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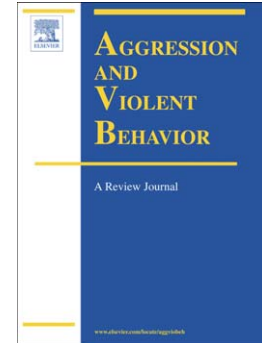
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Donald G. Dutton, Katherine R. White, Dan Fogarty

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PARANOID THINKING IN MASS SHOOTERS

DONALD G. DUTTON

KATHERINE R. WHITE

DAN FOGARTY

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Correspondence: dondutton@shaw.ca or Department of Psychology, UBC, 2136 West Mall,
Vancouver BC, V6T 1Y7

Phone: (604) 822-4592 Fax: (604) 822-6923

ABSTRACT

Mass murderers, particularly school shooters are depicted in the literature as either reacting with rage to taunts and bullying or as being psychopathic. However, examination of diaries and websites left by a subset of mass shooters (e.g., Eric Harris, Kimveer Gil, Cho Seung Hui, Anders Breivik) reveal a different phenomenology than that typically proposed. This group greatly exaggerates the negativity of their treatment as reported by third-party school peers. They become and remain fixated and obsessed with rejection by what they see as an elite in-group whom they see as having unfairly achieved success. Instead of transcending the rejection, they formulate plans to annihilate the transgressors, which they justify as vengeance for the transgressions made against them. The self-exacerbating and obsessive quality of these perceptions are more consistent with paranoid thinking than with psychopathy. The perceptions feed on themselves and, being part of a closed belief system, expand with time. In the rare cases where the perpetrator survives the mass shooting, they are diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. We focus on the pre-psychotic deterioration of their thinking.

Keywords: School shootings; Mass murderers; Paranoid thinking

1. Introduction

Civilian mass murder is front page news and a number of high profile school shootings have led to attempts to diagnose and characterize mass shooters. Unfortunately psychological "diagnosis" of mass shooters is often based on symptoms that are shared with other diagnoses. We argue that inspection of diaries or disclosures to psychiatrists made by some mass shooters reveal profound disturbances in ego-identity and paranoia.

2. Existing typologies

Verlinden et al. (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2001) examined nine cases of multiple victim school shootings and developed a list of risk factors at four levels, based on information available in the Lexis/Nexis legal database. These risk factors were categorized as individual, family, school/peers and societal/environmental. Amongst the individual level factors were difficult temperament, impulsivity/hyperactivity, psychiatric conditions, a history of aggression, substance abuse, and beliefs. Common individual factors included "anger, depression, blaming others for problems, threatening violence...a history of aggression, either physical or verbal...receiv[ing] mental health treatment, and hav[ing] known problems with substance abuse" (Verlinden et al., 2001, p. 42).

Newman et al. (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004) examined a number of school shootings in the US and developed a list of essential factors that collectively could produce school shootings. They termed these necessary but not sufficient conditions and included, 1) the shooter's perception of himself as extremely marginal in the social worlds that matter to him, 2) psychosocial problems in the shooter, including mental illness, severe depression, abuse and "related vulnerabilities," 3) cultural scripts—prescriptions for behavior that lead to a belief that unleashing an attack on teachers and classmates will solve the

shooter's problems, 4) a failure of surveillance systems to identify troubled teens, 5) gun availability. Data sets from the Centers for Disease Control and the United States Secret Service support the presence of these factors in the 27 shootings examined. By comparing the school shooters with a group of other students who had committed suicide at school, Newman et al. (2004) found the shooters were more likely to be socially marginal, to have few friends and those they had also coming from outcast cliques (p. 239). Almost three-quarters of the shooters "felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured by others prior to the attack" (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum & Modzeleski, 2002, p. 21). Feeling persecuted and being persecuted are, of course, not the same thing. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) focused on homophobic bullying and teasing as a cause of mass shootings. Kimmel and Mahler rejected "psychological problems and pathologies" and focused on "gender ideology" (i.e., homophobia: p. 1444). They quoted one Columbine football player who claimed to have taunted the Columbine killers for being gay. However, Cullen (2009) found that the Columbine shooters (Harris and Diebold) were not victims of bullying, but this was an assumption that the press developed to quickly make sense of the shooting. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) had cited a press article as a source for their conclusion about bullying. The basis for bullying in the Newman et al. (2004) study was that the offenders "felt persecuted, bullied or attacked" (p. 241) not that they were actually victimized. Further evidence that the causal factors may have more to do with the psychology of the perpetrator than the actual social climate of the school, comes from a meta-analytic review by Steffgen, Recchia and Viechtbauer (2013). Thirty six studies linking school social climate to violence found a moderate negative relationship between student's perceptions of school climate and violence. There was a large range of variance between studies and attempts to specify elements of school climate related to violence were not successful. That is, the effect size did not increase when more specific measures were assessed.

Langman (2009a) developed a typology of rampage-school shooters based on case histories of ten shooters and developed categories that he termed traumatized, psychotic and psychopathic. There are two immediate problems with this categorization system: the first being that traumatized is not mutually exclusive with the other two categories. The second is Langman's classification of some mass murderers (e.g., Eric Harris) as psychopathic. Langman focuses on the anger outburst aspect in diaries such as Harris'—which of course is callous and psychopathic. In his book on the Columbine shooting, Cullen (2009) also diagnoses Harris as psychopathic and focuses on Harris' infatuation with deception. Harris bragged about his ability to deceive, especially to deceive his parents. His plan to blow up his school was formulated months in advance and Harris practiced making pipe bombs. It is true that there is no empathy expressed for the intended victims. That being said, there is another dimension to Harris' rage that is a common theme with school shooters and unlikely for a psychopath; psychological pain over perceived rejection.

It is important to focus on the "perceived causes" factor—i.e. the phenomenology of the perpetrator—described in their diaries to see what motivated the violence. For those mass murderers who left diaries, there are themes which we detail below suggesting powerful emotions deriving from group rejection as prominent with these shooters—these are not consistent with psychopathy but read as obsessions with a group that the perpetrator claims to despise and from which he feels rejected. Psychopaths do not form emotional bonds, and are unlikely to obsess about rejection by others—they are more likely to dismiss the others out of hand (Patrick, 2007). Patrick (2007) assessed 219 incarcerated psychopaths using the Tellegen Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (Tellegen, 1982) which measures, inter alia, "negative emotionality" (NEM), an admixture of poor stress reactions, alienation (e.g., feeling mistreated, victimized) and aggression (e.g., vengeful, hurts others for own gain). Patrick found

that the Psychopathy Checklist Factor 1 (interpersonal-affective) factor correlated $-.06$ (ns) with NEM. In short, psychopaths have low reactivity to stressors, including anxiety as a reaction to group sanction or rejection. We argue below that the very blend of alienation and vengefulness measured by NEM is exactly what is expressed in the diaries of mass shooters, a personality pattern rife with anxiety over identity issues and obsessing over being an outcast.

3. Cases:

3.1 Eric Harris

Eric Harris (age 18) was the leading force in the Columbine killings in Colorado on April 20, 1999. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were high school seniors who shot 27 people at their high school, killing 13. They then committed suicide in the school library. Harris had been making pipe bombs, with the plan to blow up the school (these bombs failed to detonate), as well as shoot students. Harris and Klebold may have been part of a group (of self identified outsiders) called the Trenchcoat Mafia, although they did not appear in a group photo of the Trenchcoat Mafia taken in 1998 for the school yearbook. Harris and Klebold played a violent videogame called Doom and had various websites that espoused hatred for the people in their neighborhood and the world in general. When they started experimenting with pipe bombs, they posted the results online. Harris had been sent for psychiatric assessment and anger management after an arrest on January 30, 1998. He was taking an antidepressant (Luvox), which was supposed to suppress anger (Cullen, 2009, p. 208). He did mention the anger and depression to the psychiatrist but not that he had already been making bombs. Harris' diaries indicate that "seething hatred" is probably more accurate a term than anger. Klebold seems to have been following Harris' lead.

3.2 Seung Hui Cho

Seung Hui Cho (age 23) killed 32 people and wounded many more at Virginia Tech University, before committing suicide on April 16, 2007. Cho, a South Korean who had moved to the US at age eight, was a senior at Virginia Tech. Cho had been diagnosed with and treated for a prior severe anxiety disorder and major depression beginning in middle school, and he continued receiving therapy and special education support until his junior year of high school. While in college in 2005, Cho had been accused of stalking two female students and was recommended for a mental health assessment. He was assessed by a psychiatrist at St. Albans Psychiatric Hospital who reported, “[Cho] is mentally ill; that he does not present an imminent danger to (himself/others), or is not substantially unable to care for himself, as a result of mental illness; and that he does not require involuntary hospitalization” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 47). On April 16, 2007 Cho killed two students then returned to his room to mail a package (with a video of himself) to NBC News, and re-arm. In the next nine minutes he fired 170 shots, injuring dozens of people, and killing 30, he then committed suicide.

3.3 Kimveer Gill

Kimveer Gill (age 25) shot 20 people (killing one) at Dawson College, in Montreal on September 13, 2006 and then committed suicide. Gill was an Indo-Canadian born in Quebec, described as a loner, angry, alienated, and into Goth culture. Gill played a video game that was a re-enactment of the Columbine killing (rehearsal) and owned a semi-automatic Beretta CX-4 Storm, shotgun. Friends said he was never bullied in high school. He dropped out of a community college (not the one where the shooting occurred) in January 1999. Gill received some military training, saying he wanted to be a mercenary. He was voluntarily discharged but

had received weapons training. He had maintained a web blog for some time preceding the shooting.

3.4 Anders Breivik

On July 22, 2011 Breivik (age 32) exploded a bomb outside the office of the Prime Minister of Norway, the blast killed seven people and seriously wounded eleven. With the national focus still on the blast, Breivik boarded a ferry to the island of Utoya, 25 miles northwest of Oslo, dressed in a police uniform. The island was the location for the youth summer camp organized by the Norwegian Labor Party. At the camp, Breivik shot and killed 82 people, mostly teens. Police arrested Breivik at the scene and he admitted to the killings. Breivik e-mailed a 1500 page manifesto to 5700 people entitled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*. He said he was inspired by the Unabomber's Manifesto (Ted Kaczynski). In it he attacked the threat of Muslim immigration to Norway, and blamed the Norwegian Labor Party for encouraging this. He described himself as the "Savior of Christianity" and was active on anti-Muslim websites. Breivik had mental health issues as early as age four and these seemed to recur and exacerbate when he moved back in with his mother at age 26.

4. Diaries/web logs

The phenomenology of the perpetrator in the weeks or days prior to the shooting is available in that some shooters kept diaries or web blogs or, in Breivik's case, wrote a manifesto. A central theme that runs through these diaries is one of feeling rejected, dismissed, disrespected and devalued by an "in-group" invariably depicted as "jocks and preppies" and of wanting vengeance for this mistreatment. The in-group is despised for being "superficial" and for getting unwarranted status.

4.1 Eric Harris

Here are excerpts from the diary of Eric Harris, one of the two shooters at the Columbine High School massacre of April 20, 1999.

Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, how fucking weak I am and shit, well I will get you all back, ultimate fucking revenge here. You people could have shown more respect, treated me better, asked for my knowledge or guidance more, treated me more like a senior, and maybe I wouldn't have been so ready to tear your fucking heads off[...]That's where a lot of my hate grows from. The fact that I have practically no self-esteem, especially concerning girls and looks and such. Therefore people make fun of me...constantly...therefore I get no respect and therefore I get fucking PISSED (11/12/98; Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO), 1999, p. 26, 014).

Someones bound to say "what were they thinking?" when we go NBK [Natural Born Killers] or when we were planning it, so this what I am thinking. "I have a goal to destroy as much as possible so I must not be sidetracked by my feelings of sympathy, mercy, or any of that, so I will force myself to believe that everyone is just another monster from Doom like FH [Former Human] or FS [Former Sergeant] or demons, so It's either me or them. I have to turn off my feelings." Keep this is mind, I want to burn the world, I want to kill everyone except about 5 people, who I will name later (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,012; annotations as cited in Langman, 2009b).

I hate you people for leaving me out of so many fun things (4/3/99; JCSO, 1999, p. 26, 018).

HATE! I'm full of hate and I Love it. I HATE PEOPLE and they better fucking fear me if they know what's good for 'em[....]If people would give me more compliments all of this might still be avoidable...but probably not. Whatever I do people make fun of me, and sometimes directly to my face. I'll get revenge soon enough. Fuckers shouldn't have ripped on me so much huh! HA! Then again its human nature to do what you did...so I guess I am also attacking the human race. I cant take it, its not right...true...correct...perfect. I fucking hate the human equation (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,015).

Same thing with all those rich snotty toadies at my school. Fuckers think they are higher than me and everyone else with all their \$ just because they were born into it? Ich denk NEIN [German: I think not] Everyone should be put to a test. an ULTIMATE DOOM test[...].Fucking snotty rich fuckheads [name censored by J. C. Sheriff Office] who rely on others or on sympathy or \$ to get them through life should be put to this challenge. (4/12/98; JCSO, 1999, p. 26, 005-26, 006, annotations as cited in Langman, 2009b)

I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to the heart, and yank the fucking blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a fucking wolf, show them who is god. Strangle them, squish their head, bite their temples into the skull, rip off their jaw, rip off their collar bones, break their arms in half and twist them around, the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahh... so much to do and so little chances (11/17/98; JCSO, 1999, p. 26,016).

A personality profile of Eric Harris, based on journal entries and personal communication, suggested behavior patterns consistent with "malignant narcissism...the core

components of this syndrome are pathological narcissism, antisocial features, paranoid traits, and unconstrained aggression" (Immelman, 2004). The report noted that such a profile should not be construed as a direct psychiatric diagnosis, which is based on face-to-face interviews, formal psychological testing, and collection of collateral information. Malignant narcissism is a level of personality fracture or disorganization (Kernberg, 1992). A disturbance of object relations so the sense of self is fragile, and in turn compensated for by "antisocial grandiosity" e.g., "I am above the rules" (Millon & Davis, 2000, p. 428), narcissism also reflected in a preoccupation with mistreatment by others, e.g., "they disrespected me".

4.2 Kimveer Gill

Kimveer Gill posted this online (translated from French):

If people were making your life a living hell wouldn't you be hurt emotionally. How come no one ever talks about those MOTHER FUCKING JOCKS AND PREPS who's fault it is. Oh no. Heaven forbid. We couldn't possibly say that. Why does society applaud jocks? I do not understand. They are the worse kind of people on earth. And the preps are no better, they think they're better than others.....but they're not (1/5/06; fatality666, 2006).

Gill's vision of vengeance in the form of apocalyptic annihilation read as follows:

It will be a quiet and peaceful morning. A light drizzle will be starting up. The clouds will be grey, so grey. Just the way I like it. Disembowled bodies litter the streets. Some have been decapitated, others hung off bridges and over-passes. Yet, others still lie burning. Flames slowly eating away at their putrid flesh. Glorious. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA They

have paid this day, they truly have paid. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA (12/23/05; fatality666, 2006).

The diary then repeats this apocalyptic vision, with its central character a vengeful and omnipotent God.

Gill's self description was posted on a website called Vampirefreaks.com and reads:

He is male. He is 25 years of age. He lives in Quebec. He finds that it is an o.k. place to live. He is not a people person. He has met a handful of people in his life who are decent. But he finds the vast majority to be worthless, no good, kniving, betraying, lying, deceptive, motherfuckers. Work sucks...School sucks...Life sucks...What else can I say. Metal and Goth kick ass. Life is like a video game, you gotta die sometime (fatality666, 2006).

He also wrote,

I hate this world I hate the people in it I hate the way people live I hate god I hate the deceivers I hate betrayers I hate religious zealots I hate everything I hate so much (I could write 1,000 more lines like these, but does it really matter, does anyone even care) (3/15/06; fatality666, 2006).

More specifically he described his "dislikes" as:

Jocks, preps, Country music, Hip Hop, Posers [...] All Those Who Oppose My Rule, People who pretend to be your friend, but they're not [...] Religious People Who Think They Know Everything[...] They Don't Understand That They're Just A Bunch Of Little Sheep. [...] DAMN MOTHERFUCKING JOCKS (fatality666, 2006).

4.3 Cho Seung Hui

Virginia Tech Shooter, Seung Hui Cho described:

Do you know what it feels like to be spit on your face and have trash shoved down your throat? Do you know what it feels like to dig your own grave? Do you know what it feels like to have your throat slashed ear to ear? Do you know what it feels like to be torched alive? Do you know what it feels like to be humiliated and impaled upon on a cross and left to bleed for your own amusement?[...] Your Mercedes wasn't enough?[...] Your golden necklaces weren't enough?[...] Your trust fund wasn't enough? Your Vodka and Cognac weren't enough? All your debaucheries weren't enough? (Dailymotion, 2007)

4.4 Anders Breivik

From Breivik's psychiatric assessment and manifesto, the following components of his belief system emerged; he viewed himself as a cultural/racial martyr against the incursion of Islam into Norway. He believed he would become the future regent (Sigurd II) of Norway by killing the Norwegian Royal Family in 2020 and would organized Norwegians into reservations to be used in a breeding program using baby factories (Berwick, 2011). The factories would be staffed by third world women implanted with eggs from Norwegians. He believed that slaughtering a group of teenagers would make him Grand Master Knight Commander—deputized by a secret society to lead the forces of Christendom in a battle for the future of mankind. He had military uniforms made to reflect his future status. He believed he was being followed and spied upon, and viewed the enemy as Islam, Marxism, multiculturalism and feminism. His parents were both left wing Labour Party members who split up when he was one. His adolescence seemed focused on body building and steroid use. He had a phobia of germs, wore

a face mask and fixated on spiders. He was obsessed with saving the world from Apocalypse and with "purification."

Except for Breivik, who developed a political world view, the target group is described as "jocks and preppies" who are superficial, rich, empty and charlatans. In our view, a combination of Newman's factors 1 and 2, mental health issues and perceived marginality constitute the key psychological impetus for the mass murders. That being said, the plethora of psychological conditions (e.g., depression: Lankford & Hakim, 2011; psychosis, psychopathy: Langman, 2009a) or social experiences (e.g., being bullied: Kimmel & Mahler, 2003) ascribed to mass shooters do not explain the extreme rage they experience nor the perceived basis for that rage. The majority of depressed people, victims of bullying, psychotics (Monahan, 1992) and even psychopaths do not express rageful violence. The closest we may get in conventional taxonomy to violent rage expression is that of sadistic psychopaths (Porter & Porter, 2007) who enjoy sexual arousal through the suffering of others, but whose violence is planned (e.g., serial killers), or the malignant narcissist (Kernberg, 1994). With the latter categories, the ragefulness stems from symbolic apprehension of the integrity to the coherence of the self-identity of the rejection by a peer group (Kernberg, 1994). The identity disorders—typically narcissism, borderline personality and paranoid personality—all include some major terror/anxiety about the self, stemming from a failure in early identity formation (Kernberg, 1992; Sullivan, 1956), recognition by others of the self's "greatness" or "goodness" and preoccupation with attachment to another (Dutton, 2010) or to a group (Van Orden et al., 2010). Van Orden et al. (2010) call the latter "thwarted belongingness," and see it as indicative of a lack of social connectedness—specifically loneliness and an absence of reciprocally-caring relationships and as a risk factor for suicide. One key issue is that the "rejecting" peer group becomes an obsession, the shooter cannot let go and move on. With Breivik, the paranoia appeared to have worsened when he was past college age,

otherwise, his school peers rather than a politically derived target may have been selected.

Paranoid conditions, when they reach a stage of rage, may focus on whatever group is currently salient in the shooter's life.

5. Paranoia in Mass Shooters

There are several elements in the thinking of school shooters that suggest a paranoid personality disorder blended with what Millon calls "malignant narcissism" (Millon & Davis, 2000, p. 428). Paranoid personalities have a pervasive mistrust of others, are suspicious and hyper-vigilant for "disrespect" and actively seek "evidence" (i.e., of expected rejection or a "lack of respect" where it may appear absent to others). According to Blaney (1999) they persistently feel wronged—a victim of social injustice and are seething with anger when they recount these injustices. In the diary entries above, there are frequent references to the injustice of conferring status to "jocks and preppies" who are considered to be superficial and unworthy (e.g., Harris; "You people could have shown more respect, treated me better, asked for my knowledge or guidance more, treated me more like senior, and maybe I wouldn't have been so ready to tear your fucking heads off[...]That's where a lot of my hate grows from." [JCSO, 1999, p. 26, 014]). There is little reference to specific experiences of being a victim of bullying.

The paranoid individual is obsessed with revenge and justifies the revenge as "payback" (for a perceived injustice) and are thin-skinned, or hypersensitive to perceived slights. It is worth noting, that even in non-paranoid populations, vengeance is a powerful motive and capable of altering compassion for the target.

Paranoid individuals have closed information processing systems, literally *para noia*, meaning against knowledge—that precludes any corrective information, which is inconsistent with their world view, from being received. This closed system devolves naturally (i.e., since

corrective information is warded off) to extremes, feeding on its own hardened beliefs which divide the world into "us = good, just" and "them = bad, unjust" in their cognitive narrative. Paranoid systems become commonplace precursors of genocides, used to "otherize" an out-group via propaganda (Dutton, 2007). They also have clear themes in the thinking of school shooters.

Paranoia, in the extreme, becomes paranoid schizophrenia—delusional to the point of the person seeing visions or hearing voices, sometimes called "command hallucinations" that prompt the individual to kill, typically in order to get rid of evil. There were differing levels of social isolation for Cho, Gill, Breivik and Harris. Cho had extreme social anxiety, isolated himself and showed social incompetence, Gill and Harris had some friends but clearly pictured themselves as marginalized. All were described as loners.

Millon's description of paranoia includes a tendency to react disproportionately to perceived slights—i.e., their "mistreatment" by others may not have been extreme or unusual. The self-perpetuating aspect of paranoia explains the build-up of rage in isolation—the paranoid individual ruminates angrily on the slights they have received, these become magnified with rumination of the thought. The rants seen in the diaries are the outcome. Cullen (2009) describes a tirade by Harris in response to a friend's mother threatening to complain to Harris' mother about his actions; "Eric reminded her of an escaped animal attacking a car at a wildlife theme park" (p. 161). Gill's depictions of carnage speak to the intensity of the level of experienced rage. Cho's perceived martyrdom was accompanied by a outburst of rage and shooting. It is important to note the disproportionality of these reactions before ascribing the shooting to bullying.

Sullivan (1956), despite his psychoanalytic orientation, was interested in social interaction beyond the early formative years and the impact of this interaction on personality. Millon and Davis (2000) describe Sullivan's view on paranoid personality as developing when there was an intense insecurity related to some deep sense of inferiority. The insecurity was so intense that it constantly intruded upon awareness, generating anxiety. The paranoid individual is convinced that the inferiority can be perceived by others and cannot be disguised, it is experienced as a deficiency of the self that is beyond repair and it produces chronic feelings of shame and humiliation (e.g., Eric Harris, "That's where a lot of my hate grows from. The fact that I have practically no self-esteem" JCSO, 1999, p. 26, 015).

Sullivan's second requirement was a transfer of blame, away from the self and onto others and then a third step, the inference that their personal humiliation by others was not the by-product of social relationships but the purpose. The blame shift is evident in Harris (e.g., "I can't deprive a stupid fucking dumbshit from his possessions if he leaves them sitting in the front seat of his fucking van out in plain sight and in the middle of fucking nowhere on a Frifuckingday night." JCSO, 1999, p.26, 005). As Blaney (1999) puts it, the paranoid individual's view is self-justifying and entitled, viewing their own behavior as necessitated by their unique plight, caused in turn, by the ill-will of others. The perception of intentional humiliation by others is clear in these examples: Eric Harris' "Whatever I do people make fun of me, and sometimes directly to my face. I'll get revenge soon enough...shouldn't have ripped on me so much, huh!" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26, 015) or Seung Hui Cho's "Do you know what it feels like to be spit on your face and have trash shoved down your throat? Do you know what it feels like to dig your own grave? Do you know what it feels like to have your throat slashed ear to ear? Do you know what it feels like to be torched alive? Do you know what it feels like to be humiliated and impaled on a cross and left to bleed for your own amusement?" (Dailymotion, 2007) suggest

purposive unbearable treatment by others, although in neither case was this corroborated by third-party observers. As Millon and Davis (2000) observe, Sullivan believed that paranoia developed because of some irreparable damage to trust. Child abuse victimization is an obvious source but neither Cho, Gil nor Harris had any reported child abuse victimization.

As Millon and Davis (2000) state "By reacting as if everyone were the enemy, paranoids seek to secure their safety and autonomy and protect themselves against outside influence...autonomy is so important that paranoids sometimes imagine themselves as being something like a fascist state: totally self-sufficient, yet fearsome enough to intimidate aggressors on their borders " (p. 397; e.g., Anders Brievik). In social settings, paranoid individuals become obsessed with social rank and status and despise weakness. They are "notoriously sensitive to perceived slights which indicate that the others are on attack, expect them to submit to external control or consider them inferior" (Million & Davis, 2000, p. 397). Paranoid individuals defend themselves not only against hidden threats but also against tender emotions. The following example is from Eric Harris' diary: "I have a goal to destroy as much as possible so I must not be sidetracked by my feelings of sympathy, mercy, or any of that, so I will force myself to believe that everyone is just another monster from Doom like FH or FS or demons, so It's either me or them. I have to turn off my feelings" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26, 012).

Paranoia begins as a form of profound disturbance in the sense of trust and a sense of self under attack. Paranoia provides a motive for extreme violence—to safeguard the self from the perceived threat and an explanation as to why mass shooters personality pathology devolves over time; the essence of paranoia that it self-exacerbates because the paranoid individual withdraws and their thought processes are not amenable to corrective feedback. The

obsession with rejection or "disrespect" that mushrooms into rage and planned annihilation stems from paranoid thinking, not psychopathy.

6. Threat/Risk prediction

Both the press and social science writers tend to focus on symptoms as "explanations" for school shootings, for example, Goth culture, guns, need for mental health services, homophobic taunting, and/or psychopathy. In this paper, we argue that this approach would not work; most of the mass shooters we reviewed had been assessed by psychiatrists (Cho, Harris, Breivik). Harris was given "anger management" as a condition of release. The assessments appear cursory and do not attempt to diagnose personality disorder. Shooters become socially withdrawn but do share "detailed threats of violence" and shared plans with peers (Verlinden et al., 2007, p. 48).

7. Conclusion

Not all mass shooters keep diaries so we cannot generalize to others based on those that do. Unfortunately, the ones that do not keep diaries provide little information as to their inner processes. They are standoffish and those who knew them superficially said they seemed strange but that's all we have. Michael Carneal, who shot eight students at school in 1997, had written a story (not a diary) about a boy who was teased at school by popular students and subsequently murdered them. Carneal was diagnosed as schizotypal PD with paranoid ideation (cited in Verlinden et al., 2001, p. 33). Interviewed in prison a year after the shooting he said "people respect me now" (Blank, 1998). It is a mistake to dismiss psychological issues in this group. It is also a mistake to perform a cursory psychiatric evaluation that seizes on an obvious symptom (e.g., anger) and looks no further. The disproportionality of the rage response

indicates an ego issue aptly described in the work of ego psychology (e.g., Kernberg, Sullivan) and with far more extensive ramifications than treating anger as a separate symptom.

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

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Research Highlights:

- Inspection of the writings of mass murderers reveals pre-shooting thought processes.
- Mass murderers appear obsessed with the status of a target group that rejects them.
- They perceive the group as superficial and as benefitting unfairly.
- They are painfully aware of their own outsider status.
- Their obsession with their mistreatment is consistent with paranoid thinking.