett, 2015). Harper-Mercer expressed himself through violent writings in school, online message boards, and his

manifesto. He was angry at the world and cynical about society, as evidenced in the following passage:

Just like me those people were denied everything they deserved, everything they wanted. Though we may have been born bad, society left us no recourse, no way to be good. I have been forced to align myself with demonic forces. What was once an involuntary relationship has now become an alignment, a service. I now serve the demonic Heirarchy. When I die will become one of them. A demon. And I will return to kill again and again. (Harper-Mercer, n.d., p. 1)

His behavior would range from anger and rage to depression. He would research mass murderers during times of isolation, igniting his fantasies of revenge and fame. Harper-Mercer stated in his manifesto, "Now for the part I'm sure the media will love. My interests. My interests include listening to music, watching movies, internet piracy. My only solace in online life is posting on Kat.cr as the user lithium\_love" (Harper-Mercer, n.d., p. 3). He came to the following conclusion regarding mass murderers:

I have been interested in mass shooters for years. I noticed where they always go wrong is they don't work fast enough and their death toll is not anywhere near where it should be. They shoot wildly instead of targeted blasts. They also don't take on the cops. Why kill other people but you won't takeout the cops. (Harper-Mercer, n.d., p. 3)

Via the Internet and social media, Harper-Mercer felt a sense of connection with previous mass murderers, including Seung-Hui Cho, Elliott Rodger, Dylan Klebold, Eric



Harris, and Adam Lanza. His admiration for these and other mass killers grew over time, to the point that he stated:

My whole life has been one lonely enterprise. One loss after another. And here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society like to deny people like me these things. People who are elite people who stand with gods. People like Elliott Rodger, Vester Flanagan, The Columbine kids, Adam Lanza, and Seung Cho. (Harper-Mercer, n.d., p. 1)

He further expressed:

So, in conclusion this is my manifesto. I hope all who have read it enjoyed it and find inspiration in it. Learn from what I've done. I know this is not as long as Elliott Rodgers but its still good. Elliott is a god. For those wondering, I do not have any social media. If anything should happen to this manifesto on this hard drive there is a original copy on my computer. For the Vestor Flanagans, Elliott Rodgers, Seung Cho, Adam Lanzas of the world, I do this. For all those who never took me seriously this is for you. For all those who haven't made their stand I do this. I am the martyr for all those like me. To quote Seung Cho, "Today I die like Jesus Christ." (Harper-Mercer, n.d., p. 5)

Harper-Mercer was obsessed with handguns and rifles and, like Adam Lanza, would go to the shooting range with his mother on a regular basis (Anderson, 2017; Healy & Lovett, 2015). Like Lanza's mother, Ms. Harper collected guns and thought that going to the shooting range would provide a connection with her son, who, for the most part, was a loner with a violent temper (Anderson, 2017). In 2008, Harper-Mercer

enlisted in the military; however, he attempted suicide during basic training and was released after only 5 weeks (Healy & Lovett, 2015). Harper-Mercer underwent hospitalization for his suicidal thoughts and tendencies.

He began his attack in an early-morning writing class, killing nine students. He carried numerous guns along with a large amount of ammunition, indicating he had planned a much longer attack. Before he would shoot a student, he would ask if they believed in God, laugh, and then kill them. In addition to a typed version of his manifesto left at the scene, Harper-Mercer also left writings in his online posts recovered after his attack (Healy & Lovett, 2015). After engaging in hallway gunfire with the police, Harper-Mercer retreated to the classroom and killed himself.

#### **Case 12: Devin Patrick Kelley**

On November 5, 2017, a 26-year-old ex-U.S. Air Force airman entered the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, and opened fired on the congregation. Devin Patrick Kelley killed 26 people using a semiautomatic rifle. He died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head after being shot twice by an individual outside of the church as he was leaving (Montgomery, Mele, & Fernandez, 2017).

Kelley was born on February 21, 1991, in New Braunfels, Texas. His childhood was troubled, from disciplinary problems at school to drug offenses. Kelley enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after graduating high school in 2010, continuing his military career until dismissal for bad conduct in 2014 (“Who Was Texas Church Gunman,” 2017). He was a loner with feelings of anger, depression, and anxiety and had a short temper.

His aggressive nature, along with his constant need for control, jeopardized his military career within the first 2 years. Kelley assaulted his wife and fractured his stepson's skull, which led to a year of confinement, mental evaluation, and demotion ("Who Was Texas Church Gunman," 2017). He was legally prohibited from purchasing or possessing a firearm or any type of ammunition. Kelley's wife divorced him while he was confined; soon after his release, Kelley had to leave the U.S. Air Force for bad conduct.

Kelley soon married his second wife, with the couple living in a barn behind his parents' home. His controlling nature continued, as did his violent tendencies. Although he had attended church numerous times with his wife and in-laws prior to the First Baptist Church attack, Kelley proclaimed to be an atheist and would laugh during sermons. He became obsessed with guns and Charleston, South Carolina, church shooter Dylann Roof, posting pictures on Facebook of rifles and expressing his admiration for Roof (Brown, 2017). One post featured a quote by Mark Twain: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it" ("Who Was Texas Church Gunman," 2017). Kelley bought animals from Craigslist to use for target practice. Although Kelley faced charges of animal cruelty, they were dismissed. He was in constant conflict with his mother-in-law, threatening her via text message on the day of the shooting ("Who Was Texas Church Gunman," 2017).

Kelley's fantasies of revenge and hate escalated. He became more isolated and depressed as his obsession with mass murderers grew. He bought a semiautomatic rifle,

passing the background check because the U.S. Air Force had failed to enter his infractions and mental issues into their database (Brown, 2017).

On the morning of the attack, Kelly dressed in all black with a ballistic vest (Montgomery et al., 2017). He cuffed his wife to the bed and went to the church. Kelley parked his vehicle across the street from the church and starting shooting from outside as he worked his way through the doors. Although his wife's mother had not attended church that Sunday, her grandmother did and was among the dead ("Who Was Texas Church Gunman," 2017). Outside the church, a citizen shot Kelley as he headed back to his vehicle, with other individuals following the shooter by car as he drove away (Montgomery et al., 2017). During the chase, Kelley called his parents and wife to apologize for the killing and to tell them he was not coming home. When found in his car, Kelley was dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

### **Common Themes in Antecedent and Event-Specific Behavior**

After analyzing publicly available information for copycat behaviors and social media influence among the 12 offenders, I entered data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with three areas of focus. I analyzed each offender's behaviors before, during, and after their attacks to identify themes aligned with the conceptual framework. I concentrated on the areas of copycat behavior, suicide contagion, and media contagion with regard to mass murderers and social media in line with social learning theory.

Exploring these three target areas for each offender allowed themes to emerge, and I was able to arrive at several conclusions. Based on my analysis, the most common antecedent behaviors exhibited by these offenders were as follows: Eleven (92%) of the

offenders expressed themselves using social media and or the Internet. Ten (83%) of the offenders had fantasies of revenge, (66%) related fame-seeking fantasies, and (16%) expressed sadistic fantasies. Seven (58%) of the 12 perpetrators displayed more than one type of fantasy. Eleven (92%) of the offenders exhibited suicidal ideation, with four (33%) having known suicide attempts prior to their mass attack. All of the offenders exhibited extreme isolation before their attack, along with violent behavior or the expression of violent thoughts. These cases shared other characteristics, as five (42%) attempted to enlist or served in the military, 11 (92%) had noted depression during their lifetimes, five (42%) practiced at shooting ranges during their planning phase, and six (50%) played violent video games.

Based upon my findings of similar and imitated event-specific behavior, all 12 offenders used a firearm during the commission of their crime, with three (25%) employing multiple types of weapons; in addition, all used a firearm to kill themselves. Nine (75%) of the perpetrators wore black garb or military clothing during their mass attack. Three (25%) of these offenders killed family members or acquaintances before they carried out their mass killings. Finally, all 12 (100%) of the offenders used suicide as the final act of violence and the conclusion to their plan.

### **Examination of Offender Communications**

Upon analyzing the offenders' communications for themes as well as linguistic analysis, I recorded my data in a master codebook, subsequently entering the communications into NVivo 12 for further qualitative analysis. This process allowed me to recognize similarities and imitation among the 12 offenders. Using both the master

codebook and the query search in NVivo 12 enabled me to identify commonalities, adding to the themes found in the previous analysis of antecedent and event-specific behavior.

After examining the communications of the 12 offenders for themes, I was able to uncover several conclusions. Ten (83%) of the perpetrators expressed admiration of previous mass murderers or referred to them in their communications, with five (42%) making reference to or expressing admiration for the Columbine killers on social media, outside writings, and/or verbal leakage. Eight (66%) made reference to suicide or ending their life, five (42%) noted a dissatisfaction with society, eight (66%) mentioned anger or rage, and five (42%) spoke of killing others (e.g., kill, killed, killing, kills). Eleven (92%) of these offenders wrote or spoke of depression (e.g., depressed, depressing, depression, depressives). Five (42%) used verbiage such as God, godly, or gods, exhibiting narcissistic tendencies. Finally, all 12 offenders documented hate (e.g., hate, hatred, hateful, hates) in one or more of their written or verbal communications.

After analyzing the data relating to antecedent behavior, event-specific behavior, and social media influence focusing on imitation and similarities, I was able to identify common characteristics and behaviors. Six themes emerged from my analysis of the offenders' behaviors, communications, and copycat behaviors, with a focus on social media influence; these were: (a) preoccupation with previous mass murderers, (b) suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts and planning, and prior suicide attempts), (c) extreme isolation and computer use (social media, Internet, and violent video games), (d) presence of copycat behavior, (e) fame-seeking fantasies and media attention, and

(f) preoccupation with the Columbine shooters (see Table 1). Other areas of interest emerged from the data in relation to copycat behaviors, mass murderers, and social media influence, which included hate and hate websites and military interest.

Table 1

*Presence of Themes Relating to Copycat Behavior and Social Media Influence*

Case	Theme					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dylan Klebold	x	x			x	
Eric Harris	x	x			x	
Jeffrey Weise	x	x*		x		x
Seung-Hui Cho	x	x	X	x	x	x
Robert Hawkins	x	x*	X	x	x	
Stephen Kazmierczak	x	x*	X	x	x	x
Jiverly Wong		x				
Wade Michael Page	x		X			
Adam Lanza	x	x	X	x	x	x
Elliot Rodger		x	X	x	x	
Christopher Harper-Mercer	x	x*	X	x	x	x
Devin Patrick Kelley	x	x	X	x		

*Note.* The six themes gathered from the study participants that align with the study's research questions are presented in the table as follows: (1) preoccupation with previous mass murderers; (2) suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts and planning; \* denotes prior suicide attempts); (3) extreme isolation and computer use (social media, Internet, and violent video games); (4) presence of copycat behavior; (5) fame-seeking fantasies and media attention; and (6) preoccupation with the Columbine shooters.

### Summary and Transition

This study was an exploration of 12 U.S. public mass murderers who committed suicide and the influence of social media in relation to copycat suicide. I analyzed publicly available data that focused on antecedent behavior, event-specific behavior, and the communications of each offender to identify common characteristics and behaviors. I read, analyzed, and coded each piece of data multiple times to ensure validity, reliability, and transferability of the results from this qualitative study. Findings were adequate to answer both research questions.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the purpose and nature of the study, as well as the basis for the study. I summarize the findings of the research with regard to current literature on mass murderers to extend knowledge of copycat behaviors and social media influence among this study's 12 cases. I examine limitations and implications and provide recommendations for further research. Finally, I discuss this study and its potential for social change.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Crime and violence receive extensive exposure in the media. The frequency of mass murder in the United States has increased since 2010 (APA, 2016; Bonn, 2018; Hickey, 2016; Rocque & Duwe, 2018). Social media has changed the way people exchange information and opinions, making the sharing of ideas nearly instantaneous. Previous research has focused on imitation and mass murderers in relation to suicide and media contagion, and copycat effects. Would-be mass murderers are influenced by previous mass murderers, with the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado, the most referenced.

A number of psychological scholars have focused on mental illness and gun control with regards to mass murderers, as well as, media influence, including print and national news outlets in relation to mass killers and their actions. Although researchers have acknowledged a connection with mass murderers and copycat behaviors, a thorough examination of the relationship between suicide of mass murderers and the influence of social media had not yet followed.

To address this research gap, I analyzed data relating to antecedent behavior, event-specific behavior, and social media influence focusing on imitation, from which I was able to identify common characteristics and behaviors. Six themes emerged after an analysis of the offenders' actions, communications, and copycat behaviors with regard to social media influence: (a) preoccupation with previous mass murderers, (b) suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts and planning, and prior suicide attempts), (c) extreme

isolation and computer use (social media, Internet, and violent video games), (d) presence of copycat behavior, (e) fame-seeking fantasies and media attention, and (f) preoccupation with the Columbine shooters. Two other areas of interest that emerged were hate and hate websites with a military focus.

The research questions were as follows:

*RQ1:* How does repeated media coverage of mass murderers influence copycat suicide?

*RQ2:* How does social media portray the copycat suicides of mass murderers?

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Imitation and suicide contagion, media contagion, and copycat effects have been explored in relation to mass murderers. Mental illness and gun control in the area of mass murderers and their actions have garnered significant interest. Media influence and mass murderers and their behaviors have been examined, focusing on print and national news outlets; however, current literature lacked a thorough examination of copycat suicide and social media influence.

Based upon limited prior research relating to mass murderers, copycat suicide, and social media influence, I used specific themes to guide this qualitative research study. Thematic analysis required the examination of antecedent and event-specific behaviors based on transcendent fantasy theory and social learning theory. With my results, I was able to identify six themes common among public mass murderers who committed suicide after their attacks.

Additional concepts related to the six themes identified in this study that may be worthy of further research include feelings of hate and use of hate websites with a military interest. All 12 offenders expressed feelings of hate in their written or verbal communications, with seven (58%) using hate websites or online platforms. Five of the cases (42%) expressed interest or enlisted in the military. Wade Michael Page served in the military, which exposed him to racist materials, groups, and behaviors, thus prompting his involvement in the Neo-Nazi movement and encouraging his feelings of hate and superiority.

The six identified themes validated that would-be mass murderers relate to previous mass murderers' behavior through social media and their imitating actions. Social media platforms provide a space for repeated coverage of violent crimes to large populations (Levin & Wiest, 2018). The 12 offenders in this study expressed themselves through written and verbal communications, with 10 (83%) making reference to or expressing admiration for previous mass murderers and five (42%) of whom specified the Columbine killers. These findings provide a better understanding of mass murderers, copycat suicide, and social media influence.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations in this study, beginning with the inability to transfer qualitative case study results to a broader population. I chose offenders who met specific criteria for this study. My role as the sole researcher was another limitation, meaning the only person to code, analyze and present data. Other limitations included

threats to confirmability, credibility, and dependability because of possible human error, as I was the only individual to code, analyze, and present the data.

Findings from this sample of 12 individuals are not generalizable to all mass murderers; thus, the results are specific to this sample only. Purposeful sampling based on the availability of data was another limitation to adequately represent the entire population. Finally, legal restrictions prevented access to some information, as did unavailability due to the removal of offenders' communications from public access.

### **Recommendations**

Future research opportunities in this subject area are possible based on the findings in this study. Scholars could replicate the study using a sample of offenders from a different country. They could also focus on specific types of public mass murderers, such as school shooters or terrorists. A similar study could involve the examination of more recent offenders as additional mass attacks occur in the United States.

Another potential field of study could be social media influence and the reporting of violent crime, as 11 of the 12 offenders used social media or the Internet to express themselves. Researchers can look at specific sources of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, hate websites via the Internet. All 12 offenders mentioned hate in their written or verbal communications. Finally, a review of how many times the media provided coverage to specific crimes deserves further study.

Lastly, researchers may want to explore public mass murderers who did not commit suicide, but were rather caught by or surrendered to law enforcement. One could review these offender's communications, as well as their antecedent and event-specific

behaviors. This could potentially provide insights into another sample of mass murderers in terms of similarities.

### **Implications**

Following an exhaustive review of previous literature on mass murder, I was able to identify a gap in the literature regarding the connection between the copycat suicide of mass killers and the influence of social media. Two theories provided the groundwork for this study: social learning and transcendent fantasy. I used these two theories to gather, analyze, and code data to evaluate similarities and behaviors among 12 individuals who committed mass murder in the United States. Those study subjects were Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris, Jeffrey Weise, Seung-Hui Cho, Robert Hawkins, Stephen Kazmierczak, Jiverly Wong, Wade Michael Page, Elliott Rodger, Christopher Harper-Mercer, and Devin Patrick Kelley.

Six main themes emerged from the findings, along with two additional concepts. The main themes were (a) preoccupation with previous mass murderers, (b) suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts and planning, and prior suicide attempts), (c) extreme isolation and computer use (social media, Internet, and violent video games), (d) presence of copycat behavior, (e) fame-seeking fantasies and media attention, and (f) preoccupation with the Columbine shooters. The additional concepts of hate and hate websites and military interest indicate the need for further examination.

The results of this study expand awareness and understanding of social media influence and imitated behaviors—more specifically, suicide among mass murderers. Findings could inspire further research, thus providing more information on a complex

subset of the population. Social change can come from bringing awareness to the public, law enforcement, media outlets, and other stakeholders regarding mass murderers, social media, and copycat suicide, perhaps reducing the number of future public mass murderers and attacks.

Dahmen (2018) found 30% of mass killings over the past decade to be inspired by media coverage of similar acts. According to Langman (2018a), mass murderers imitate the behaviors of previous mass killers. The media give an extensive amount of coverage to violent crime (Levin & West, 2018). Social media has made it not only easier for individuals to obtain information but to share information and research and voice opinions in seconds. In my study, 11 (92%) of the 12 offenders expressed themselves using social media or the Internet, with 10 (83%) showing admiration to previous mass murderers or making reference to such killers in written or oral communications. Meindl and Ivy (2018) found that increased awareness of mass killings correlates with the higher risk of future attacks. In addition to acts of mass murder, high-profile suicides receive significant attention in the media, leading to imitation (Meindl & Ivy, 2018). Considering that 40% of all mass murderers commit suicide, coverage of high-profile suicides is significant. The attention the media give mass murderers creates role models for like-minded individuals (Lankford & Madfis, 2018b).

It is important for the public to be aware of the role the media plays in their lives and actions. Ortiz and Khin (2018) found that 86% of adults use the Internet, with 90% of teenagers going online daily. Forty percent of public mass shooters commit suicide (Capellan, 2016; Lankford, 2015a; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Murray, 2017b; Silva &

Capellan, 2019). Suicide contagion and media contagion have a recognized connection with the act of mass murder (Chen, 2018; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Lee, 2018). The media have censored the coverage of certain topics, such as celebrity suicides and names of the victims of sexual assault (Follman, 2015a; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a; Meindl & Ivy, 2017). Responsible reporting is needed in areas that can produce imitative actions in others, such as mass attacks. Findings in this study indicate a connection between copycat behavior and extensive media attention, such as that the Columbine shooting received, with five (42%) of the offenders in this study making reference to Klebold and Harris or expressing admiration for them.

The media are responsible for what and how they report incidents. The use of trigger or high-impact words relating to a topic to secure the attention of the public can often produce negative effects. The psychological community must acknowledge and address the stigma associated with topics such as suicide, mental illness, and mass murderers. Acts of mass murder are often planned over long periods. Recently, the media have attempted to modify how they report violent crimes, such as not excessively using the perpetrator's name or showing the offender's photograph, instead focusing more on the victims of the attack to reduce attention to the fame-seeking offenders (Lankford & Madfis, 2018a).

Findings from this study do not indicate that all individuals who use social media as a source of information will commit an act of violence—more specifically, a mass attack—nor do they mean that individuals who suffer from depression or suicidal ideation will commit a violent crime, suicide, or both. On the other hand, individuals who exhibit

warning signs of violent behavior should undergo assessment by professionals to determine if a threat exists as well as to identify depression and suicidal ideation. The findings in this study deserve consideration in relation to the current literature regarding mass murderers, suicide, and social media influence.

### **Discussion**

The media have great influence over the public's awareness based on the information they publish and air. Individuals' use of social media as their primary source of information continues to grow exponentially. In this study, I emphasized the negative effects social media influence has on mass murderers and copycat behaviors, more specifically, suicide. According to previous studies, repeated media coverage inspires future mass murders and imitative behaviors (Cordell, 2019; Lee, 2018; Pew et al., 2019). Previous mass murderers may appear as role models or celebrities to those with similar interest. In his manifesto, Seung-Hui Cho referred to the Columbine killers as martyrs. These 12 offenders' communications (both written and video) give insight into their admiration for previous mass murderers, their feelings, and their plan of attack. The preoccupation with previous mass murderers suggests that like-minded people feel a connection with others who commit acts of violence. These communications are easily accessible via the Internet for would-be killers to repeatedly read or watch. Should the communications of mass murderers be accessible via the Internet? Does easy availability promote imitative behaviors in these offenders?

The Columbine shooting served as a blueprint for other mass attacks. The media's portrayal of mass attacks often reads like a script, repeatedly outlining each step taken.



Suicide often appears as a part of, or the conclusion to, a mass murderer's plan. The media place enormous attention on high-profile suicides in addition to violent crimes, which future mass killers notice. Individuals who feel invisible seek the fame the media can provide. The more people they kill, the more media attention they will receive (Christensen, 2017; Lankford & Madfis, 2018a). A mass killing event receives an enormous amount of media attention for hours, days, or even weeks after it has occurred. The incidence of mass attacks rises 20% to 30% in the 12.5 days following a mass shooting (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). Social media has made it easier to disseminate information to a large population in a matter of seconds, which Internet users can repeatedly access and view. Social media provides platforms for people to share their opinions with others who have similar ideas. Mass murderers hold fame-seeking and other fantasies. Could the combination of these fantasies play a role in mass murderers' actions during their attacks and subsequent media attention?

The media must acknowledge their role in society, waiting until they have an accurate understanding of a situation before reporting. Relaying a story without first conducting a thorough investigation results in misleading information, causing confusion, misinformation, and the need to devote further coverage to the event to correct the inaccuracies (O'Toole, 2009). This corrective repetition gives more attention to a sensitive situation than is necessary.

The media also have to take into account that their audience comprises a large population made up of a variety of individuals. The accessibility to information

surrounding mass murderers via the Internet and social media is vast, thus indicating a need for media to better recognize the repercussions of the information they relay.

Mass murderers are complex individuals requiring academic and law enforcement research and study. Their antecedent behaviors range from extreme anger, hatred, suicide attempts, isolation, and excessive computer use to feelings of hopelessness. In their communications, mass murderers express feelings of hate, obsessions with firearms, and military interest. Their firearm fixation extends to practicing at shooting ranges during the planning stages of their attacks. Almost half of the offenders in this study served or attempted to enlist in the military, often finding themselves rejected due to their mental health history. Wade Michael Page served in the U.S. Army for several years, during which time his hate for minority groups increased.

It is imperative that the public is aware of common behaviors in these types of offenders, and know how to react in these situations in a way that will expose the individual to prevent a possible future attack. Mental health professionals, law enforcement, the media, school officials and teachers, and the general public can work together to reduce mass attacks. Educating the public with scholarly research relating to these complex offenders will decrease confusion and bring awareness to relevant issues in society surrounding these individuals and their behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

Previous researchers have focused on the influence of print and national media outlets on mass murders' copycat behaviors (Ortiz & Khin, 2018); however, there were gaps in the literature specific to social media influence and copycat suicide (Auxemery,

2015; Lankford, 2015a, 2018). Because copycat suicide and the influence of social media had not received extensive study, this research served to expand current literature and knowledge in this field. I chose to explore the influence of social media and copycat suicide in mass murderers through a comprehensive examination of antecedent behaviors, event-specific behaviors, and direct communications of 12 offenders who committed suicide after conducting a mass attack. Because a comprehensive examination of social media influence and copycat suicide in mass murderers had not yet occurred, this research expanded upon the current literature.

This was the first study to feature these two areas relating to this population in an in-depth exploration, therefore adding to the research and awareness in the area of copycat suicides and social media influence in mass murderers. My findings confirmed the results of previous scholars and provided additional knowledge to the literature; further research could heighten transferability. Future scholars could replicate this study using a sample of offenders from a different country; alternately, they might focus on a specific type of public mass murderer, such as school shooters or terrorists. Exploration of the themes presented in this study could enable further understanding of mass murderers.

## References

- Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training. (2019). Don't name them. Retrieved from <https://www.dontnamethem.org>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2019). Suicide statistics. Retrieved from <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (2016). "Media contagion" is factor in mass shootings, study says. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2016/08/media-contagion>
- American Psychological Association. (2018). *APA dictionary of psychology*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/fantasy>
- Anderson, R. (2017, September 23). Here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend: Shooter's manifesto offers clues to 2015 Oregon college rampage. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-school-shootings-2017-story.html>
- Anisin, A. (2018). A configurational analysis of 44 US mass shootings: 1975-2015. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 42, 55-73. doi:10.1080/01924036.2016.1233444

- Auxemery, Y. (2015). The mass murderer history: Modern classifications, sociodemographic and psychopathological characteristics, suicidal dimensions, and media contagion of mass murders. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 56*, 149-154. doi:10.1016/j.comppsy.2014.09.003
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. New York, NY: General Learning.
- Berkowitz, D., & Liu, Z. M. (2016). Media errors and the “nutty professor”: Riding the journalistic boundaries of the Sandy Hook shootings. *Journalism, 17*, 155-172. doi:10.1177/1464884914552266
- Böckler, N., Roth, V., Stetten, L., & Zick, A. (2014). Targeted school violence and the web of causes: Risk factors and the problems of specificity. *International Journal of Developmental Science, 8*, 49-51. doi:10.3233/DEV-140146
- Bonn, S. (2018, February 22). The mass shooting-suicide connection. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/.../the-mass-shooting-suicide-connection>
- Brown, S. R. (2017, November 10). Texas church killer admired Dylann Roof for Charleston slaughter, said he bought dogs on Craigslist for target practice. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/texas-church-killer-admired-dylann-roof-charleston-slaughter-article-1.3622981>
- Bubar, J. (2018, December 10). Is social media fueling hate? *New York Times Upfront*. Retrieved from <https://www.scholastic.com/issues/2018/19-.../is-social-media-fueling-hate.html>

- Budenz, A., Purtle, J., Klassen, A., Yom-Tov, E., Yudell, M., & Massey, P. (2018). The case of a mass shooting and violence-related mental illness stigma on Twitter. *Journal of Stigma and Health*, *1*, 1-10. doi:10.1037/sah0000155
- Bushman, B. J. (2018). Narcissism, fame seeking, and mass shootings. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *62*, 229-241. doi:10.1177/0002764217739660
- Capellan, J. A. (2016). *Looking upstream: A sociological investigation of mass public shootings* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 1832048098).
- Chandrashekar, S. (2017). Engendering threat in the guise of protection: Orientalism and Sikh vulnerability. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, *12*, 366-381. doi:10.1080/17447143.2017.1371183
- Chen, L. (2018). *The effects of media coverage on mass shootings in the United States* (Unpublished Master's thesis). Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA.
- Cho idolized Columbine killers. (2016, May 7). *Associated Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.denverpost.com/007/04/18/cho-idolized-columbine-killers/>
- Christensen, J. (2017, October 5). Why the US has the most mass shootings. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2015/08/27/health/u-s-most-mass-shootings/index.html>
- Church gunman's wife says he cuffed her to bed, said he'd be "right back" before rampage. (2018, August 13). *CBS News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sutherland-springs-texas-church-gunman-devin-kelley-wife-speaks-out/>

Coleman, R. (2014). Adam Lanza's "Shocked Beyond Belief" posts. Version 1.0.

Retrieved from [https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/lanza\\_posts-1.0\\_1.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/lanza_posts-1.0_1.pdf)

Cordell, K. (2019, April). The news coverage of Columbine helped turn the tragedy into an international phenomenon. 5280. Retrieved from

<https://columbine.5280.com/the-news-coverage-of-columbine-helped-turn-the-tragedy-into-an-international-phenomenon/>

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dahmen, N. S. (2018). Visually reporting mass shooting: U.S. newspaper photographic coverage of three mass school shootings. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 163-180. doi:10.1177/0002764218756921

Dahmen, N. S., Abdenour, J., McIntyre, K., & Noga-Styron, K. E. (2018). Covering mass shootings: Journalists' perceptions of coverage and factors influencing attitudes. *Journalism Practice*, 12, 456-476. doi:10.1080/17512786.2017.1326832

Davey, M. (2005, March 24). Signs of danger were missed in a troubled teenager' life. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/24/us/signs-of-danger-were-missed-in-a-troubled-teenagers-life.html>

- DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Marshall, P. L., & McCulloch, A. W. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project. *Field Methods, 23*, 136-155.  
doi:10.1177/1525822X10388468
- Dietz, P. E. (1986). Mass, serial, and sensational homicides. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 62*, 477-491. Retrieved from <https://nyam.org/publications/>
- Elsass, H. J., Schildkraut, J., & Stafford, M. C. (2016). Studying school shootings: Challenges and considerations for research. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 41*, 444-464. doi:10.1007/s12103-015-9311-9
- Everytown Research Organization. (2018, December 6). Mass shootings in the United States: 2009-2017. Retrieved from <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/mass-shootings-analysis/>
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2018). Active shooter incidents in the United States in 2016 and 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-us-2016-2017.pdf/view>
- Follman, M. (2015a, October 6). How the media inspires mass shooters. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/10/media-inspires-mass-shooters-copycats/>
- Follman, M. (2015b, November/December). Trigger warnings: Inside the race to identify and stop the next mass shooter. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/10/mass-shootings-threat-assessment-shooter-fbi-columbine/>



- Follman, M. (2019, April 17). Copycat shooters motivated by Columbine keep multiplying, our investigation shows. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2019/04/we-need-to-bury-the-columbine-shooters/>
- Fox, J. A., & Fridel, E. E. (2016). The tenuous connections involving mass shootings, mental illness, and gun laws. *Violence and Gender*, 3, 14-19.  
doi:10.1089/vio.2015.0054
- Fridel, E. E. (2017). A multivariate comparison of family, felony, and public mass murders in the United States. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 00, 1-27.  
doi:10.1177/0886260517739286
- Gramlich, J. (2018, December 27). 7 facts about guns in the U.S. *FactTank*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/27/facts-about-guns-in-united-states/>
- Grinberg, E. (2016, January 25). Gun violence not a mental health issue, experts say, pointing to “anger,” suicides. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2016/01/25/health/gun-violence-mental-health-issue/index.html>
- Guggenheim, L., Jang, S. M., Bae, S. Y., & Neuman, W. R. (2015). The dynamics of issue frame competition in traditional and social media. *Annals of the American Academy*, 659, 207-224. doi:10.1177/0002716215570549

- Hagan, C. R., Podlogar, M. C., & Joiner, T. E. (2015). Murder-suicide: Bridging the gap between mass murder, amok, and suicide. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 7, 179-186. doi:10.1108/JACPR-07-2014-0132
- Hamilton, J. L. (20, February 2018). How to end school shootings: A proposal. *Socialist Rifle Association*. Retrieved from <https://socialistra.org/news/demand-media-blackout>
- Hamlett, L. E. (2017). *Common psycholinguistic themes in mass murderer manifestos* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 1832048098).
- Harper-Mercer, C. (n.d.). *My story*. Retrieved from <https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Christopher-Sean-Harper-Mercer-My-Manifesto.pdf>
- Harris, K. M., Lello, O. D., & Willcox, C. H. (2017). Reevaluating suicidal behaviors: Comparing assessment methods to improve risk evaluations. *Journal of Psychopathology & Behavioral Assessment*, 39, 128-139. doi:10.1007/s10862-016-9566-6
- Harrop, F. (2015, October 10). Twisted social media and mass murder in America. *Seattle Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/twisted-social-media-and-mass-murder/>
- Healy, J., & Lovett, I. (2015, October 2). Oregon killer described as man of few words, except on topic of guns. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/03/us/chris-harper-mercerc-umpqua-community-college-shooting.html>

- Heim, J. (2012, August 7). Wade Michael Page was steeped in neo-Nazi 'hate music' movement. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/wade-michael-page-was-steeped-in-neo-nazi-hate-music-movement/2012/08/07/b879451e-dfe8-11e1-a19c-fcfa365396c8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/wade-michael-page-was-steeped-in-neo-nazi-hate-music-movement/2012/08/07/b879451e-dfe8-11e1-a19c-fcfa365396c8_story.html)
- Helfgott, J. B. (2015). Criminal behavior and the copycat effect: Literature review and theoretical framework for empirical investigation. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 22*, 46-64. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2015.02.002
- Hickey, E. W. (2016). *Serial murderers and their victims* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Hobbs, T. D. (2019, April 19). Three decades of school shootings: An analysis. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/graphics/school-shooters-similarities/>
- Hoffner, C. A., Fujioka, Y., Cohen, E. L., & Seate, A. A. (2017). Perceived media influence, mental illness, and responses to news coverage of a mass shooting. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 6*, 159-173. doi:10.1037/ppm0000093
- Holmes, R. M., & Holmes, S. T. (2005). *Suicide: Theory, practice, and investigation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ioannou, M., Hammond, L., & Simpson, O. (2015). A model for differentiating school shooters characteristics. *Journal of Criminal Psychology, 5*, 188-200. doi:10.1108/JCP-06-2015-0018

- Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. (2003). JCSO 1998. Retrieved from <https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/jcso-1998.pdf>
- Jeffrey Weise. (2006, November 9). Retrieved from <https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Jeffrey%20Weise%20Online.pdf>
- Jilani, Z. (2019, January 22). How the media can help prevent mass shootings: Sensationalized TV coverage of mass shootings may encourage more of them. *Greater Good*. Retrieved from [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_the\\_media\\_can\\_help\\_prevent\\_mass\\_shootings](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_the_media_can_help_prevent_mass_shootings)
- Knoll, J. L., IV. (2010). The “pseudocommando” mass murderer: Part II, the language of revenge. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 38, 263-272. Retrieved from <http://jaapl.org/content/jaapl/38/2/263.full.pdf>
- Knoll, J. L., IV, & Annas, G. D. (2016). Mass shootings and mental illness. In L. H. Gold & R. I. Simon (Eds.), *Gun violence and mental illness* (1st ed). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.
- Konigsberg, E. (2007, December 8). From ‘troubled to killer,’ despite many efforts. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/08/us/08gunman.html>
- Langman, P. (2014a). Transcript of the Columbine “Basement Tapes.” Retrieved from [https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/columbine\\_basement\\_tapes\\_1.0.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/columbine_basement_tapes_1.0.pdf)
- Langman, P. (2014b). Seung Hui Cho’s “manifesto.” Retrieved from [https://schoolshootersinfo/sites/default/files/cho\\_manifesto\\_1.1.pdf](https://schoolshootersinfo/sites/default/files/cho_manifesto_1.1.pdf)

- Langman, P. (2014c). The search for truth at Columbine. Retrieved from [https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/search\\_for\\_truth\\_at\\_Columbine\\_2.2.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/search_for_truth_at_Columbine_2.2.pdf)
- Langman, P. (2015). The enigma of Adam Lanza's mind and motivations for murder. *Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention*, 3, 1-11. doi:10.17732/JBIT2015/1
- Langman, P. (2016a). Influences on the ideology of Eric Harris. Retrieved from [www.schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/harris\\_influences\\_ideology\\_1.2.pdf](http://www.schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/harris_influences_ideology_1.2.pdf)
- Langman, P. (2016b). Jeffrey Weise: Timeline. Retrieved from [www.schoolshooter.info/sites/default/files/weise\\_timeline\\_1.3.pdf](http://www.schoolshooter.info/sites/default/files/weise_timeline_1.3.pdf)
- Langman, P. (2016c). Jiverly Wong's suicide note. Retrieved from [www.schoolshooter.info/sites/default/files/wong\\_suicide\\_note\\_1.1.pdf](http://www.schoolshooter.info/sites/default/files/wong_suicide_note_1.1.pdf)
- Langman, P. (2018a). Different types of role model influence and fame seeking among mass killers and copycat offenders. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 210-228. doi:10.1177/0002764217739663
- Langman, P. (2018b). School shooters: A miscellany. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 210-228. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/abs>
- Langman, P. (2019a). Themes in the writings of Eric Harris. Retrieved from [www.schoolshooters.info/themes-writing-eric-harris](http://www.schoolshooters.info/themes-writing-eric-harris)
- Langman, P. (2019b). Dylan Klebold's journal and other writings. Retrieved from [www.schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Klebold\\_journal\\_1.2.pdf](http://www.schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Klebold_journal_1.2.pdf)

- Lankford, A. (2014). Précis of the myth of martyrdom: What really drives suicide bombers, rampage shooters, and other self-destructive killers. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 37, 351-393. doi:10.1017/S0140525X13001581
- Lankford, A. (2015a). Mass murderers in the United States: Predictors of offender deaths. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 26, 586-600. doi:10.1080/14789949.2015.1054858
- Lankford, A. (2015b). Mass shooters in the USA, 1966-2010: Differences between attackers who live and die. *Justice Quarterly*, 32, 360-379. doi:10.1080/07418825.2013.806675
- Lankford, A. (2018). Identifying potential mass shooters and suicide terrorists with warning signs of suicide, perceived victimization, and desires for attention or fame. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 100, 471-482. doi:10.1080/00223891.2018.1436063
- Lankford, A., & Madfis, E. (2018a). Don't name them, don't show them, but report everything else: A pragmatic proposal for denying mass killers the attention they seek and deterring future offenders. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 260-279. doi:10.1177/0002764217730854
- Lankford, A., & Madfis, E. (2018b). Media coverage of mass killers: Content, consequences, and solutions. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 151-162. doi:10.1177/0002764218763476

- Lee, K. J. (2018). Mass shootings and media contagion theory: Social media's influence on frequency of incidents. *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 9(2), 27-35. Retrieved from <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/communications/journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/153/2018/12/03-Lee.pdf>
- Leigh-Cooper, K. (2018, May 31). Does the media have a problem with coverage of mass shootings? *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44321469>
- Lenoir, A. (2019, March 15). 'No easy answers': The full story of the Columbine High School shooting. Retrieved from <https://allthatisinteresting.com/columbine-high-school-shooting>
- Levin, J., & Wiest, J. B. (2018). Covering mass murder: An experimental examination of the effect of news focus—killer, victim, or hero—on reader interest. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 181-194. doi:10.1177/0002764218756916
- Lin, P. I., Fei, L., Barzman, D., & Hossain, M. (2018). What have we learned from the time trend of mass shootings in the U.S.? *Plos ONE*, 13(10), 1-9. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0204722
- Lloyd, R. (2018, March 8). Media coverage of mass shootings: Is it part of the problem? *Undark: Truth, Beauty, Science*. Retrieved from <https://www.undark.org/2018/03/08/media-coverage-of-mass-shootings-misses-the-mark-for-decades/>
- Lopatto, E. (2015, August 27). How do we stop killers from exploiting social media? *Verge*. Retrieved from <https://www.theverge.com/2015/8/27/9217305/virginia-shooting-mass-murder-contagion-social-media>

- Mall gunman admitted he was satanic, attempted suicide. (2015, January 13). *Associated Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.foxnews.com/story/mall-gunman-admitted-he-was-satanic-attempted-suicide>
- Margaritoff, M. (2019, March 8). The full story behind Columbine High School shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Retrieved from <https://allthatisinteresting.com/eric-harris-dylan-klebold-columbine-shooters>
- McGreal, C. (2012, August 7). Wade Michael Page's acquaintances recall a troubled man guided by hate. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/07/wade-michael-page-wisconsin-shooting>
- Mears, D. P., Moon, M. M., & Thielo, A. J. (2017). Columbine revisited: Myths and realities about the bullying-school shooting connection. *Victims & Offenders, 12*, 939-955. doi:10.1080/15564886.2017.1307295
- Meindl, J. N., & Ivy, J. W. (2017). Mass shootings: The role of the media in promoting generalized imitation. *American Journal of Public Health, 107*, 368-370. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303611
- Meindl, J. N., & Ivy, J. W. (2018). Reducing media-induced mass killings: Lessons from suicide prevention. *American Behavioral Scientist, 62*, 242-259. doi:10.1177/0002764218756918
- Meloy, J. R. (2014). The seven myths of mass murder. *Violence and Gender, 1*(2), 1-3. doi:10.1089/vio.2014.0012



- Meloy, J. R. (2015). Threat assessment: Scholars, operators, our past, our future. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2, 231-242. doi:10.1037/tam0000054
- Meloy, J. R., & O'Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 29, 513-527. doi:10.1002/bsl.986
- Montgomery, D., Mele, C., & Fernandez, M. (2017, November 5). Gunman kills at least 26 in attack on rural Texas church. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/us/church-shooting-texas.html>
- Mother Jones. (2019). US mass shootings, 1982-2019: Data from Mother Jones' investigation. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/>
- Murray, J. L. (2011). *The role of fantasy in mass and serial murder* (Doctoral dissertation). Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.
- Murray, J. L. (2014). Suicidal-homicidal ideation in mass killers and transcendence. *Deviant Behavior*, 36, 581-588. doi:10.1080/01639625.2014.951570
- Murray, J. L. (2015). Suicidal-homicidal ideation in mass killers and transcendence. *Deviant Behavior*, 36, 581-588. doi:10.1080/01639625.2014.951570
- Murray, J. L. (2017a). The role of sexual, sadistic, and misogynistic fantasy in mass and serial killing. *Deviant Behavior*, 38, 735-743. doi:10/1080/01639625.2016.1197669
- Murray, J. L. (2017b). Mass media reporting and enabling of mass shootings. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 17, 144-124. doi:10.1177/1532708616679144

- Murray, J. L. (2017c). The transcendent fantasy in mass killers. *Deviant Behavior*, 38, 1172-1185. doi:10.1080/01639625.2016.1246015
- Neklason, A. (2019, April 19). The Columbine blueprint. *Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/04/columbines-20th-anniversary-mass-media-shooting/587359/>
- Nelson, J. (2017). Using conceptual depth criteria: Addressing the challenge of reaching saturation in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 17, 554-570. doi:10.1177/1468794116679873
- Northern Illinois University. (2008). Report of the February 14, 2008 shootings at Northern Illinois University. Retrieved from [niu.edu/forward/\\_pdfs/archives/feb14report.pdf](http://niu.edu/forward/_pdfs/archives/feb14report.pdf)
- Norton, B. (2015, October, 2). Oregon shooter Chris Harper Mercer, like Dylann Roof, was a right-wing extremist, not a 'lone wolf.' Retrieved from <http://bennorton.com/oregon-shooter-chris-harper-mercerc-like-dylann-roof-was-a-right-wing-extremist-not-a-lone-wolf/>
- O'Toole, M. E. (2009). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: Diane.
- Omaha Gunman Suicide Notes. (2007, December 7). *Smoking Gun*. Retrieved from [www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/crime/omaha-gunman-suicide-notes](http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/crime/omaha-gunman-suicide-notes)
- Ortiz, P., & Khin, E. K. (2018). Traditional and new media's influence on suicidal behavior and contagion. *Behavioral Science Law*, 36, 245-256. doi:10.1002/bsl.2338

- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perrin, P. B. (2016). Translating psychological science: Highlighting the media's contribution to contagion in mass shootings: Comment on Kaslow (2015). *American Psychologist, 71*, 71-72. doi:10.1037/a0039994
- Persaud, R., & Bruggen, P. (2018, April 4). YouTube HQ attack: The psychology of workplace shootings. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com.../youtube-hq-attack-the-psychology-workplace-shootings>
- Pew, A., Goldbeck, L., & Halsted, C. (2019). Does media coverage inspire copycat mass shootings? *National Center for Health Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.center4research.org/copy-cats-kill/>
- Pirkis, J., Blood, W., Sutherland, G., & Currier, G. (2018, February 13). Suicide and the news and information media: A critical review. *Mindframe*. Retrieved from <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/suicide-and-news-and-information-media-critical-review>
- Radford, B. (2019, March 27). How common are mass shootings? The nature and frequency of mass shootings. *Center for Inquiry*. Retrieved from <http://centerforinquiry.org/blog/how-common-are-mass-shootings-the-nature-and-frequency-of-mass-shootings/>

- Raitanen, J., & Oksanen, A. (2018). Global online subculture surrounding school shootings. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62, 195-209.  
doi:10.1177/0002764218755835
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Richmond, E. (2019, February 14). It's time to rethink coverage of school shootings. *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from [https://www.cjr.org/united\\_states\\_project/parkland-anniversary-education-reporters.php](https://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/parkland-anniversary-education-reporters.php)
- Rocque, M., & Duwe, G. (2018). Rampage shootings: An historical, empirical, and theoretical overview. *ScienceDirect*, 19, 28-33. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.03.025
- Rodger, E. (n.d.). *My twisted world*. Retrieved from [https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/rodger\\_my\\_twisted\\_world.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/rodger_my_twisted_world.pdf)
- Rowen, B. (2019, February 16). Does naming the shooter in the media lead to more mass violence? *Pacific Standard*. Retrieved from <https://psmag.com/social-justice/does-naming-the-shooter-in-the-media-lead-to-more-mass-violence>
- Schaffer, E. R. (2018). A review of the Werther effect and depictions of suicide: 13 reasons why. *UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal*, 10(2), 1-19.  
Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8vr9n8bf>
- Schildkraut, J. (2014). *Mass murder and the mass media: An examination of the media discourse on U.S. rampage shootings, 2000-2012* (Doctoral dissertation).  
Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 1543368084).

- Schildkraut, J. (2016). Mass murder and the mass media: Understanding the construction of the social problem of mass shootings in the US. *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice and Criminology*, 4(1), 1-41. Retrieved from <https://www.jqcjc.org/>
- Schildkraut, J., & Muschert, G. W. (2014). Media salience and the framing of mass murder in schools: A comparison of the Columbine and Sandy Hook massacres. *Homicide Studies*, 18, 23-43. doi:10.1177/1088767913511458
- Schildkraut, J., & Muschert, G. W. (2018, September 30). Why the coverage of mass shootings continues to miss the mark and how to fix it. *Hill*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/408487-why-the-coverage-of-mass-shootings-continues-to-miss-the-mark-and-how-to-fix-it>
- Schildkraut, J., Elsass, H. J., & Meredith, K. (2018). Mass shootings and the media: Why all events are not created equal. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 3, 223-243. doi:10.1080/0735648X.2017.1284689
- Schildkraut, J., Elsass, H. J., & Stafford, M. C. (2015). Could it happen here? Moral panic, school shootings, and fear of crime among college students. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 63, 91-110. doi:10.1007/s10611-015-9552-z
- Shepard, C. (2019). Dylan Klebold's journal. Retrieved from [www.columbinesite.com/dylan/writing/journal/journal.php](http://www.columbinesite.com/dylan/writing/journal/journal.php)
- Silva, J. R., & Capellan, J. A. (2019). The media's coverage of mass public shootings in America: Fifty years of newsworthiness. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 43, 77-97. doi:10.1080/01924036.2018.1437458

- Silver, J., Horgan, J., & Gill, P. (2018). Foreshadowing targeted violence: Assessing leakage of intent by public mass murderers. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 38*, 94-100. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2017.12.002
- Steinkoler, M. (2017). Lone wolf terrorists: Howling in the eye of the wind—The case of Adam Lanza. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, 26*, 217-225. doi:10.1080/0803706X.2017.1333142
- Stewart, S. (2018, April 10). Living in a time of twitter and mass murder in the U.S. *On Security*. Retrieved from <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/living-time-twitter-and-mass-murder-us>
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education. (2019a). Retrieved from <https://www.save.org/who-we-are/>
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education. (2019b). Recommendations for reporting on mass shootings. Retrieved from <https://www.reportingonmassshootings.org>
- Suit, M. (2017). Dreaming of Columbine: Exploring an offender's preoccupation with the Columbine massacre. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, 21*, 355-366. doi:10.1080/02668734.2017.1345002
- Swift, P. J. (2017). *Active shooter event severity, media reporting, offender age and location* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 1832048098).
- Towers, S., Gomez-Lievano, A., Khan, M., Mubayi, A., & Castillo-Chavez, C. (2015). Contagion in mass killings and school shootings. *Plos ONE, 10*(7), 1-12. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0117259

TV station gets gunman's death manifesto. (2009, April 6). *CBS News*. Retrieved from

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tv-station-gets-gunmans-death-manifesto/>

Vann, D. (2009, February 12). Portrait of the school shooter as a young man. *Esquire*.

Retrieved from <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a4863/steven-kazmierczak-0808/>

Virginia Tech Review Panel. (2007, April 16). Mass shootings at Virginia Tech.

Retrieved from

<https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/prevail/docs/April16ReportRev20091204/pdf>

Weaver, M. (2007, December 6). The Nebraska gunman: Robert Hawkins. *Guardian*.

Retrieved from

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/dec/06/usa.usgunviolence2>

Weir, K. (2019). Better ways to prevent suicide. *Monitor on Psychology*, 50(7), 39-47.

Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/>

White, S. (2017). Case study: The Isla Vista campus community mass murder. *Journal of*

*Threat Assessment and Management*, 4, 20-47. doi:10.1037/tam0000078

Who was Texas church gunman Devin Patrick Kelley? (2017, November 7). *BBC News*.

Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41884342>

Wills, A. (2019). *Characteristics of fame-seeking individuals who completed or*

*attempted mass murder in the United States* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved

from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 2239312995).

World Health Organization. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.who.int>

- Wright, M. (2018, February 19). School shootings, teen suicide, the hidden consequences of social media. *Hill*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/374534-school-shootings-teen-suicide-the-hidden-consequences-of-social-media>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Younge, G., & Goldenberg, S. (2005). You could hear a girl saying, 'No, Jeff, quit, quit. Leave me alone. What are you doing?'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/mar/23/usa.schoolsworldwide>
- Zarembo, A. (2016, June 19). Do killers play the media? News of massacres may spur new shooters to seek fame, experts say. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from [latimes.com](http://latimes.com)



## Appendix A: List of Search Terms

Active shooter

Adam Lanza

Celebrity suicide

Christopher Harper-Mercer

Columbine effect

Columbine mass shooting

Contagion

Contagion and mass killings

Copycat mass murder

Copycat effect

Crime and suicide

Devin Patrick Kelley

Don't Name Them campaign

Dylan Klebold

Elliott Rodger

Eric Harris

Escape fantasy

Fame-seeking

Fame-seeking mass murderers

Fantasy

Fantasy and mass killers

Firearms and mass murder

Gun control and mass murder

Hate crimes

Imitation

Jeffrey Weise

Jiverly Wong

Mass tragedies

Mass shootings

Manifesto

Mass media coverage and mass murder

Mass murderers and depression

Mass murder and social media

Mass murder and suicide

Mass murder and mental illness

Mass murder and gun violence

Mass murder statistics

Mass murder and violent media

Mass murders and the Internet

Mass murders and hate crimes

Mass public shooting

Mass public shooting and media coverage

Mass public shooting and social media

Mass school shootings

Mass shooting

Media contagion

Media influence and suicide

Narcissism

No-Notoriety campaign

Rampage mass shooters

Revenge fantasy

Robert Hawkins

Sadistic fantasy

Sandy Hook mass killing

Seung Hui Cho

Social media

Stephen Phillip Kazmierczak

Suicidal ideation

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

Suicide by cop

Suicide contagion

Suicide imitation

Suicide imitation and social media

Suicide imitation and mass media

United States mass murder

United States mass shootings

United States school shootings

Wade Michael Page

Werther effect

World Health Organization

YouTube videos of mass murderers