

Lund University
Department of Sociology
Cultural Criminology



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“30 million women rejected me”

A narrative analysis of perpetrators of gendered mass murders

Author: Tova Wedding

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Supervisor: Erik Hannerz

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Abstract

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This thesis examines how perpetrators of misogynistic mass murder utilise narrative and storytelling to make meaning of their violent acts towards women. This thesis is hereby an attempt to understand gendered mass violence, and its narrative resources that precede and promote such actions, as part of a wider, misogynist culture centered on a denial of the existence of patriarchal societies and oppression of women. Utilising narrative criminology and gender studies as theoretical frameworks, this thesis carries out a textual-and thematic analysis of personal accounts of three mass killers in order to understand - how they utilise narratives to justify their violent acts towards women as a group. The main findings show these perpetrators conveyed an ‘underdog’ narrative of contemporary “male oppression” and “women holding too much power”. These men constructed their masculine identity as threatened, as their expressions of sexual and romantic interest were constantly dismissed by women in unjustified means. These men also used discourses of misogyny, resembling the very contents and ideologies discussed within the manosphere, and attempted to justify their acts through their victimhood-narration of themselves as a product of their treatment and rejections by women. By engaging in such violence, these men also seemed to believe it would protect and restore their manhood. Their acts of mass harms operated as both a gendered narrative accomplishment and as an act of insurgency.

Keywords: mass murder, misogyny, narrative criminology, hegemonic masculinity, homosociality

Popular science summary

In this thesis, I attempted to increase my understanding of a rising phenomena - men who carry out mass murders on women - like white people carrying out mass attacks on the basis of racism, xenophobia and more. In this thesis, the focus is 'misogyny' being this basis, which means hatred and prejudice against women as a population. Several counter-terrorist organisations, including the Anti-Defamation League and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, have raised their concerns regarding misogyny as a potential ideology of terrorism. But according to sociologist Alexis DiBranco, our knowledge and understanding of this type of mass violence is still "far behind where it needs to be" (ibid, 2020). Additionally, it is becoming more common that perpetrators of mass violence publish manifestos, YouTube-videos and other forms of personal materials online prior to their attacks - detailing their motivations. By studying these materials, it may help us to understand the core of their violence and why they choose this group of victims.

I used a narrative analysis, within the framework of narrative criminology and gender studies, to generate more knowledge and understanding regarding mass violence driven by misogyny. A narrative in this context can be explained as a story or a series of stories, where the teller recounts both: 1) his life experiences and memories that affect his view of the world, others and himself, 2) how these stories affect his future actions. I examined how these male mass murderers use narrative, in form of personal materials, to explain and justify their use of violence towards women as a population. I examine how their experiences and memories involving women affect their hatred of women, and how it increases to the point where they find it justified to use violence towards them as a population generally.

My conclusion showed these perpetrators felt threatened in their role as men in this society and felt women were holding too much power in this society that is trending towards equality. These men experienced constant romantic and sexual rejections by women, which they found unjustified as they felt they did put effort in themselves in correspondence with masculine ideals. They used violence to 1) conquer their perceived sense of inferiority, which they believed women caused by rejecting them, 2) to punish women for not allowing them to be superior, and 3) to tell their stories to others in similar situations.

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Lastly, I want to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my maternal grandparents, Britt and Eric Olsson, who passed away in the beginning of this year. Especially my grandfather whose academic excellence at Lund University inspired me to pursue my academic goals.

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1. Introduction

“If I can’t find one decent female to live with, I will find many indecent females to die with. If they are intent on denying me life, I will have no choice, but to deny them life” - Scott Beierle, 2018

On 2nd November, 2018, Scott Beierle entered a yoga studio in Tallahassee, USA, and opened fire, killing two women and injuring five people before killing himself - his act of mass violence remaining unexplained by himself. However, there were fragments of a narrative which could be found in his social media history - containing Youtube-videos where he expressed racist and misogynistic views. He also declared his hatred of women on a note on the nightstand in the hotel room, quoted above, which he checked into days before the incident (Tallahassee Police Department, 2018).

Beierle was not the only male mass shooter to be proven to be motivated by a wish to punish women. In recent years, there have been several cases of mass violence carried out by men motivated by misogynist principles. Sociologist Alex DiBranco (2020) claims we have not paid enough attention to misogyny as a motivating ideology for acts of mass violence despite a rapid rise in the online mobilisation of male supremacist extremism. Since 2018, several counter-terrorist organisations, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), has started to acknowledge male supremacism as a potential ideology of terrorism (ADL, 2018; DiBranco, 2020). But DiBranco claims despite these acknowledgements, our “understanding of male supremacist terrorism remains far behind where it needs to be” (ibid).

On that premise, there has been an increase in perpetrators of mass violence leaving published manifestos, Youtube-videos and other forms of personal accounts behind them - detailing their plans, ideologies and motivations (Ware, 2020: 2). In cases like Scott Beierles’, such personal accounts could be our only primary source in order to make an investigation of their choices. By analysing personal accounts of perpetrators of gendered mass murders, there is an opportunity for us to examine how these perpetrators utilise narrative and storytelling as part of legitimising hate towards women to the point where they justify use of violence towards them. It gives us a window into their life-worlds, “aesthetics, values, beliefs, preoccupations and habits of mind that may be

shared among a given group” (Cashman as cited in Tutenges, 2019: 28). It can increase our understanding about one of the most difficult societal challenges - how misogyny can drive mass harm of women (DiBranco, 2020).

According to Lois Presser (2018), a pioneer of the emerging field of narrative criminology, narrative is a powerful tool in understanding how perpetrators make sense of their own harmful actions and choices. Narrative criminology stresses how stories and “narratives inspire and motivate harmful action and how they are used to make sense of harm” (Presser & Sandberg, 2015: 1). The sociologist Jack Katz (2016) also asserts that “culture in crime refers to the understandings employed by people as they commit crimes” (ibid: 233). Such understandings can be found in such previously mentioned personal accounts. The stories, narratives and emotions within these personal accounts are conditioned by the perpetrators' cultural and social context (Presser, 2018).

Given the focus of this study - mass murderers that target individuals on the basis of gender - I cannot afford to neglect the fact that these perpetrators' narratives and their purported meanings can be explained through the cultural construction of masculinity. According to Robyn Fivush & Azriel Grysman (2022), narrative and gender are actually “core components of creating in human lives” (ibid: 1). It is a perspective that promotes the act of narrating as part of a gendered practice (ibid). Using gender studies as an analysis tool, there will be an attempt to examine the significance of gender in the construction of ‘self’ and narratives that justify these violent attacks on women.

By studying the emerging narratives in these perpetrators' personal accounts, we get closer to knowing what narratives and stories inspired and legitimised their extremist narratives and acts of mass violence. To clarify, my focus is not centred on the act of mass murder itself, rather how these perpetrators utilise narrative and storytelling as part of their own understanding and meaning-making of their violent acts. My purpose is hereby to use gender theories, like hegemonic masculinity and homosociality, as an analytical tool to study the emerging narratives in these mass murderers' personal accounts - in forms of manifestos, Youtube-videos and more. Drawing upon the study of narrative criminology and gender studies, there will be an attempt to examine:

- 1) How do perpetrators narrate their justification of mass violence
- 2) How can their narratives be understood as part of gendered violence?

1.2. Delimitations

In this thesis, I study perpetrators who have committed a form of mass murder. In general, mass murder means intentional murders of at least four persons during a single event or a short-lived homicide spree within a short period of time, and usually carried out by a lone perpetrator (Fox & Levin, 1998: 24). But in order to expand sample size, I have lowered the parameters of this definition in my thesis to include attacks that only caused one death, if the intent was to cause significantly more deaths. For example, Beierle only killed two women. Beierle shot himself in the head after his gun jammed at a point and a man present in the yoga class attempted to stop him. It appeared to be an incomplete act, seeing 100 rounds of ammunition was found on his body afterwards (Tallahassee Police Department, 2018: 17-20). This evidence is an indication of his intention to cause significantly more deaths.

This thesis also only includes cases that were proven to be motivated by a form of personal grievances towards women or misogyny as an ideology. Given my aim of this thesis, the focus is on mass violence carried out by men motivated by misogynist principles as a phenomena. It can range from perpetrators who were driven simply by hatred or revenge towards the general population of women, to perpetrators who were part of a far-right group or online community with misogynist principles and were driven by these principles. Such cases of mass murders are notoriously labelled as the Incel mass attacks (see pp: 12) in mass media. This thesis attempts to move away from such narrow labelling, preferring to categorise this rising phenomena with the broader term 'misogyny driving mass harms'.

2. Literature review

In this section, the aim is to apply an academic context by using literature and previous research conducted by other scholars in similar fields to that of my chosen topic. In order to examine gendered mass violence and its narrative resources that precede and promote such actions, we need to understand such violent acts as part of a wider, misogynist culture. Narratives within such a culture cultivate a denial of “the existence of patriarchy” and oppression of women (Kelly et al, 2021:8). I also examine gendered mass violence as an expression of the cultural orientation of being “a real man” - through hegemonic masculinity ideals and aggrieved entitlement. I will also discuss the definition of mass murder as a criminal act, in order to understand how perpetrators utilise it as part of their narrative accomplishment. As previously stated, the focus is on how these perpetrators utilise narrative and storytelling to make meaning of their violent acts. It should be noted that there was lack of academic research concerning *gendered* mass murders within narrative-or cultural criminology, which means there was a reliance on previous research from other scholars - like feminist scholars, sociology, mainstream criminology and more.

2.1. The evolution of the manosphere

To understand the storied nature of mass murder in this thesis, we need to dive into the narrative resources for perpetrators committing gendered mass murders. Their set of beliefs and values affect how they chose to construct a narrative that justifies this type of violence (Presser, 2012). Seeing their acts appear to be motivated by misogynist principles, we need to understand their violent acts as part of a wider culture. Misogyny is not just about male hostility towards women according to philosophy professor Kate Manne (2017). Manne claims misogyny is rather embedded in our everyday culture and customs. It operates “within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women’s subordination and to uphold male dominance” (Manne, 2017: 33). Manne defines misogyny as the attempts to control, punish and police women who challenge and resist male dominance and patriarchal structures - while rewarding women who actively reinforce them (ibid).

The most visible display of misogyny can be seen in contemporary male supremacist ideologies and movements, like *Men’s rights activists* (MRA), the online community called the

*Incel*s, *Pick-up artists* (PUA), the diverse *Red Pill* movements and several more (see footnote¹). Such ideologies and movements are centred around a denial of “the existence of patriarchy” and “presents men, not women, as the true victims of sexism and discrimination” (Kelly et al, 2021: 8). According to Kelly et al (2021), these movements took off in a resistance to feminism and all the changes evoked by the women’s rights movements during the 1970s. Such male supremacist movements were hereby created to reinstate men’s societal positions (Kelly et al, 2021: 8). These movements usually overlap with the far-right and alternative-right communities politically. After all, according to DiBranco (2020), gender is an underlying issue in far-right and alt-right movements, as the political ideas themselves threaten women’s entitlement to equality in diverse ways (ibid; Blee, 2020). Such movements contribute to narratives of men as the oppressed victims of feminism. In the Western societies, where the idea of equality is generally accepted and encouraged, the rapid growth of male supremacist movements in recent years is a concern (Kelly et al, 2021).

The 1990s and 2000s internet expansion led to a profoundly cultural space where “people who share the same values, customs or practices could gather” (Winter & Lavis, 2020: 55). But it also enabled a wider spread of misogynist ideologies and movements online. The limitless access to diverse online discussion forums and communities allowed its participants to engage in similar misogynist worldviews (Kelly et al, 2021). A manosphere was by this means established - online communities that promote cultural expressions of anti-feminism, misogyny and toxic masculinity. It became a cultural space where men could encourage each other to normalise misogynistic, hateful attitudes towards women and justify crimes against women, like sexual harassments, rape and domestic violence without direct consequences (Marganski, 2019; ADL, 2018). The typical users within this manosphere tend to be young and heterosexual men, who utilise these spaces as an outlet for their anger and frustrations over their perceived life failures such as limited sexual experience (O’Donnell, 2021). The manosphere produces harmful narratives of (white) men as “victims of oppressive feminism, an ideology which must be overthrown often through violence” (Zimmerman et al, 2018: 1; Dickel & Evolvi, 2022).

¹ MRA: political movements that advocate for men’s rights and that question women’s. Embraces traditional, patriarchal values and views feminism as a threat for their rights as men.

PUA: dating coaches who teaches men how to pick up women - criticised for gender stereotyping and dehumanising sexism.

Red Pill: a term that derives from the movie “The Matrix”, operates as a metaphor for men to describe their awakening to this hidden reality of men as the oppressed ones and women as the ones holding the power and privilege

While many mass murderers give the appearance of being socially isolated, many of them do have connections within these online communities, where they are able to bond over “personal or perceived failures” and engage in a homosocial brotherhood (Marganski, 2019: 7). According to criminologist Alison Marganski (2019), these virtual communities are often “plagued with heavily misogynistic content and ideologies” with men encouraging each other to dehumanise women and to view them as a commodity, and to blame women for all their miseries. Its “collective hate is predicated” on their social identity as well (Marganski, 2019: 87). Especially within the Incel communities, where they have a general belief that men are entitled to sex from women, without any regard for their own wish, and blame all women and “Chads” (good-looking, sexually active men) for their involuntary celibacy. It is a place where women’s bodies are commercialised as one of the basic human needs, as well as food, sleep, shelter and more on (Kelly et al, 2021: 14). In recent years, the Incels have received a lot of public attention following mass attacks committed by men who identified themselves as Incels. For examples: Chris Harper-Mercer who expressed frustrations about his involuntary celibacy in his manifesto before killing nine persons, Elliot Rodger who blamed women and sexually active men for his involuntary celibacy in several Youtube-videos before killing six persons (DiBranco, 2020).

2.2. Mass murder

As previously stated, mass murder is here defined as the intentional murders of four or more persons during a single event or a short-lived homicide spree. In most cases, the perpetrator of a mass murder is found at the crime scene or in close proximity - either dead by their own hands or alive in hope to be shot by the police or to surrender (Fox & Levin, 1998). Criminology professors Fox and Levin (1998) assert that although a loner, who shoots random strangers in a public location, is the “most publicised type of mass murder”, mass killing as a definition is far broader (ibid: 429). It can range from a disgruntled former employee “going postal”² by shooting his fellow co-workers, to a depressed husband and father who murders his entire family before committing suicide, to a racist who shoots a group of immigrants in a public location. Ultimately, this means the motives for mass murder can vary a lot - revenge, desperation, terror, greed, hatred and more on

² an American phrase for workplace rage. Usually used to describe a person becoming uncontrollably angry about his/her work environment or situation to the point he/she commits violent acts (Ames, 2005).

(ibid: 429ff). According to sociologist Jack Katz (2016), who was drawing on case studies of various mass murders, the murder sites themselves sometimes have an autographical meaning for the murderer. The murder site and its meanings can be provocative for the murderer, evoking feelings of humiliation or degradation (ibid).

Additionally, in their article, Fox and Levin suggest the combination of three categories contribute to such acts: 1) predisposers, a long-term frustration and failure which leads to an externalisation of blame, 2) precipitants, sudden losses or threats of loss, usually relationship or work wise, serving as a catalyst for violence, 3) facilitators, being isolated and not having sources of emotional support (1998: 439ff). The victims themselves could be chosen for personal reasons, due to a random bias or due to them being members of a particular group. Mainly, they are chosen because of “what they have done or what they represent” (Fox & Levin, 1998: 437ff).

Fox and Levin also describe how some revenge-motivated mass killings are “motivated by a grudge against an entire category of individuals” who are “viewed as responsible for the killer’s difficulties in life” (ibid, 1998: 446). A case in point being Marc Lepine, who murdered fourteen female engineering students at the University of Montreal in 1989. His long-term grudge against feminists operated as a catalyst for his violent act, which was explicitly stated in his suicide letter (ibid). Katz (1988) suggests that the perpetrator “acts in ways that are mindful of the narrative possibilities of the action”, whereas their narrative and storytelling may be utilised as a form of “moral tale” justifying their use of violence towards their chosen victims (ibid; Presser, 2009: 302). In my thesis, the focus is on women bearing the brunt of such illogical sentiments.

Another such example was Jim Adkisson, an American mass shooter who targeted a liberal church and used narrative to characterise liberals as responsible for his unfair life circumstances. Drawing on Adkisson’s four-page suicide letter and two prison interviews with him conducted by her, Presser (2012) explains his act of mass murder operated as a “stories feat” - in other words, a narrative accomplishment (Presser, 2012: 3). Adkisson clearly planned an act that was going to end his life, thus his suicide letter was an attempt to direct how his story will be told and how he, as the protagonist, will be situated within it. His mass attack was to be framed as “an act of national heroism” against liberals, who “represent” all of his unfair life circumstances (ibid: 4). Prior to his attack, Adkisson was an elderly depressed man who was divorced four times, unemployed and struggling financially. Using narrative resources including these, he established a redemptive

self-narrative that justified his use of violence. By constructing a heroic self-narrative, he attempted to justify his violent act as a political necessity. Presser suggests such rhetoric, by perpetrators like Adkisson and other political shooters, likely promotes future actions (ibid).

Criminologist Sveinung Sandberg (2013) also analysed a personal account of a mass murderer - a manifesto written by the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik prior to his mass attacks in Oslo and Utøya. Sandberg points out that Breivik seemed to “reinterpret most events in his life through his relatively recent political radicalisation” as many parts in the manifesto concerning Breivik’s life were inaccurate and distorted (ibid: 73). Further, Sandberg states Breivik strategically adjusted his life events and stories in order to reframe the focus and to justify his attacks through an anti-Islamic rhetoric. But Sandberg also found four different self-narratives with many contradictions - the professional revolutionary, the evangelist, the pragmatic conservative and the social and likeable person (ibid: 75-78). Sandberg interprets his diverse self-narratives as multiple “prepared responses to accusations he knows he will meet” by the public following the mass attacks. These self-narratives can thereby be viewed as “creative ways of countering” accusations and slander of his character (ibid: 79). In the light of his own study, Sandberg asserts such materials as manifestos indeed is a “valuable resource” in contemporary research of offenders’ narratives (ibid: 70).

2.2.1. Gendered mass shootings

In a recent case-study using 106 cases of gender-based mass shootings (Silva et al, 2021), the authors provided four categories of revenge-motivated by personal grievances against women: 1) specific woman, targeted, 2) specific woman, not targeted, 3) general women, targeted, and 4) general women, not targeted. The third type, concerning ‘general women, targeted’ involves mass killings where the perpetrators obtain personal grievances towards women in general and purposefully target women during their act of mass killing. Silva et al (2021) explains this category often involves members of anti-feminist movements (Incels for example) or those who are just “angry with women for their treatment and perceived rejection/victimization” (ibid: 2170). The fourth type means the perpetrator acts upon “male resentment of societal changes related to women’s empowerment” but does not target solely women during their act (Silvas et al, 2021: 2179). In these cases, performing the symbolic act of violence matters more than the choice of victims itself (ibid). Like Katz (1988),

murder can operate as a form of play with moral symbolics. The violent action itself is viewed rather as a way for the offender to “perform a preferred self-story” and to construct or restore a desired identity (Presser, 2018; 13, Katz, 1988). The act of violence also “honours” what the killer suffered in life (Katz, 1988 & 2016).

2.3. Masculinity and aggrieved entitlement

Mass shootings and other forms of mass murders are an extremely male phenomenon (Peterson & Densley, 2019; Marganski, 2019). While women do also engage in harmful crimes, men are disproportionately responsible for crimes against women - and men as well, especially violent offenses like domestic assault, sexual assault, homicide and serial killings (Marganski, 2019). Criminologist Alison Marganski (2019) claims mass murder is a “way by which some individuals do gender” and further describes it as “an expression of aggrieved entitlement and representation of toxic masculinity” (ibid: 1). Several scholars also point out the link between hegemonic masculinity and mass violence, in relation to recent societal changes leaving men feeling disadvantaged (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Kimmel, 2013; Vito et al, 2018).

In a case study concerning three white, male mass shooters who carried out their attacks in schools, Rachel Kalish and Michal Kimmel (2010) described how all of these shooters, with a history of bullying and more, “felt both victimised by others and superior to them” and experienced an achievement failure in living up to masculine ideals (ibid: 459). They used violence as a restorative tool in correspondence to traditional masculine ideals and retaliated against people who made them feel inferior. There was also a sense of entitlement - feeling wronged by their society and that they were not getting what they deserved (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). This entitlement aggrieved them to the point they felt “righteous rage” towards those who evoked feelings of humiliation and inferiority - their classmates in this case. This sense permits them to justify their use of violence. Further, Kalish & Kimmel asserted “the culture of hegemonic masculinity in the U.S. creates a sense of aggrieved entitlement conducive to violence” (2010: 451). According to DiBranco (2018), who analysed cases of misogynist mass attacks, aggrieved male entitlement indeed operates as “the primary driver of violence” in mass violence motivated by misogynist principles. She connects it to the changes evoked by feminism and explains that men, who strongly believe in their privileged

power and position, may feel threatened and disadvantaged by this development. Their sense of entitlement leads to feelings like frustration, humiliation and anger for their perceived sense of inferiority in this changing society - and creates a rage towards other supposedly inferior groups, women for example (ibid; Manne, 2017; Hoffman et al, 2020).

2.4. Violence restoring honour

Violence can be viewed as “a cultural orientation of what it is to be a real man”, by displaying symbols of masculinity like status competition, physical strength and aggressiveness (McFarlane, 2013: 329). Acts of violence can be attempts to restore or preserve one’s “internalised masculine honour beliefs” - in other words, a cultural belief that male aggression or violence is sometimes necessary especially if a man feels dishonoured or receives insults concerning his manhood (Stratmoen et al, 2018: 151). In such a context, violence is viewed as a necessity in order to maintain and protect one’s sense of masculinity and self-worth. Evelyn Stratmoen et al (2018) used Elliot Rodger as an example for such a situation and described his violent act as a response to constant romantic rejection. Rejection in this context was described as a threat to Rodger’s internalised masculine honour (ibid).

Criminologist Helen McFarlane (2013) also discussed how such a sense of dishonour generates a violent, criminal response in men. But she explains it through hegemonic masculinity and subordinate masculinity. These two concepts are opposed, with hegemonic masculinity being the idealised male form, and subordinate masculinity operating as marginalised and failed forms of masculinity. From a criminological perspective, men’s violence towards women “represents a masculinity of domination, control, humiliation” (ibid. 329). Utilising the case of Raoul Moat - a man who threatened his ex-girlfriend and murdered her new boyfriend - McFarlane described a man whose masculine status was viewed as subordinated and undermined when he lost his girlfriend to another man - dishonoured in this context. A violent act of revenge was his way to restore his lost sense of manhood and to recover from humiliated feelings - and dishonour. The violence was viewed by him as a legitimate behaviour for being rejected by a woman.

The sense of dishonour can be compared to the emotions utilised by sociologist Jack Katz (1988) to describe the agency of enraged killers. In his work (1988), using a phenomenological

approach, Katz argues how various types of crimes, including murders, operated as narrative accomplishments for their offenders. For example, “righteously enraged slaughter” centres on how the killer uses violence as a last stand in defence of his respectability, or to overcome a personal/moral challenge (ibid). In this context, Katz describes how humiliating situations or confrontations, which are associated with the victims themselves, evoke feelings of rage and righteous passion in the killer, which permits him to legitimise violence as a way of defending and upholding his respected social status beyond the law. It is done as part of honouring and restoring one’s offended/violated honour and respectability. Such “righteous” slaughters can be viewed as a universal form of the “Good” beyond what is stated in the law. These killers utilise murder as part of defending what they believe is “the Good” (Katz, 1988). While Katz claimed “words are not necessary to make violence a means of honouring offended respectability”, Presser (2012) maintains words are indeed an important part of such processes (Katz, 1988: 37; ibid). According to Presser, words, in the form of narratives, help us to find a link between our emotions, actions and events and allow us to build a story that demonstrates how violence restores our honour (Presser, 2012: 7).

3. Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis examines how male perpetrators utilise narrative and storytelling as part of their own understanding of their violent acts and hatred towards women. Narrative is used here as a tool in understanding how perpetrators make sense of their own harmful actions and choices (Presser, 2018). In a thesis centred on such a gendered phenomenon, we can not neglect the fact that such mass acts, motivated by misogynist principles, can be explained on the basis of the cultural constructions of how “a real man should be” (Marganski, 2019). By using gender studies, we may be able to explain how these perpetrators narrate their justification of violence in correspondence with their own understandings of masculinity, in relation to women’s increased empowerment. In this section, I will introduce narrative criminology as a theoretical paradigm along with gender frameworks like hegemonic masculinity, homosociality and male entitlement.

3.1. Hegemonic masculinity

As mentioned before, mass murder can be “a way by which some individuals do ‘gender’” (Marganski, 2019: 1). *Doing gender* is a theory developed by Candace West & Don Zimmerman (1987), that assigns gender as a social, cultural construct that we actively reinforce and perform in our everyday interactions. We “do gender in response to a situated normative discourse of what it means to be a woman or a man”, based on internalised cultural norms and expectations of femininity and masculinity (Grundetjern, 2015: 255; *ibid*). If you take this into account, it means such internalised gender patterns are by nature incorporated in our construction of self-narratives - we “do gender” in our storytelling. But what shapes the cultural framework of gender performances and expectations? As a part of R.W. Connell (1987) gender order theory, hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the maintenance of practices that institutionalise men’s dominance over women”, which is constructed within relations to women and men who embody subordinate masculinities (Connell as cited in Bird, 1996: 120).

In this context, R.W. Connell (1987) asserted hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity as the normative prototypes of our idealised gender expectations. As a concept, hegemonic masculinity embodies the idealised, normative and dominant form of masculinity that most men attempt to achieve, demonstrate or strive towards (*ibid*; Connell & Messerschmidt,

2005). Sociologist Mike Donaldson (1993) further described hegemonic masculinity as both “a personal and a collective project”, as the expressions and practices in this form of masculinity institutionalise and maintain men’s dominance in a patriarchal society (ibid: 645). According to Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), only a minority of men are able to achieve hegemonic masculinity fully, so it rather operates as a normative framework and expresses “widespread ideals, fantasies, desires” (ibid: 838). Hegemonic masculinity reproduces cultural expectations on men and is “reinforced through a process of rewards and punishments” (McFarlane, 2013: 323; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Additionally, Messerschmidt (2000) points out that men construct their sexuality through their own understanding of masculinity and its essence. Messerschmidt further explains this concept by asserting “it is through our sexuality that we confirm the successful construction of our gender identity” (ibid: 287). Two of fundamental elements of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality and sexual objectification. Heterosexual sex is “associated with the achievement of compelling gendered (...) identity” (Vito et al, 2017: 89).

Hegemonic masculinity has been used to explain mass violence. According to Marganski (2019), there is a link between mass violence and hegemonic masculinity in the form of status deficiency. Status deficiency in this context refers to men and boys’ inability to conform to dominant masculine norms, which are often characterized by sexual prowess, “toughness, assertiveness and risk-taking behaviors” (Marganski, 2019: 5; Vito et al, 2017). When one experiences failure to achieve or demonstrate that form of masculinity, he experiences a crisis of masculinity. In this context, he may attempt to overcompensate by resorting to extreme forms of masculinity in a pursuit of proving himself as a “real man”. In such cases, violence can be viewed as a tool to maintain male dominance and to restore their masculine identity and status (ibid; Kimmel, 2013). Such a crisis of masculinity can hereby lead to violent actions with women being the primary targets - a narrative discourse that may be utilised to justify acts of mass harm.

According to Sharon Bird (1996), the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity depends on male homosocial interactions. Which leads us to the concept of homosociality.

3.1.1. Homosociality

The maintenance of hegemonic masculinity depends on male homosocial interactions according to Sharon Bird (1996). The concept of homosociality was defined by Jean Lipman-Blumen (1976) as nonsexual bonds between men that contribute to the segregation of men and women institutionally. Homosociality refers to men who enjoy, prioritise and seek the company of their own gender, but in a purely platonic capacity. This view suggests men can satisfy most of their needs through other men, which promotes a male homosocial world where women are excluded for being “irrelevant” but still are used as a sexual resource to heighten a man’s sexual prowess and status - him having “acquisition of a beautiful woman” (ibid: 16). Lipman-Blumen used this as an explanation for the structural inequality in distribution of opportunities, resources and power between genders. Through their homosocial interactions, bonds and “bromances”, men collectively preserve their position and privilege in a gender hierarchy, while suppressing both women and subordinate masculinities (ibid).

Lipman-Blumen (1976) explains homosociality established and preserved a stratification system that “located men in such a way that they had virtually total and exclusive access to the entire range of resources available within the society” (ibid: 16). Women had to seek resources from men and in turn “became resources which men can use to further their own eminence in the homosocial world of men” (ibid: 16). Women, with limited resources consisting of sexuality, beauty, fertility and more on, had to “fashion themselves as sex objects” in order to attract men to gain access to other resources (ibid). But in contemporary Western societies, women are not as forced to seek resources from men anymore - at least not to the same extent. It means women do not have to provide men with sexual resources in order to gain access to other resources (ibid).

Sharon Bird (1996), who based her data on in-depth interviews with men, describes three shared meanings that explain how homosociality contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity through individual conceptualizations of masculinity: 1) emotional detachment, 2) competitiveness and 3) the sexual objectification of women (ibid: 122). All these meanings express hegemonic ideals while suppressing non-hegemonic and feminine ideals. These shared meanings are also used to distinguish men as non-females. Emotional detachment refers to men who withhold expressions of “feminine” intimacy and emotions in response to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Expressing emotions and vulnerabilities as a man “signifies weakness” while emotional detachment “signifies strength” (ibid: 125). Competitiveness allows men to construct their

masculinity through different forms of competitions - sports, sexual exploits for examples - and facilitate hierarchal relations between men depending on their competition performance. Whereas individual conceptualization of masculinity operates as a competition on its own as well.

Lastly, the sexual objectification of women provides “a base on which men superiority is maintained” (Bird, 1996: 123). Women are viewed here as sexual objects in a competition, in which men engage in order to heighten their masculine status and enact sexual prowess. Men compete in getting attention of women so they can boast about their sexual exploits to each other - and to maintain their status within their male homosocial peers. Bird (1996) explains most men go along with such norms in the fear of being “pecked” by others in the group. According to Bird, this competitiveness over women “constitutes the very essence of what hegemonic masculinity means in this society” (ibid: 129). Men who “desired homosocial bonds were more likely to agree with discourses of hegemonic masculinity” (Kiesling, 2005: 705; Bird, 1996).

3.1.2. Male entitlement

Using the framework of male entitlement, Philosophy professor Kate Manne (2017) explains there are gendered expectations on women as providers of feminine goods in form of sex, emotional care and domestic labor while not permitting them to take masculine goods in form of power and authority (ibid). Manne argues those who hold misogynist views, see women as human givers rather than human beings. It creates an entitled sense of feeling owed by women in various forms of personal goods and services (ibid: 106). When a woman fails to give a man what he thinks he is entitled to - “by various forms of nurturing, admiration, sympathy and attention”, he may feel dehumanised and may seek vengeance by dehumanising her in turn through hostility and aggression (ibid: 174).

Micheal Kimmel (2013) explains violent behaviour is especially associated with men who have presumed entitlement to social privileges, as a direct result of the culture of hegemonic masculinity in which patriarchy “used to be” legitimated and preserved through (2018: 91). In Western societies where the concept of equality is starting to be more widely accepted and encouraged, there are men who experience a perceived sense of reduced privilege, both socially and institutionally. When these presumed privileges are threatened, it creates a sense of aggrieved

entitlement which allows these men to feel justified to utilise violence to avenge “the threat to their precarious sense of masculinity” and privilege (ibid; Kimmel, 2013).

3.2. Understanding stories of crime through narrative criminology

We “do gender” in our storytelling. Both gender and narrative is “foundational to the ways in which humans engage in meaning-making” (Fivush & Grysman, 2022: 1). The term ‘narrative criminology’ was coined by sociologist Lois Presser in 2009 and was developed further in her future works. Although Presser was the first to use the term, it is undeniable there were original sources that contributed to narrative criminology as a field prior to Presser’s quantification. More than half a century prior, Sykes and Matza (1957) used narrative as an analytical tool in understanding offenders’ neutralisation of their own criminal acts. Later, the sociologist Jack Katz (1988), demonstrated how various criminal acts served as “narrative accomplishments” for their offenders and how certain criminal acts were motivated by its potential storytelling (Fleetwood et al, 2019; Presser, 2012: 7). Thus Presser “drew together and summarised several coinciding developments in the social sciences” when she first developed this perspective (Fleetwood et al, 2019: 2).

Narrative criminology as a theoretical paradigm “seeks to explain crime and other harmful actions as a function of the stories and the bystanders tell about themselves” (Presser, 2012: 5). According to Presser, stories both precede actions and promote future actions - such as acts of mass harm: “actions may be planned to generate an already imagined story of those actions” (ibid, 2018: 14). Stories influence both the listeners and the storyteller themselves. Operating as “both strategic and impactful”, storytelling can direct our thinking, evoke emotions and inspire us to either commit or resist harmful actions (ibid: 14).

Additionally, Presser explains the stories told about crimes may not be objectively truthful but that it is to be expected. Further, Presser claims that our accounts of our experiences and choices are constantly being reconstructed in our memory. We can also be affected by cultural templates surrounding us and by the social context in which our storytelling takes place. Within our storytelling, ulterior motives can lead us to tailor the story with an imagined audience in our mind (ibid, 2018: 17). Presser claims the invalidity of stories about crimes is irrelevant, as stories still “draw on the events, symbols and phenomenological tensions that matters to” the tellers (Presser &

Sandberg, 2014: 7). The tellers also reveal how they establish “who they are - their identity - by emplotting their experience” (Presser, 2018: 6; Presser & Sandberg, 2015).

3.2.1. Master narratives, self-narratives and the underdog story

Narrative is a discourse form “that follows events or experiences over time and makes some point” and is constructed to explain people’s lived realities and experiences, through a temporal order filled with casualties. According to Presser, such narratives provide moral meanings and justifications for the teller in his attempts to motivate acts of mass harm, as language can contain discourses that normalise and legitimise violent acts towards specific groups or people (Presser, 2018).

Master narrative is defined here as “a transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture” (Halverson et al as cited in Presser, 2018: 141) and can operate as a form of narrative that promotes mass harm and other forms of extreme ideas as enculturated and normalised. Master narrative can also be described as “culturally shared stories” that individuals internalise and eventually use as a framework to construct a personal narrative within (McLean & Syed, 2015: 319). Self-narrative is the narrative form we utilise to identify ourselves through our autobiographical stories. We construct a narrative of *who we are* through our stories and experiences, using narrative resources available to us. According to Presser, our self-narratives, which include our identities, are constantly “works in progress that clearly change with new experiences, discourse resources, and interlocutors” (ibid, 2018: 56).

Presser also discussed a concept called ‘the underdog story’, which can be described as seductive stories of “the aggrieved and often misunderstood hero going it alone” (ibid, 2018: 86). It is a narrative where the actor believes he is putting “everything on the line for something bigger than himself” through his actions and that he alone sees things as they are - in this case, the oppression of men (ibid: 103). He views his actions as morally necessary and as the only way to open the public eye to the real truth. In an underdog story, the hero often views himself as part of an oppressed group and views his actions as part of an insurgency (Presser, 2018). By constructing a narrative of victimhood with narrative resources deriving from political discourses for example, the underdog actors can point out a group responsible for his oppression and misfortunes in this society. Such narratives allow the actors to morally justify their attacks towards this specific group and narrate

them as “deserving” of their violence (ibid). According to Presser, underdog stories are “potential mechanisms of mass harm and especially mass violence” (ibid: 102).

Presser (2018) also describes how such a protagonist views himself as a hero and morally good despite his faults - his criminal acts for example. A fundamental part of building self-narratives in such contexts is to construct a preferred self-image and produce a redemptive narrative that emphasises how, deep down, they are actually good people despite their actions (ibid; Verde, 2020). Presser explains these self-narratives, connecting to one’s criminal experience, often contain gaps of essential information that might explain the perspective of “the other side” or these obstacles that the protagonist encounters and finds unjustified (ibid, 2018; Verde, 2020).

4. Methodological framework

In this chapter, I will discuss the approaches that were used to collect and analyse the empirical materials for this thesis. Secondly, I will discuss the process of my data sampling and my selected cases. Finally, I will discuss both my role as a female researcher and ethical considerations. Before I continue, it should be mentioned that I am a deaf researcher who uses Swedish sign language as the primary form of communication. Considering my lack of hearing, there was a need for external assistance, in the form of interpreters, in my data collection, which will be mentioned briefly later.

The purpose of my thesis is to analyse personal accounts of mass killers who were motivated by personal grievances towards women. In doing so, I will investigate what narratives were used to make sense of and justify these perpetrators violence against women. Narrative criminology “takes as its point of departure that stories can be found everywhere”, including self-written-and spoken accounts of one’s own life and choice for example (Fleetwood et al, 2019: 13). On that premise, I have collected personal materials which were created by the perpetrators themselves - in forms of manifestos, Youtube-videos and more. The utilised materials consisted of both spoken and written forms of narratives but considering my deafness, the spoken forms were transcribed into written texts by my interpreters. It means a textual-and thematic analysis, with a narrative approach, was mainly utilised as a method in this thesis. The approach to these narratives was a critical one, as we can not expect offenders’ narratives to be objectively truthful or authentic as storytellers often “speak in ‘borrowed words’,” with “a sideward glance to an audience” (Sandberg, Tutenges & Copes, 2015: 4). The focus is rather on how these stories are told and how they are utilised to make sense of actors’ choices (Presser & Sandberg, 2015).

4.1. Data sampling

In accordance with previous research, the criterias for my data sampling were created - using the definition of mass murder and misogyny as a form of motivation. To be able to study the narratives of these perpetrators, I wanted to utilise personal materials created by themselves - like Sandberg previously described, such personal accounts like manifestos can be a “valuable resource” in contemporary research of offenders’ narratives (ibid: 70).

The cases were therefore selected based on the following criteria: 1) a form of mass attack carried out by a man, 2) in one or more locations within the same day, 3) resulting in several injured and at least one death, 4) potentially motivated by misogyny or simply by personal grievances towards women, 5) obtaining personal accounts in the form of manifestos, Youtube-videos and other personal contents, with enough materials and substance to be analysed in narrative forms. The Internet was utilised to find relevant cases for this thesis, mainly Global Newsstream which is an online database containing both recent and archived global news. Search words like *mass murder/killing/attack* were used along with gendered words or sentences like *misogyny, women/man/females/male, a man kills/murders/attacks women* and more. Once cases were found and identified, they were investigated further to see if they fulfilled the criteria set for this thesis.

The last criteria considerably scaled down the sampling to three perpetrators - George Sodini, Elliot Rodger and Scott Beierle. The cases where the perpetrators expressed themselves in languages other than English or Swedish were discarded, due to the lack of time for translation processes. My accessibility to these personal materials was crucial as well. For example, the British gunman of the Plymouth shooting in 2021 uploaded several Youtube-videos, which contained misogynist rants, weeks before his mass attack. But these videos have been permanently terminated by YouTube in the aftermath of the attack and can not be found anywhere. Unfortunately, as a result of this, my sampling is limited geographically, with all of my selected cases occurring in the US.

4.1.1. Case description

In this section, my selected cases and their perpetrators in this study are to be described in a chronological order. The purpose is to gain a general overview of the incidents. In the end of this section, there is a discussion regarding my selections.

Case 1

On August 4th, 2009, the 48-year-old man, George Sodini, entered an LA Fitness health club in Collier Township, US. Dressed in black workout-clothes, wearing a black headband and carrying a gym bag, he walked into an aerobics class for women ³. Inside there, he put down his bag on the

³www.inquirer.com/philly/news/local/20090806_Pittsburgh_gym_shooter_wrote_of_rejection.html%3foutputType=amp

floor and turned off the lights before he started firing off. He killed three women and injured nine other women before turning the gun on himself. In the aftermath of the incident, the police found suicide notes in Sodini's gym bag, which contained complaints about how he "had never spent a weekend with a woman, never vacationed with a woman and never lived with a woman, and that he had limited sexual experiences"⁴. In his suicide note, Sodini also directed readers to a website under his name which contained his online diary. Over a nine-month period, he continuously documented in his online diary about his growing frustrations over his loneliness and inability to find a girlfriend despite working out and having a decent appearance.

Case 2

On May 23rd, 2014, the 22-year-old Elliot Rodger stabbed his two male roommates and their visiting male friend to death in his shared apartment in Isla Vista, US. Hours after the initial murders, Rodger uploaded a YouTube-video, including several clips, where he explained the purpose with his next acts was to avenge: 1) women generally, for constantly rejecting him and denying him any form of sexual experience, and 2) sexually active men, for taking away his chance with women. He also emailed an autobiographical manifesto titled "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger" to his family and other acquaintances, where he documented his life in detail and reasons for his act of mass harm (Report by Santa Barbara County Police Department, 2015).

Minutes later, Rodger drove to a sorority house at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and "aggressively knocked" on the front door for several minutes (ibid, 2015: 13). But his attempt to gain entry was unsuccessful as nobody opened the door. He decided to shoot three female students out on the street instead, killing two of them. Thereafter, he went on a drive-by shooting spree in the area of Isla Vista, killing one man and wounding fourteen - one was female and others male. He also used his own vehicle to ram people on the streets. After striking his last victim with his vehicle, Rodger committed suicide by shooting himself (ibid). Additionally, in the aftermath of this attack, Elliot Rodger has been repeatedly referenced by other perpetrators who attempted/carried out similar types of mass violence. He is considered a hero by many within the online Incel community (Kelly et al, 2021).

⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/08/05/pennsylvania.gym.shooting>

Case 3

On 2nd November, 2018, the 40-year old Scott Beierle entered a yoga studio in Tallahassee, US, at 17:17. He signed up for a drop-in yoga class, which started at 17:30, under the name Scott Paul. The receptionist thought he appeared nervous, as he kept walking in and out of the yoga studio before finally joining the class at 17:35. Only a few minutes later, several gunshots were fired off by him in the classroom - killing two women and injuring five persons, four of whom were women. Beierle shot himself in the head after his gun jammed at a point and a man present in the yoga class attempted to stop him by hitting him with a vacuum cleaner. It was reported the incident could have been far worse if the man didn't attempt to stop Beierle, given the 100 rounds of ammunition found on Beierle's body afterwards (TPD, 2018). A suicide note was left by him on the nightstand in the hotel room, which he checked into days before the incident. Beierle had laid out the motivation behind his horrific act - his hatred towards women. Besides this note, Beierle also left a trail of hatred towards women through many YouTube-videos and self-published songs on SoundCloud (ibid). Beiere also had a history of prior arrests for grabbing, groping and following/stalking several young women (TPD, 2018).

Case discussion

All three men committed the act of mass murder in various public locations - a yoga studio, a fitness center and the public streets. All three cases resulted in more than one death and multiple injured persons. Both Sodini and Beierle clearly targeted women as a population, as nearly all of their victims were female. However, in the case of Rodger, most of his victims were men. But I have taken his original plan into consideration. He intended to gain access to a sorority house, which is a female space filled with college girls. But his attempt was unsuccessful as nobody opened the door, which possibly led him to drastically change his plans and shoot random people out on the streets and then go on a drive-by shooting spree. Rodger's motivation, which was explicitly stated in his Youtube-video, also included sexually active men, which may explain the male victims. However, my interpretation is that his main focus, considering his primary choice of murder site and his explanation in his manifesto, was women for constantly rejecting him and choosing other men over

him. As Silvas et al (2021) stated, sometimes performing the symbolic act of violence matters more than the choice of victims itself (ibid).

When it comes to their motivations, there were several sources that confirmed their motivations being driven by personal grievances towards women - in form of suicide notes, personal writings, Youtube-videos. These sources, considering their narrative details and lengths, were also appropriate to be used as personal accounts to be analysed in this thesis.

4.2. Collecting data

The data collection in this thesis is built upon multiple online sources, which is suitable (Creswell & Poth, 2018), due to the limited qualitative possibilities to collect information about such cases, especially regarding this: restricted access to interviews with the perpetrators, seeing most of them are possibly in prison in other countries or not alive. All my selected perpetrators committed suicide during their mass attacks, meaning I have no choice but to rely on their personal communications prior to the mass attacks.

I departed from two forms of data collections in my main empirical materials for this study - 1) data collection with information surrounding these cases and, 2) data collection with personal materials created by the perpetrators themselves. The first form of data collection consists of two criminal investigations with objective details surrounding the cases of Beierle and Rodger. After my unsuccessful attempts at finding any record of a criminal investigation concerning the case of George Sodini, I had to settle on diverse news articles that described and detailed his case.

When it comes to analysis materials of Beierle, I utilised self-recorded songs by Beierle along with a 40-minute Youtube-video, containing several clips of Beierle expressing his personal opinions and stories of his experiences. Analysis materials of Rodger consisted of a 137-page manifesto, treated as a life-story, and a 22-minute Youtube-video, containing several clips of Rodger expressing his motivations prior to his attacks. Regarding George Sodini, I utilised his suicide note along with his online diary as analysis materials. Most of these personal materials were found through Google search engine, using different search words along with the name of the perpetrator. Sodini's online diary had been removed from its original website but I was able to access an archived PDF-file of his diary. It should be clarified that both Youtube-videos were uploaded by other users, meaning the

original videos have been taken down and reuploaded by other users on Youtube. It means these Youtube-videos possibly have been edited or compressed by the users who uploaded them. For example, the Youtube-video featuring Beierle was a single 40-minutes long video containing several clips. It indicated that Beriele originally may have uploaded several videos instead of a single video. Unfortunately, there is not much to do about this part, I can only use what I have at my disposal.

4.3. Analysing and coding

Narrative analysis as an analytic framework explores the content of stories and its patterns and meanings. Stories “selectively draw on experiences and reflect and construct the identity and self-understanding of the narrator” (Sandberg, 2022: 2). The process of constructing the codes and themes in my materials has been in development over a long period, as I initially used my empirical materials as a guide in my search for theories and relevant variables. Sveinung Sandberg (2022) describes how stories are conditioned by the tellers’ cultural and social context and should be “understood based on variables such as gender, class...” (ibid: 1). The cultural construction of gender as a variable continuously appeared in my empirical materials, so it was eventually incorporated in my chosen theoretical frameworks. During my coding and analysis, I continually utilised my theoretical frameworks as analytical tools. Narrative theory helped me to build structures out of my empirical materials and find its plots, events and characters that were of importance in their self-constructed narratives. Gender studies were used to conceptualise their motivations in relation to misogyny and to understand the significance of gender in their construction of selves.

Given all of my materials held different forms of narrative, I sorted each of my selected cases into their own case folder so I could analyse and code their contents separately. Codes helped me to find common themes across the cases. After the initial coding, a thematic analysis was implemented in order to find specific narratives and its patterns and meanings in relation to the perpetrators’ acts of mass harm. Seeing that most of my analysis materials, apart from Rodger’s manifesto, could be described more as fractions of a story rather than complete stories, the primary focus has been on the common themes and patterns across my selected materials. By using this approach, I was able to

build thematic narratives by putting several story fractions together. It allowed me to find plots, characters and events that represent the windows into the perpetrators' choices.

4.4. Reflexivity

As a female researcher situated in a gender-loaded research context, there is a need to discuss my reflexivity. As a self-identified feminist, I do have personal interests and values that may lead to preconceived notions on such mass murders. After all, my own personal interest in men's violence against women as a societal problem did lead me to this topic. However, according to Guillemin & Gillam (2004), being reflexive does not mean you have to eliminate your values in your research process, but rather acknowledge the possible limitations of the knowledge and interpretations that are produced in your research (ibid: 275). According to Presser & Sandberg (2019), "narrative criminologists should not only analyse stories, but also try to reconstruct them critically - in a way that resists domination and promotes social justice" (ibid:12). I attempted to apply this approach to my thesis, using my own prior understanding of social injustice in my critique of the empirical materials. After all, Lefkowich (2019), when reflecting on her role as a female researcher examining men's experiences, posited that female researchers do have a lot to offer in such analysis of structural inequalities (ibid; Hastings, 2010).

With that said, it should be noted that my identity as a heterosexual, female may affect the way I viewed their materials but that I consistently engaged in reflective practices and attempted to make sure all of these materials were analysed in line with my chosen frameworks rather than my personal opinions. I can admit these source materials affected me emotionally at times, causing me to take breaks in order to deal with my emotions, especially my anger towards these men. But as the time spent on the thesis increased, I learned to detach myself and view their cases in the abstract, rather than focus on them as scenarios that played out in the real world.

4.5. Ethical considerations

The personal texts and videos published by the selected perpetrators have been used in my thesis without their explicit permission. It was not possible to gain any form of permission, seeing all of the selected perpetrators committed suicide. However, all of these perpetrators did choose to make

their materials available online prior to their suicides. Additionally, all of the used materials were available to anyone online, which makes it a part of the public domain.

One of my biggest ethical considerations was my use of their names, as it may contribute to the media sensationalism in such cases of mass murder (Kellner, 2008). However, all three cases are widely known and their personal materials widely available to the public online - so anyone would be able to search the case details and quotes utilised by me in the analysis and find its original sources. Therefore, I concluded it would be a meaningless process to conceal their names, if they could be identified regardless. Additionally, it would be harder to conduct a narrative analysis if I was not to include personal details that may reveal their identity and case. Despite this, I acknowledge the dilemma arising from notoriety and therefore attempted to use their names sparingly in sections of my paper where possible. I also decided not to include the source links to these personal materials in my list of references - to lower the accessibility in an attempt not to promote such content (Van der Veer, 2020). Other people whose names were mentioned in these personal materials and criminal investigations, like specific women, relatives or victims, were anonymised in order to minimise any form of inconvenience towards these individuals as the result of this thesis (O'Donnell, 2021).

5. Analysis

Analysing offenders' self-narratives allows us to see what narratives they want to present to us and how these offenders wish to be viewed. Such an approach does have limitations, as it means the perpetrator gets to control our perception and interpretation of their acts (Presser, 2012). Nevertheless, by using a critical approach, we can attempt to detect, not only the intended narratives of the perpetrator, but unintentional narratives too. By studying such narratives, we also can investigate how they "appropriate society's master narratives" in their making of the self (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012: 16). In this analysis, I will treat their narratives as part of a protagonist story situated within a gendered context. This will require us to attempt to understand the significance of gender in their construction of selves. We will view their stories as attempts to construct how their attacks will be perceived and justified, and how they, as the protagonists, will be situated within it. The women, and other men, within these stories are viewed in opposition to the protagonist, operating as a "stories feat" for them. Such a formula results in the act of mass murder being part of both a personal and collective project (Presser, 2012). By focusing on offenders' narrative constructions of their lived realities, experiences and motivations, we can endeavour to understand their attempts to legitimise their actions of mass harm.

5.1. Achieving masculinity through dating competition

One of the most dominant protagonist narratives in my materials was that of the 'high achiever', a preferred self-narrative constructed in correspondence with hegemonic masculinity ideals. Running counter to this, is the story of the 'failed achiever', which contributes to a victimhood-narrative of these men who deemed their rejections by women as undeserved and operates as their first step towards legitimising their use of violence. This section focuses on the duality of self-narratives - one preferred narrative where they describe themselves as 'high achievers', putting effort in this dating game, and one counter-narrative of them being 'failed achievers' by acting entitled, socially awkward or aggressive in this dating game. These narratives represent two different embodied forms of masculinity - hegemonic and subordinated. As Connell & Messerschmidt stated (2005), hegemonic masculinity operates as the normative framework for the dominant masculinities that most men attempt to achieve or demonstrate. Whereas subordinate masculinity is "characteristics of a failed

and marginalised masculinity [...] their behaviour contravenes legitimate hegemonic masculine forms” (McFarlane, 2013: 324; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

5.1.1. The high achiever

Bird (1996) describes various forms of competitions among men that reinforces: 1) the individual conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity, and 2) male homosocial banter. One can gain status, respect and approval from other men through different forms of competitions, like “occupational status, wealth, physical strength, sporting achievements, sexual prowess..” (Hall et al, 2022: 534).

The narratives in my empirical materials point out one form of competition which involves a dating game with women. As a part of hegemonic cultural ideals of masculinity, all three men seemed to be aware of the importance of sexual prowess and romantic attraction and how they are not able to uphold this. All of them continuously narrated their lack of success with women as unjustified, describing how they have done what they were supposed to do as “competitors” in this male homosocial game for the attention of women. This characterises a suffering protagonist whose “idealistic motives” are met by obstacles and injustice (Sandberg, 2021). Their interpretation of themselves as high achieving competitors is an important part of how their story moved towards legitimising the use of violence. In his online diary, George Sodini described himself as a man who put effort in his appearance:

Just got back from tanning [...] I actually look good. I dress good, am clean-shaven, bathe, touch of cologne - yet 30 million women rejected me - over an 18 or 25-year period [...] A man needs a woman for confidence. He gets a boost on the job, career, with other men, and everywhere else (December 29, 2008).

Here is an example of how Sodini viewed himself as a high achiever. He described himself putting efforts in forming his body and adjusting his appearance to the masculine ideals - through tanning, nice clothes and appearance. Regarding the rejection part, it will be discussed in a later section but what matters here is the last part of the quote stating how women are objectified as part of a

homosocial interaction. Sodini described how a man needs a woman to get “a boost” with other men - objectifying women as “a resource” to create homosocial bonds with other men.

The importance of being a high achiever was also stressed by Elliot Rodger. In his YouTube-video which he published minutes before heading out on a killing spree, he was shown standing by the side of a road. Rodger, dressed in a black, chequered shirt with a pair of sunglasses resting on his shirt collar, claimed he did everything he could to appear attractive to girls:

I am sophisticated. I am magnificent. I have a nice car, a
BMW [...] I am polite. I am the ultimate gentleman [...]
I put a lot of effort into dressing nice. These, these
sunglasses [he takes his sunglasses off his shirt collar,
showing it off to the camera], were 300 dollars. Giorgio
Armani (clip 1).

He then proceeded to put sunglasses on his face and showed off, saying how fabulous he looked in them. Here, Rodger declared himself as an affluent high achiever, demonstrating his efforts in appearance through his expensive taste in clothes, glasses and car. Like Sodini, Rodger attempted to embody this hegemonic form of masculinity by forming and controlling his body and appearance through effort, good style and “gentlemanly” manners. In his 135-page manifesto, Rodger mentioned several turning points where he decided to do a restart, by having a new haircut and buying new clothes from expensive brands, in hope it will turn him into an ‘Alpha’⁵ and improve his chances with women (pp: 95ff). Working out was a part of his intended makeover: “maybe if I built muscles, girls will be attracted to me” (pp: 63). It implies how he viewed his body as a source for signifying manhood - using it as a culturally mediated instrument to attract women. Like Rodger, Sodini wrote about his efforts going to the gym to stay fit and him frequently going to a tanning salon (December 29, 2008). They both emphasised their effort in moulding themselves into a desirable romantic partner - through physical attributes like being athletic, proper haircuts and a good sense of fashion.

⁵ Alpha: an Incel term for the most dominant, hypermasculine man in a group of men

It suggests they interpreted the physical embodiment of masculinity as the key facet in attracting women. Sodini also emphasised his financial security - having a stable job, rising wage and ownership of a house, which means he viewed his occupational status and income as worthy contributions to this competition. It also indicates a belief in traditional gender roles where the men function as a “breadwinner” and provide for their women. Clearly, Sodini and Rodger expected these various displays of masculinity would deliver women to them - as they have done what they were “supposed to do” as competitors. This narrative allows both Rodger and Sodini to frame themselves as ‘a worked, able-bodied protagonist’ - a man who has done what he should to ‘be able’ to attract women in correspondence with hegemonic ideals. By describing themselves as men who put effort in conceptualising the form of masculinity desired by women, it allowed them to legitimise their anger about not being acknowledged by women despite their “efforts”.

So far, the focus has been on the self-conceptualisation of masculinity through physical attributes. This is where our third perpetrator, Beierle, differed from these two men narrative wise. While Beierle did repeatedly narrate his unsuccessful efforts in getting the attention of women, there was more emphasis on him putting efforts in his ‘actions’ in this competition rather than physical attributes. Bird (1996) described how male homosocial bonds were partially formed through men’s sexual storytelling - in the form of bragging and boasting about their way of courting women, sexual relations to women, track record of sexual exploits and more (ibid; Flood, 2008).

In one clip of his YouTube-video (clip 4, the title: my fraulein⁶), Scott Beierle described - or boasted about - his efforts to court his former girlfriend - showing harsh facial expressions at times, which suggests it did not work out between them despite his efforts. In this video clip, Beierle was shown sitting on a chair in his bedroom - which was filled with empty cardboard boxes and a dishevelled looking bed. He claimed he “flew her to Milan, Oslo and Dublin”, “took her on a hot air balloon”, took her to a couple of dances and gave her chocolates and roses on Valentine’s Day. He emphasised how he always was dressed up during their time together and that he “checks as many boxes as I can when I’m with someone”. At one point, Beierle described a memory of him carrying her across a threshold and tried to reinforce how impressive this effort was by adding: “That was no easy chore. She was no, no dainty article”. The last sentence is an example of how storytelling cultivated by homosociality may objectify and devalue women as part of male bonding -

⁶ Fraulein - a German word for the title of a unmarried woman, corresponding to Miss in English

objectifying women's body sizes in this case (Bird, 1996). It appears Beierle viewed his Youtube-audience as an outlet for male homosocial banter - having such an audience in his mind as he filmed himself telling these stories. By telling these stories, he framed himself as a notable competitor in this dating game and well-deserving of this trophy, in the form of women, as a reward for all of his efforts.

This narrative shows how they were ticking off items in their mind, items which they believed were fundamental in achieving this form of masculinity desired by women. By completing these actions, they believed they would gain sexual access to women and heighten their masculine status and sexual reputation among their male homosocial peers.

5.1.2. The failed achiever

In the prior section, all of these perpetrators constantly reinforced their efforts in this dating game and in achieving this form of masculinity desired by women. Yet, all of them had lived realities of limited sexual experiences and continual rejections by women despite their "efforts". This narrative of them "attempting to be high achievers" allowed them to frame themselves as the victim, as their efforts were described as "unappreciated" by women. Despite their best "efforts", none of them received any form of societal confirmation of their masculinity, ultimately turning it into a subordinated form of masculinity. Rodger, for example, was still a virgin by the time of his mass attack. By continually reinforcing they were "doing everything right", their failures turned into an unexplained anomaly which allowed them to allocate the blame on others - women in other words. The following passage highlights how they narrated their failures regarding sexual prowess and romantic attractions in correspondence with their perceived idea of hegemonic ideals and male entitlement. Sodini continuously described how he struggled to understand the core of his lack of success with women:

No girlfriend since 1984, last Christmas was with [mentions a female name] in 1983. Who knows why. I am not ugly or too weird. No sex since July 1990 either (I was 29). No shit!
(December, 24, 2008).

Here, he narrated his confusion by describing himself as “not too ugly or too weird”, a normal-looking man in other words, but yet, his attempts with women remain unsuccessful. Like he said “Who knows why?”. Sodini reinforced his perceived sexual failure by making a reference to the fact his last sexual experience occurred in 1990 and his last relationship ended in 1984. It shows he was aware of the importance of sexual prowess and romantic attraction in correspondence with hegemonic ideals, and how he was not able to uphold this cultural expectation. Sodini reinforced this narrative of his frustrations concerning his indiscretions by adding these in his diary:

Girls and women don't even give me a second look
ANYWHERE. There is something BLATANTLY wrong
with me that NO goddam person will tell me what it is (July
20, 2009).

These narratives of ‘the high achiever’ and ‘the failed achiever’ are directly linked to each other through this anomaly expressed by Sodini. Despite his efforts through his appearance, women would not comply with his efforts for some reason - like Sodini expressed it “there is something BLATANTLY wrong with me that NO goddamn person will tell me what it is”. It shows how Sodini, perhaps naively, believed that he was following unwritten rules of the dating game through his efforts in his appearance. And by following these rules successfully, he should have been rewarded with women - which did not happen. Like Sodini, Rodger described how women rejected them by not giving him any attention or “a second look”. One time, Rodger described how he put effort into his appearance by dressing up in his fabulous, expensive Armani shirt and his new Gucci glasses before heading out to his college campus:

I came in through the front entrance so that everyone could look at my fabulous self. To my utter dismay, I saw no one turned their head to look at me at all. No girl tilted a head or lifted a pretty little eyebrow at my approach. After all that effort, I was still being treated like I was invisible (pp: 99).

Rodger narrated his confusion over this anomaly - that no woman responded with what he thought they owed to him. He could not comprehend why his physical attributes, despite his efforts, were

not appealing to women. His male entitlement continued to manifest, leading to the formation of a belief that it is a women's obligation to provide men with various forms of goods - notably attention and affection (Manne, 2017). Beierle also described his inability to get female attention, no women wanting to engage in conversations with him:

..She snuffs me, whenever I try to engage her, she answers as quick as she can, then turns away [...] so affable and sociable to absolutely everyone else, EXCEPT ME! (TDP report 2018: 50).

“EXCEPT ME!” demonstrated his entitled belief of this woman owing him time and attention. To him, it was unbelievable that this woman would not show him the same kind of attention she showed to everyone else. But on the other hand, did he have an objective view of his attitude and behaviour towards this woman in this situation?

5.1.2.1. Is the rejection unjustified?

Presser (2018) describes how the protagonist, in his mind, views himself as a hero and morally good despite his faults - his difficulties with pursuing women for example. A fundamental part of building self-narratives in such contexts is to construct a preferred self-image (ibid; Verde, 2020). Presser explains these self-narratives, connecting to one's criminal experience, often contain gaps of essential information that might explain the perspective of “the other side” or these obstacles that the protagonist encounters and finds unjustified. The mass rejection by women in these perpetrators' narratives were all described as unjustified. But at the same time, neither Sodini and Rodger really described specific times where they did “approach” women and asked them out, which gives us a veiled narrative of them having trouble with approaching and pursuing women in appropriate ways.

In his manifesto, Rodger never once mentioned asking out or chatting up a girl despite his claims about constant rejections by women. Rodger repeatedly described how he would go out in a public location, like a café, and loiter there in the hope women would approach him. He also described how he would smile at random women out in the streets, hoping they would approach

him, and then described himself getting furious about not getting any smile back. Rodger was too shy to approach women but still felt entitled to their attention and “smiles”. In this way, women not approaching or smiling back to him was equivalent to him being rejected.

Like Rodger, Sodini displayed shyness in his online diary. He described times where he observed pretty women at his gym for example but he never described himself approaching them or asking them out. He once wrote “I decided to walk over and make a comment about the crowds but she left when I finished the exercise”, which indicates him being too shy and insecure to approach her right away (January 5, 2009). Sodini was also told once by a pastor to stop attending his church after “a minor incident involving a woman who felt he was paying too much attention to her”⁷. It indicates Sodini was being inappropriate towards the woman - him not knowing the balance between these two approaches. Like Manne (2017) says, when men do not get what they believe they are entitled to, it evokes hostile behaviour towards women. Sodini constantly narrated how he was doing everything right and that he fulfilled masculine ideals through shaping his body and appearance. By following these rules in this dating game, Sodini believed women owed him time and attention. Regarding the church incident, Sodini seemed to adapt his belief of entitlement into an action towards a woman and then was reported and punished for doing what “he believed he was entitled to”.

Beierle exhibited a male entitlement similar to Sodini, but perhaps more aggressive. In contrast to the others, Beierle did seem to approach women, approaching them in a more aggressive, offensive manner, which likely discouraged these women from accepting his advances. For example, while in his late 30s, Beierle once approached a 19-year-old woman sunbathing on a college campus and offered to put sunscreen on her. When she denied his request, he “battered the victim on her buttocks” (TPD report, 2018: 55ff). According to Manne (2017), when men do not get what they believe they are entitled to, in form of attention, sex and care from women, it evokes misogynistic behaviour. It can mean “men showing or enforcing hostility toward women who violate patriarchal norms and expectations” (ibid). In this case, Beierle was demanding this young woman to give him what he wanted - namely, bodily contacts under the guise of rubbing sunscreen on her body. This can be perceived as a sexually loaded act by him. When the female denied his request of bodily

⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/08/05/pennsylvania.gym.shooting>

contact, Beierle became hostile towards her, violating her body parts and demonstrating his presumed entitlement to women's bodies, without regard.

5.1.3. The male rivals

A fundamental part of homosociality among men is heterosexual rivalry - a competition in pursuing women. It is a plot that appears in these perpetrators' narratives, with opponents in the form of other sexually successful men. In order to conquer their sense of masculine "failures", these perpetrators attempted to narrate themselves as superior to sexually active men - by constructing themselves as more deserving "competitors" and other men as the lesser deserving "competitors". Doing so, enabled them to legitimise their anger towards women - as women continued to choose these "lesser men". However, their narratives showed traits of their self-perceived sense of inadequacy despite their attempts at suppressing it by pointing out inferiority in other men.

These perpetrators attempted to compensate for their sense of masculine failures by framing other men as more subordinated and less "deserving of women" in various ways. Beierle attempted to construct himself as superior by putting down other men, in correspondence with his perceived idea of hegemonic ideals. Beierle devoted a video clip to criticise and mock: 1) men who have long hair, 2) black men with dreadlocks, 3) men who have pants below the butt, describing it like saying "this is open for business. I'm open for sodomy", 4) men who wear "wife beaters" in public. In the end of this clip, he claimed "it doesn't take that much effort or energy to sound like you care". However, Beierle's narrative differed to the one told by his roommate. His roommate commented on how Beierle, months before his act, was "eating food straight from cans" and wearing far too small clothes. It shows how Beierle attempted to conquer his feelings of inferiority by putting down other men who did not conceptualise his idea of masculinity. There was also a discourse of racism in Beierle's view of inferior men, as he discussed how white women who were involved in interracial relationships betrayed their "blood" - inciting his anger towards women rather than the male opponents.

Sodini, on other hands, attempted to conquer his feelings of inferiority by putting down sexually active men through their female counterparts. Sodini, aware of his lack of sexual prowess

and romantic attractions, attempted to boost himself by discussing how one of his male relatives never had attractive girlfriends:

[Name of the male relative] NEVER had an attractive girlfriend.
[Listing three female names] ... then I lost track [...] He married a Chinese-descent, petite woman with no body, no ass, no chest and no personality... (July 23, 2009).

By pointing out deficiencies in the wife of his male relative, Sodini characterised men who date “unattractive” women as less successful in this competition. He then asserted it was only fair as this male relative was a “useless bully” who tried to discourage his “efferts” when pursuing girls during his teen years (December 31, 2008). By discussing women’s external attributes, Sodini portrayed women as objects whose “trophy” value was entirely dependent upon their physical appearance. By aesthetically critiquing the female counterparts of known male acquaintances in this way, Sodini was able to construct a narrative whereby he appeared superior (at least to himself) to these sexually active men. Rodger also devalued sexually active men through their female counterparts. Rodger belittled his “unattractive” roommate after he confided in him in regarding a former girlfriend, despite the fact that Rodger was himself a virgin at the age of 20:

I didn’t understand how a chubby and unattractive guy like [name of his former roommate] would have been able to get a girlfriend [...]
I concluded to myself that this former “girlfriend” of his that he mentioned must have been just as unattractive as he was (pp: 93)

To Rodger, it was unbelievable that such an unattractive, “less deserving” guy was able to have a girlfriend while he himself still was a virgin despite his efforts. Rodger repeatedly narrated himself as more deserving of girls than “all those slobs at his college” and described himself feeling “insulted by the sight of all these lesser men, walking around with beautiful girls” (clip 1). Aware of his inability to uphold this cultural expectation of heterosexual success, Rodger attempted to reclaim his sense

of superiority by narrating other men as inferior and undeserving of his female objects of desire. At the same time, he assigned the blame on women for choosing these “lesser men”:

I don't understand you girls. It's like your sexual attraction is flawed. It's perverted. You're attracted to the wrong kind of guy (clip 1)

Men who feel their masculinity is threatened tend to direct their anger towards men they believe are of lower rank (Vito et al, 2017). In this case, women who were supposedly inferior to him, chose other ‘inferior’ men over him despite his efforts. It created a motivation for Rodger - to punish women for not giving him the attention he felt entitled to, and to punish lesser deserving men for receiving that attention instead of him.

While Sodini did attempt to put down other men through their “unattractive” female counterparts, he also narrated his perceived sense of inferiority to other successful sexually men via their attractive female counterparts. In an entry, he described a college girl leaving the home of his neighbour, who was in his age:

I just looked out my front window and saw a beautiful college-age girl leave [mentions the name of his male neighbour] house [...] I guess he got a good lay today. College girls are hoez [...] He is about 45 years old. She was a long haired, hot little hottie with a beautiful bod. I masturbate [...] Some were simply meant to walk a lonely path in life (July 23, 2009)

Sodini was comparing his ‘lack of’ sex life with the active one of his neighbour. By noting how his 45-years old neighbour managed to attain a “hot little hottie” college-aged girl, Sodini perceived his neighbour as an impressive competitor as in successfully embodying this form of hegemonic masculinity through an “acceptable commodity”. By stating “college girls are hoez”, Sodini chose to externalise his anger and envy on college girls in general instead of his male opponent. Because they resembled the objects of his perceived failures through rejections.

5.2. Distinguishing women as the bad

This section discusses 1) how stories distinguish the good and the bad by drawing symbolic boundaries between the protagonist and other characters, 2) in relation to how women are described and treated as characters in these men' narratives. Women as a population were portrayed rather more like objects than 'real characters' in these perpetrators' stories - as sexual objects for entitlement and trophies of a competition. Women as a group also represented the immoral/bad in opposition to 'the good' protagonist - a conduct deriving from these perpetrators' perceived reality of constant rejections by females. In these perpetrators' narratives, women also operate as the objects for the externalisation of blame - allowing the perpetrators to punish women for not complying with their view of gender expectations and justifying their use of violence to police.

5.2.1. The dehumanised and objectified women

Women functioning as sexual objects for men is one of fundamental elements of hegemonic masculinity and homosociality. According to Hall et al, (2022), "sexual objectification of women [...] is one of the hallmark strategies used in homosocial interaction among men to promote patriarchy" (ibid: 535). Sexual objectification refers to the views and treatments of women as bodily objects of sexual desire rather than human beings with personhood (Bird, 1996; Manne, 2017). It also contributes to men's enforcement of a gender hierarchy that places women as subordinate to men. This view was prominent when the perpetrators narrated women and contributed to their process of dehumanising women (Bird, 1996; Manne, 2017). Dehumanisation does play a role in justifying mass killings, as such an attitude, along with motivating emotions like anger and frustrations, weakens the actors' "moral restraints against violence" (Presser, 2018; 32). Sodini utilised objectifying language towards women in his online diary - describing women with words like "wench girl"⁸, "very edible", "hoez", "so beautiful as not to be human", "desirable females", "hot little hottie with a beautiful bod". These words were clearly a product of a culture that objectifies women as bodily objects of sexual desire. Rodger was constantly objectifying blonde girls in his narratives:

⁸ Wench = a promiscuous woman; a prostitute

Just so many beautiful blonde-haired girls walking around everywhere. In your revealing shorts, your cascading blonde hair, your pretty faces (clip 1).

Here, he narrated blonde girls as his objects of sexual desire, using the ‘male gaze’ discourse by focusing on their desirable appearance rather than their personhood. At one point, Rodger started to view wealth as a resource that would grant him sex from women. During this period, he was obsessed with winning the lottery and fantasised about how a big lottery win would “buy” him women:

It is evident that girls are not attracted to me as a person. They are repulsed by me. The only way I could possibly become worthy of their love and attraction is if I become wealthy (pp: 102).

Here, Rodger framed wealth as an alternative path to obtaining a masculine capital. He framed women as objects that he can buy and use to manifest his high status as a result of wealth. Women were hereby reduced to sexual tools in his pursuit of a masculine capital.

Sexual objectification of women also meant devaluation - objects whose “trophy” value is entirely dependent upon their physical appearance (Bird, 1996). All of these perpetrators thought they were entitled to women, with high “trophy” value, as result of their “high achiever” performance in this dating game. Rodger had high expectations about attaining blonde, white women, and Sodini was hoping to attain “young, hot girls” and even obtained a book titled “How to date young women for men over 35”⁹. A female relative mentioned that Scott Beierle was “unsuccessful with romantic relationships” but also added that his standards were “abnormally high” (TDP, 2018: 31). This aspect became distinct when Beierle once described how he had to settle down on a “fat woman”, saying:

I knew she was big, but you know, fatties need love too [...] my fuckability threshold is pretty far out there” and expressed

⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=8264736&page=1>

anger over her dumping him “..she had the nerve to direct to me and say something along the lines of ‘I was trying to let you down easy’[...] you’re the fatty! (clip 10: the brick wall).

Such sexual objectifications, body size in this case, contributes to their process of dehumanising women. In a video clip, Beierle also told a story about a woman who stood him up and mentioned how he “could’ve ripped her head off” and called her act as “treachery” for cancelling on him like that. Like McFarlane (2013) writes, there is a risk that men, whose masculine status was perceived as subordinated, would overcompensate by resorting to more extreme forms of masculinity - using displays of “aggression, lack of empathy and devaluation of women” (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 280). In this case, Beierle clearly showed aggression and lack of empathy towards the woman who did not show up on their planned date - which may be the exact attitude that deterred the woman from showing up.

Beierle also exhibited a record of arrests for grabbing, groping and stalking several young women. He had been discharged from his job as an officer in the United States Army (2010) for “inappropriate contact” with female soldiers. He later was hired as a substitute teacher but was terminated from two different schools (2015, 2017) due to “inappropriate touching and contacts” with his female students (TPD, 2018: 55-57). It shows how Beierle dehumanised women to the point where they were just his objects to obtain, in accordance with his belief in his sexual entitlement. Similarly to what Kate Manne (2017) claims, misogyny encompasses a view whereby man feels entitled to objectify and control a woman’s body.

5.2.2. The immoral and evil women

As previously stated, Presser describes how the protagonist views himself as a hero and morally good despite his faults. Storytelling is partially utilised to draw “boundaries between a moral us and a deviant them” (Sandberg, 2016: 154). These perpetrators’ self-constructed narratives of their mass rejections by women were narrated as unjustified and undeserving, which allowed them to characterise women as immoral and bad in various ways (Presser, 2012). In these perpetrators’

personal materials, there was a narrative of “non-respectable women”. Here, Sodini compared his sex life with that of a teenage girl:

I was reading several posts on different forums and it seems many teenage girls have sex frequently. One 16 year old does it usually three times a day with her boyfriend. So, err, after a month of that, this little hoe has had more sex than ME in my LIFE, and I am 48 (June 5, 2009).

The fact that 16-year old girls possibly had more sex than Sodini ever had in his life clearly evoked feelings of shame and humiliation related to his failed sexual prowess. But as a suffering protagonist, Sodini was able to narrate himself as a “decent, nice man” despite his faults in form of failed sexual prowess (see previous sections). He projected his failure onto teenage girls by calling them ‘hoes’ - marking a symbolic boundary through his use of language when narrating women. Like Sodini, Rodger projected his anger over being virgin on women:

How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British [...] they would give themselves to this filthy scum, but they reject ME? The injustice! (pp: 84)

Women were framed as immoral for “giving themselves to this filthy scum” instead of Rodger - a “beautiful” gentleman with a British heritage. Rodger, despite being half-Asian, also utilised a racist discourse to reinforce the immorality and injustice - a white girl who gives herself to an “inferior, ugly black boy”, a man he considered as less deserving and ranked lower than him.

By framing themselves as “decent, deserving” men in their previously discussed narratives, sexually active women were made as their evil and immoral opponents for having sex with everyone else but them despite their efforts. It shows these perpetrators were drawing on a discourse deriving from traditional cultural expectations of sexual behaviour where it is culturally normative for men to initiate sex and be sexually active while penalising women for these same actions (Manne, 2017). In the clip “The American Whore Part 2”, Beierle thought women ought to be penalised for being

“promiscuous” and discussed how “crucifixion” was an appropriate punishment. He also discussed the Affordable Care Act - a health care reform law that offers insurance coverage in the US - and how this law should not “faciliate the sexlives of slutty girls” by covering the cost of birth control (clip “Illegal Immigration and the Unaffordable Care Act”). Here, Beierle demonstrated a misogynistic view, as a part of policing and punishing the women’s resistance to patriarchal gender expectations - by believing women should not be able to obtain fundamental human rights like sexual freedom and free reproductive health care.

Rodger demonstrated a similar view when he described how women “should not have the right to choose who to mate and breed with. The decision should be made for them by rational men of intelligence” (pp: 136). He also believed how women held more societal power than they should have:

Women have more power in human society than they deserve, all because of sex. There is no creature more evil and depraved than the human female [...] their wickedness must be contained to prevent future generations from falling to degeneracy. Women are vicious evil, barbaric and they need to be treated as such (pp: 136)

Here, Rodger believed women have more power than they deserve, as a result of this increased equality in distribution of opportunities, resources and power between genders. Like Lipman-Blumen (1976) explained, there was a stratification system that “located men in such a way that they had virtually total and exclusive access to the entire range of resources available within the society” (ibid: 16). Women had to seek resources from men and in turn “became resources which men can use” - the sexual resource for example (ibid: 16). But in contemporary Western societies, most women are not forced to seek resources from men anymore - at least not to the same extent. It means women do not have to provide men with sexual resources in order to gain access to other resources (ibid). To these perpetrators, women were immoral and evil for not seeking sexual resources from these perpetrators, and for not accepting and acting in accordance with their supposed subordinated status as women. Rodger believed the world would go downhill if women continued to hold societal power - “falling to degeneracy” like he described it.

5.2.3. Attributing blame to women

Generally, mass murderers “tend to reject personal responsibility for their long history of frustration and failure”, which leads to an externalisation of blame on other people for their long-term failures and frustrations (Silva et al, 2021: 2167). This can be emphasised in their choice of victims - holding a specific group accountable for their difficulties in life. In Adkisson’ case (see pp: 13ff), it was the liberals who were culpable for his unfair life circumstances, a standpoint which he utilised when forming his redemptive story justifying his violence towards them (Presser, 2012). The perpetrators in this thesis did experience various forms of life difficulties and held general women accountable for it.

Beierle, at age of 40, had been fired multiple times from his substitute teaching jobs - due to “inappropriate touching and contacts” with his female students and for “watching pornography” during his work time (TPD, 2018: 55, 57). His roommate described how Beierle was a “loner” and seemed to experience both financial and mental issues prior to the mass attack (TDP, 2018: 11). In the last months prior to his attack, Beierle sang about killing and raping women, grabbing their butts and accused women of “lying” and “treachery”. One of his songs contained lyrics like: “To the hell with the boss that won’t get off my back” and “To hell with the girl I can’t get in the sack”. These lyrics not only narrate his profound sense of failure, being sexless and jobless, it also narrated his rejection of personal responsibility for his failures. His suicide note undoubtedly pointed out women as responsible for his act of mass attack:

If I can’t find one decent female to live with, I will find many
indecent females to die with. If they are intent on denying me
life, I will have no choice, but to deny them life (TDP, 1028)

By saying “women denied him life” through rejections, he narrated his act of mass attack as “an eye for an eye” - an act of vengeance for all misdeeds done to him by women. If they deny him life, he will deny them life as well.

While the 48-year-old Sodini did have a stable job and financial security, he was unhappy with the monotony of his life and described his long-term loneliness as:

Why should I continue another 20+ years alone? I will just work, come home, eat, maybe do something, then go to bed alone for the next day of the same thing. Auschwitz Syndrome, be in serious pain so long one thinks it is normal (January 5, 2009).

Here, he attempted to reinforce the narrative of his loneliness by comparing his pain with the one endured by the Holocaust survivors as result of their traumatic experiences in the concentration camps. Framing himself as a suffering, oppressed protagonist. When Sodini got a promotion and a raise, he reacted by writing:

But that is NOT what I want in life [...] I have slept alone for over 20 years. Last time I slept all night with a girlfriend it was 1982 (July 20, 2009)

Sodini clearly stated female company was what he wanted in life, not a job promotion or wealth, and viewed female company as the only cure of his monotony life. In doing so, he was constructing women both as the *core element* of his loneliness and as the *core solution* that would erase that sense of failure. This allowed him to reject personal responsibility for his own failures and allocate his opportunity for a life-change into the hands of women. Like Sodini, Rodger did narrate his constant loneliness as a result of lack of success with women. His manifesto contained a theme of loneliness which he associated with his lack of romantic attractions, his inability to lose virginity and to fit in with the “cool guys” at his high school/college. Rodger described his manifesto as a story of “a war against cruel injustices” and pointed out women as responsible for his “suffering”:

All I ever wanted was to love women, and in turn to be loved by them back. Their behaviour towards me has only earned my hatred, and rightfully so! I am the true victim in all of this. I am the good guy. Humanity struck at me first by condemning me to experience so much suffering. I didn't ask for this. I didn't want this. I didn't start this war... I wasn't the one who struck first... (pp: 137).

By narrating his suffering and loneliness as a product of his rejections and treatments by women, he externalised responsibility for his failures onto women. By presenting themselves as a product of their treatments and rejections by women, these perpetrators draw upon an oppression discourse of men as victims and hereby held women accountable for their acts - like Sodini described in one of his diary notes: “To get a friend like her and for night time action, I would cancel this plan, or put on hold, at least for a while” (January, 5, 2009). By externalising responsibility on women, they were able to justify their violent revenge - as a part of policing and punishing the women’s resistance to patriarchal gender expectations. Like Mann (2018) describes, misogyny is the act of policing women who deny men what they believe they are entitled to. In this case, these perpetrators utilised an extreme form to establish their male dominance over women, for not complying with their entitlement. Like Rodger expressed:

If I can’t have you girls, I will destroy you ... I’ll take great pleasure in slaughtering all of you. You will finally see that I am in truth the superior one. The true alpha male. Yes...after I have annihilated every single girl in the sorority house (clip 4).

5.3. The final accomplishment

In this section, I summarize my findings, in regard to emerging narratives, plots and gendered characters in these perpetrators’ personal materials, and utilize them to analyse 1) how they may utilise violence as part of a gendered narrative accomplishment, 2) how the perpetrators symbolise and realise their self-narrative, and its given motivations, through their choice of victims and murder locations. My findings tell a story filled with injustice where the women, and other men, are viewed as the opponents to the suffering protagonist.

It is a story where the protagonist’ final act would operate both as a narrative accomplishment and as an act of insurgency. These narratives resemble an underdog story, as the hero often views himself as part of an oppressed group and views his actions as part of an insurgency (Presser, 2018). These perpetrators constructed themselves as suffering protagonists, by describing they were “doing everything right” and that they demonstrated various masculine ideals desired by women, through their bodies and actions. They were following these unwritten rules in this dating game and believed

women owed them time and attention, not other “lesser men”. Yet, they had lived the realities of constant rejections and loneliness in a society that is growing towards equality. They experienced a failure to achieve or demonstrate the idealized, traditional form of masculinity - unable to be this sexually active, powerful and successful man. By using a victimhood-narrative, with narrative discourses deriving from misogynistic worldviews, these perpetrators pointed out women as a group responsible for their oppression, humiliations and misfortunes.

Like Presser (2018) describes, an underdog actor believes he is putting “everything on the line for something bigger than himself” through his actions and that he alone sees things as they are - in this case, the threat of male oppression and women’s increased societal power over men (ibid: 103). He views his act of mass harm as morally necessary and as the only way to open the public eye to the real truth. Like Beierle described:

You [women] bring this on yourselves [...] I have a duty, an obligation, a moral obligation to proceed and act as such (TPD, 2018: 44).

It is a misogynist story with an logical (illogical) consequence of an underdog narrative, followed by a failed masculine narrative - mass murder of women being symbolic of these perpetrators’ perceived ‘mass rejection’.

5.3.1. Taking a last stand

As previously stated, when a man’s masculine status is threatened, he is more likely to overcompensate by resorting to more traditional forms of masculinity - through displays of “toughness, aggression, lack of empathy, devaluation of women...” (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 280). Violence is hereby viewed as a tool to maintain male dominance and restore, protect or enhance their masculine identity (Marganski, 2019; McFarlane, 2013). Like Kalish & Kimmel (2010) so aptly stated, such violence is an outcome of “a gendered emotion, a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and the moral obligation and entitlement to get it back” (ibid: 454). These perpetrators were, like Katz (1988) describes it, taking a last stand in defence of their undermined masculine status. Rodger described his act of mass harm as an chance to reclaim his true worth:

Everyone knew how undesirable I was to girls, and I hated everyone just for knowing it. I want people to think that girls adore me. I want to feel worthy [...] But I will finish it by striking back. I will punish everyone. And it will be beautiful. Finally, at long last, I can show the world my true worth (pp: 135, 137)

Like in an underdog story, Rodger explained how his acts will finally show the world his “true worth” as a man - which women deprived him of. Women resembled the objects of these perpetrators’ perceived failures. Mass murder of women, who “have wronged” and humiliated them through rejections, was therefore a tool for them to restore and reinforce their lost sense of masculinity and acted as an compensation for their humiliation - an emasculation of women (Katz, 1988; Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). By choosing victims, who represented their masculine failures, it was an opportunity for them to demonstrate their preferred self-story and to realise their idealised version of masculinity. By performing the most extreme act of “masculine transcendence” - they were self-affirming their masculine identity by avenging those who evoked their sense of masculine failures (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010; Presser, 2012).

5.3.2. A call to homosocial arms

Presser (2018) describes how stories of mass harm and its rhetoric promotes future actions, as storytelling can evoke emotions and inspire us to do harmful actions. Sodini was one of the first ones contributing to this trend of mass killings motivated by misogyny in the modern age. According to the Isla Vista shooting investigation, Rodger googled George Sodini a few times and even mentioned his name in a few unknown forum posts (ibid, 2015: 45ff). It shows he was likely inspired by the acts of mass harm carried out by Sodini. In turn, Beierle paid homage to Rodger in one video called “Plight of the Adolescent male”, where he sympathised with Rodger and stated he wanted to send “a message” to everyone who are in the same position as Rodger, including the younger self of Beierle, in this “endless wasteland that breeds this longing and frustration”.

It shows how these past narratives contained discourses of injustice that inspire and motivate other people, who are positioned in similar situations. Like Presser (2018) described, stories are truly “interdiscursive, they borrow from or connect with other stories” (ibid: 144). Within these perpetrators’ narratives, there was a master narrative of male rage as a result of recent societal changes leaving men feeling disadvantaged and deprived of privileges. These perpetrators used an underdog format to tell stories about their suffering in the form of male oppression and their act of insurgency against those who were responsible. To show their audience, of the same mindset, that they are not alone, and so that others can learn from their stories, in hope to start a revolt against women and their increased societal power as a result of feminism (Presser, 2018). Like Sodini wrote in his last diary note: “maybe all this will shed insight on why some people just cannot make things happen in their life, which can potentially benefit others” (August 3, 2009).

The locations of their mass violence are clearly a symbolic choice for their narrative accomplishment - as symbolic as a black church, a synagogue or a mosque for far-right attackers. Like Katz (2016) stated, the choice of murder site sometimes has an autographical meaning for the murderer and may evoke feelings of humiliation or degradation. Rodger’s choice of murder site did resemble the very feelings of humiliation and anger. He originally planned to target a sorority house, which was a female space filled with college girls. He described explicitly his choice of murder site:

“I will attack the very girls who represent everything I hate in the female gender: The hottest sorority of UCSB [...] [Mentions the name of the sorority house] is full of hot, beautiful blonde girls; the kind of girls I’ve always desired but was never able to have because they all look down on me. They are all spoiled, heartless and wicked bitches. They think they are superior to me..” (pp: 132)

This sorority house as a planned murder site clearly symbolised his perceived sexual failures and inability to gain access to “beautiful blonde girls”, as he originally moved to the college oriented town Isla Vista because it was “the perfect environment to lose virginity” (manifesto: 82). But

Rodger's attempt to gain access to the sorority house was unsuccessful as nobody opened the door. It led him to change his plans and shoot people out on the streets and then move on to the next phase of his planned mass attack by going on a drive-by shooting spree. It was a part of his plan, as he did explicitly stated "After I have annihilated every single girl in the sorority house, I'll take to the streets of Isla Vista, and slay every single person I see there" (clip 4).

Sodini targeted a familiar place as he used to work out regularly there but he allegedly didn't know anyone in the class¹⁰. This aerobics class was only for women, so it may mean he targeted a women-only class on purpose. His victims simply served as representatives for his feelings of humiliation and inadequacy. Prior to his attack, Beierle's search history consisted of search words like "cheer camp near me", "hot yoga", "nude hot yoga", "hot yoga Tallahassee" (TPD 2018: 47-49). It is an indication of him planning to target a female space and him obtaining a view of yoga as a representation of female sexuality. A sorority house, a yoga studio and a women's aerobics class at a fitness health club: these locations were viewed as female-dominated spaces associated with women that Rodger, Beierle and Sodini felt entitled to but were unable to have access to. By targeting these spaces, it seems to be an attempt at taking control of their previous humiliating failures and reinforcing their lost sense of masculinity. It also operates as a narrative project that "honours" what these killers suffered through their use of violence (Katz, 1988).

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/05/fitness-centre-shooting-pennsylvania>

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to increase our understanding of gendered mass murder by examining how perpetrators of such mass murders utilise narrative and storytelling to legitimise and make meaning of their violent acts towards women. Additionally, it sought to examine the significance of gender in their construction of ‘self’ and narratives that seek to justify their violent attacks on women. Mass murderers are more likely to die during the incident, which give us no choice but analysing their personal communications prior to their mass attacks. By combining theoretical frameworks of narrative criminology and gender studies, I was able to build thematic narratives, with plots, events and characters, across several cases and at the same time, conceptualise these perpetrators’ narrative accomplishments in relation to gender studies.

All three mass murderers did construct their narratives using similar discourses of misogyny, resembling the very contents and ideologies discussed within the manosphere, and conveyed a narrative of contemporary “male oppression” and women holding “too much” power. This relates to male supremacist movements and ideologies, as these are centred around this very denial of “the existence of patriarchy” and “presents men, not women, as the true victims of sexism and discrimination” (Kelly et al, 2021: 8). These perpetrators presented themselves as victims whose expressions of sexual and romantic interest were constantly dismissed by women in unjustified means. They consistently narrated their efforts in achieving masculine ideals desired by women and how it was “unappreciated” through constant rejections. Despite their best “efforts”, none of them received any form of societal confirmation of their masculinity, which turned it into a subordinated form of masculinity. They seem to feel threatened by the societal changes related to women’s empowerment, as all of them held presumed entitlement and superiority to women through their perceived view of hegemonic masculinity, in which patriarchy “used to be” legitimated and preserved (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010: 459). One of them expressed women should not have any sexual freedom or free reproductive health care, and the other claimed women should not have any right to “choose who to mate and breed with” and that the decision should be made by rational thinking men. In order to conquer their sense of masculine “failures”, these perpetrators attempted to narrate themselves as superior to women (and other “lesser men”), by devaluing and oppressing

them in diverse ways. Which turns these perpetrators' narratives into a paradox, representing both the powerlessness and empowerment within these men.

None of them denied the extent of their acts of mass harm but they did attempt to frame it as morally justified and frame their victims as deserving of their violence - through their self-pity narration of themselves as a product of their treatments and rejections by women. Their use of language contained misogynistic discourses that normalise and legitimise violent acts towards women as a group. Their stories were narrated as if the world was downhill for men like them, using their negative experiences involving women, and they alone saw this threat (Presser, 2018). One of these perpetrators stated "I have a duty, an obligation, a moral obligation to proceed and act as such", meaning he viewed his act of mass harm as "morally necessary" which does resemble the mindset of an underdog actor (Presser, 2018). Such underdog narratives allow these perpetrators to morally justify their attacks towards women. Manne (2017) described how misogyny operates as the attempts to control, punish and police women who challenge and resist male dominance and patriarchal structures. My findings showed these men carried out an extreme act of misogyny - as a part of policing and punishing women back into their "supposed" positions, in accordance with patriarchal gender expectations.

As a result of this thesis, I believe narrative criminology is a worthwhile approach in such cases. Using this framework, we were able to understand more by analysing their narrative constructions of their lived realities and experiences and how it motivates and legitimises their actions of gendered mass harm. Such personal materials are indeed valuable resources in contemporary research of mass murder perpetrators' narratives (Sandberg, 2013: 70). It also allows us to explore how narratives and storytelling can direct our thinking, evoke emotions and inspire us to either commit or resist harmful actions. In my case, these narratives did evoke emotions in me but in the other way round. I view their narratives as a threat, but not of male oppression but of a continuation of women's oppression through resistance and violence by men, who strongly believe in their privileges and feel disadvantaged in this society that is trending towards equality. I believe there is a need for further research concerning this topic, in the interest of greater knowledge and understanding concerning misogyny and male supremacism as a potential ideology of mass violence and its rising mobilisation through online communities (DiBranco, 2020).

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