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The Writing is on the Wall

*An Analysis on How American Mass Shooters Frame Their Self-Portrayals and
Self-Narration Online*

Master Thesis

Written by: Sunna Sasha Larosiliere

Student Number: s2185032

Supervisor: Dr. Stef Wittendorp

Second Reader: Dr. G.M. van Buuren

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Abstract

“The writing is on the wall”. This biblical expression cautions imminent danger or an inevitable consequence which has become evident.¹ Much akin to the foreboding writings of mass shooting perpetrators when they post their last communications online prior to committing heinous offences. Considerable discernment may be ascertained by exploring such self-narrations. This thesis thus delves into the exploration on how mass shooters self-narrate, beginning with an examination of the theoretical underpinnings of the *media contagion effect*, which serves to contextualize the importance of self-narration in the online domain, accompanying a brief review of what constitutes an online identity and ensuing affiliated narratives. This study is based upon the theoretical framework of *framing*, with the aim of answering the question; *To what extent are there consistent frames to be found within divergent mass shooters’ self-portrayals and self-narration online prior to their attacks, despite contrasting ideological profiles and motivations?* Six contrasting case studies of online self-narration and self-portrayals by mass shooting perpetrators are presented within this study, all of which originated within the United States during periods of pinnacle social media usage, with all of the perpetrators having been highly active online prior to their attacks. A comparative analysis is presented which includes the implementation of framing devices and predefined frames, in order to substantiate that commonalities in self-narration are present across the cases, despite differing backgrounds and motivations. The dominant frames that were analyzed are *the fantasy frame*, *threat frame*, *othering frame* and *the fame-seeking frame*. Based on the results of this study, the threat-, and fame-seeking frames were not as prevalent across the case studies as the othering-, and fantasy frames were. Nevertheless, all frames were consistently found within each narrative, albeit with varying intensity.

¹ Gary Martin, "The Writing Is on the Wall" - the Meaning and Origin of This Phrase," Phrasefinder, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/the-writing-is-on-the-wall.html>.

Preface

This 15 ECTS credit MSc thesis is my final project for my Crisis and Security Management Masters degree within the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs at Leiden University. This research topic came to be in November 2018, after several weeks of indecision regarding the final choosing of this thesis topic. I received a great deal of guidance and assistance from one of my professors Mr. Sergei Boeke, who took time to help me sort out my ideas despite not being obligated to do so and for that I am forever grateful.

I was later allocated a great supervisor, Dr. Stef Wittendorp who has helped me navigate through this tedious literature. Dr. Wittendorp was always readily available, patient and willingly answered all my questions and addressed my uncertainties. Thank you for all your help, this thesis would not have come to fruition without you. I will also like to extend my gratitude to my second reader, Dr. G.M. van Buuren for taking on this thesis and for all the useful feedback.

To my unwavering support system consisting of (all) my parents, who always encouraged me and believed that I could finish this despite my absurd procrastinating ways. To Viktor for going through this process with me and keeping me motivated. To Áslaug, for being my partner throughout this Leiden journey, to Hildur, Lovísa, Ástrós and Egill for the readovers that were much appreciated, to Marissa and Sanne for being great study partners and to Palli, the one person I could not have done this without, who got me through this whole thing. Takk! Last but not least, words that still ring true since my Bachelor's thesis, I'd like to thank myself for actually getting this done. Past Sunna didn't believe this day would come, so well done future (and present) Sunna!

The research done for this thesis has at times been disheartening and demoralizing to say the least. It is not exactly an uplifting topic, but I do believe it is one that is both important and extremely unsettling. I chose this topic mainly because I find social deviations to be of great interest, as they can manifest in various forms. A contributing fact is that I grew up in the United States, where mass shootings are a woefully recurring phenomenon. Thus, with this study, I hope a greater understanding is provided into the aberrant nature of mass shootings within the age of social media, which may serve to encourage additional investigative measures into these fairly new occurrences of self-narration and insights into how to possibly manage these developments within the mass shooting literature.

I hope you enjoy the read.

Sunna Sasha Larosiliere

Reykjavík, Iceland

June 9, 2019.

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter presents an outline of this thesis with a justification as to why this topic is deemed important and relevant to our current times. The research question is stated along with several follow up sub-questions which highlight the main research problems, whilst the academic and societal relevance of this paper is also explained. This chapter concludes with a reading guide that will serve to explicate the following chapters and inherent structure of this paper.

1.1 Unprecedented Times

"I hope people call me insane (laughing emojis).. wouldn't that just be a big ball of irony? Yeah... I'm insane, but the only thing you people do after these shootings is 'hopes and prayers'.. or 'keep you in my thoughts'... every time... and wonder why these keep happening...(straight-faced emojis)"²

The aforementioned statement was posted on Facebook on November 7th, 2018 by mass shooter Ian David Long, during his mass shooting episode at the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks, California. He momentarily ceased his discharge in order to post onto his Instagram and Facebook accounts, moments before the police arrived. In total, he had killed twelve people and injured over a dozen others.³ Well before the media were made aware of the unfolding situation, the perpetrator himself framed his own narration with his social media postings.

The concept of mass shootings is a contested one, where no singular confirmed definition exists.⁴ It is however, a prevailing notion that is often cited by law enforcement and the media. Aside from psychological perceptions of a perpetrator's motive and characteristics, the implications of what the media contributes to mass shootings is monumental. By way of circulating incessant news coverage of these events with a focus set upon perpetrators instead of the victims, inciting what is termed a *media contagion effect*.⁵ In the subsequent sections, the theory of contagion will be explored as it will serve as an entry point to this research, leading to the exploration on how mass shooters self-narrate through the theoretical framework of framing. There is ample research on the topic of the media contagion effect, both in regards to mass media and as of more recently, the

² Eric Levenson, Jose Pagliery, and Majlie De Puy Kamp, "Thousand Oaks Gunman Was a Marine Veteran Who Often Visited the Site of the Shooting," CNN, November 09, 2018, accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/08/us/thousand-oaks-gunman/index.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jaelyn Schildkraut and H. Jaymi. Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016), 13.

⁵ Jennifer Johnston and Andrew Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, 2016, 3.

academic literature has broadened to encompass social media.⁶ This research chiefly concludes that media contagion is a condition which drives the mass shooting phenomenon with the general mass media inciting such contagion effects with their over reporting of mass shooting events.⁷

However with new media, i.e. social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Reddit and Twitter, perpetrators of mass shootings no longer have to rely on getting their message across with traditional media sources, rather they can post and create their own narrative on social media in real time. These unfettered and unchecked narratives accompany notable implications in the realm of social media, as they may serve to glorify these atrocities and in turn normalize and mainstream them, consequently creating their own contagion effects.⁸

Currently, social media platforms operate mostly by self-governance, meaning these websites create their own rules and guidelines concerning what they deem unsuitable, offensive or inappropriate. This can include; hate speech, fake news or extremism. Much of which can be automatically detected and subsequently removed by detection software that is implemented by social media companies. However, problems may arise when content succeeds in evading detection, as few government regulations are presently in place which serve to compel social media platforms to remove illegal or harmful content.⁹ In actuality, existing regulatory frameworks often lag considerably behind emerging technologies, resulting in weak regulations in the online domain. This poses quite a dilemma for a variety of sectors, both within the online realm as well as in the physical world, as the two often collide and entangle in matters such as this thesis presents; mass shooters wielding the power to communicate to a wide audience, within the fairly unimpeded setting of social media. The consequences of uninhibited and detrimental narratives cannot be explicitly stated, but through the literature of the media contagion effect, it can be stipulated that repercussions may stem from these communications by mass shooters.

The media contagion effect is not the focus of this thesis, but it will be briefly explored in order to underscore the importance of examining self-narration, as the phenomena provides a

⁶ See Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," *also*: Paul Marsden, "Memetics and Social Contagion: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" *The Journal of Memetics: Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission* 2 (1998): http://cfpm.org/jom-emit/1998/vol2/marsden_p.html. *And* Sherry Towers et al., "Contagion in Mass Killings and School Shootings," *Plos One* 10, no. 7 (2015): 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect", 2.

⁹ Reality Check Team, "Social Media: How Can Governments Regulate It?" BBC News, April 08, 2019, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-47135058>.

depthening aspect to the literature. By focusing solely on the language used by each shooter, going beyond their traits and profiles, and more towards how they themselves narrate within the online domain may provide further insights into mass shootings. A study which can be argued is important during times of hyper online connectivity, where social media usage has skyrocketed in the past years, leading us into new times and further unknowns.

New unknowns in an unprecedented time, a time in which we are more connected than ever in the online sphere. According to an annual digital report published by Hootsuite, a social media management platform, the numbers pertaining to internet usage globally acclaim an astounding 4.388 billion internet users in 2019, with 3.484 billion of them active on social media. To put this into perspective and within the scope of this paper which places a sole focus on American mass shooters, there are currently 312.3 million Americans connected to the internet, with 230 million of these individuals being active social media users.¹⁰ Meaning, 95% of Americans use the internet, with 70% of them active on social media.

The chosen case selection is limited to mass shooting perpetrators within the United States. On account of; available data in English, certain cultural aspects that may possibly be utilized in the generalization of the findings and societal factors that may influence the narration communicated by these perpetrators. Nevertheless, a total of six diverse case studies are presented within this research with the objective of portraying a broad spectrum of perpetrators despite possessing the commonality of citizenship, with the aim of covering vast ideological grounds; thus this study incorporates individuals who range from the ‘alt-left’ to the ‘alt-right’, a black separatist contrasting a white supremacist, a school shooter, a misogynist ‘incel’ and an individual with a transgender identity who glorified past mass shooters. Externally, these perpetrators share some uniformity, as all case studies are of American men who were significantly active on social media and provided indications of their motivations within their self-narrations online prior to their attacks. This study thus places great emphasis on these social media narratives, by way of exploring associated online identities and inquiring into how social media may impact identity construction within self-narration.

¹⁰ Simon Kemp, *Digital 2019: Essential Insights Into How People Around the World Use the Internet, Mobile Devices, Social Media, and E-Commerce*, report, Hootsuite, 2019, 7&14, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://p.widencdn.net/kqy7ii/Digital2019-Report-en>.

However, as this thesis will solely interpret the postings by these perpetrators online, it may be considered as a limitation of this study as their uploaded images and written texts may not necessarily reflect an exact representation of who they are and were in real life. Caution is thus needed and reflected in the analysis of each mediatized communication posted by each of the six mass shooters presented in this paper. As well as a chapter dedicated to the examination of self-narration and social identities in the online domain to provide additional understanding of this fairly new phenomena of online self-portrayals.

1.2 Research Question

This paper seeks to explore and answer the question, *“To what extent are there consistent frames to be found within divergent mass shooters’ self-portrayals and self-narration online prior to their attacks, despite contrasting ideological profiles and motivations?”*

1.3 Sub-Questions

For the aforementioned research question to be answered and explored in depth, a series of sub questions will follow in order to provide both context and structure.

1. What does self-narration entail in the age of social media?
2. What dominant framing strategies do these mass shooters engage in?
3. Do these shooters present similar framing strategies despite differing motives?

1.4 Academic and Societal Relevance

The academic relevance of this thesis relates to the examination of self-narration within the literature of mass shootings. There is already an abundance of literature which focuses on mass shooting statistics and subsequent correlations in a more quantitative fashion, often placing an emphasis on the profiles of mass shooters alongside an examination of their motives and mental state. However, what will be presented here is a qualitative study within the theoretical framework of framing. Thus, placing a sole focus on how these perpetrators narrate their own actions online adds to the existing body of knowledge of mass shootings. We are currently entrenched within two realities, the physical and digital, adopting identities that suit our public persona as well as our internet persona, with the two often overlapping. Especially within the sphere of social media, how we choose to present ourselves is both fascinating and in some cases a cause for concern. In the case

of mass shooting perpetrators, attention set upon their digital identities and their online self-narration and portrayals adds value, as it goes beyond psychologically-oriented motives which much of the present literature stems from. Rather, I aim to understand these perpetrators' worldviews and in turn, will analyze whether commonalities can be found within the framing strategies they engage in despite conflicting ideologies, differing motives and different styles of framing.

The societal relevance of this research regards the exploration of whether these framing themes can be identified with an emphasis on contributing to future countermeasures against the further proliferation of mass shooting attacks, by way of understanding this self-narration phenomenon better and its resulting implications. Resulting in various policy recommendations directed towards social media platforms in conjunction with platform accountability.

1.5 Reading Guide

This thesis is composed of six chapters, all of which include several subchapters. The purpose of this thesis is to examine to what extent are there consistent frames to be found within divergent mass shooters' self-portrayals and self-narration online prior to their attacks, despite contrasting ideological profiles and motivations. In the quest of answering the questions put forth, the second chapter describes the concepts of mass shootings and media contagion in order to situate the focus of this study within the context of the academic literature. The chapter further presents the necessary theoretical framework of the Framing theory and introduces framing devices which serve to translate the theory into recognizable frames. It concludes with several predefined framing categories, which are dominant frames that are subjected to analysis within mass shooters' self-narration. The third chapter concerns the methodology of this study, which illustrates the comparative case study design, the methods, a description of the six cases and how the concept of framing is operationalized within an analysis scheme. The fourth chapter goes into further details regarding each perpetrator's background, ideology and motives whilst the fifth chapter crucially analyzes each narrative and subsequently associates them with predefined frames, in an attempt to highlight commonalities within the six mass shooter communications. Lastly, the sixth and final chapter comprises of answers to the main research questions and subquestions, a discussion of certain limitations pertaining to this study and policy recommendations.

2.Theoretical framework

The following chapter encompasses the theoretical framework in which this research is built upon. Within the presented framework, key concepts such as mass murders, mass shootings, media contagion and self-narration are introduced and explained. An answer to the first sub-question, “what does self-narration entail in the age of social media?” is put forth. The theory of framing and definitions of predefined frames will be provided, all in order to underscore the research question and sub-questions.

2.1 Mass Shooting Definition(s)

In order to identify the framing strategies found within mass shooters’ self-portrayals and self-narration online, theories will be presented to guide the discussion and answer the eventual research questions. The theory of media contagion presents how the normalization of mass shootings on social media can increase its frequency,¹¹ but it lacks clarification as to why and how a contagion effect materializes. Which is one of the reasons why it is relevant to interpret the framing that is involved in mass shooting cases, at the behest of the perpetrators themselves. To understand this and in order to discern why social media plays a vital role in the understanding of mass shootings today, a brief review of mass shooting literature needs to be recited.

As previously mentioned, there is no standard definition for mass shootings, in fact according to Grant Duwe, there is no previous research on mass murders prior to 1965.¹² The little research that came to be in the mid 1960s to the early 1980s mainly consisted of psychological and psychiatric individual case studies, without a clear focus on the phenomena of mass murders as a whole. These case studies typically consisted of data which was collected from clinical interviews, composed of a singular offender or at most a small number of perpetrators.¹³ It was not until Fox and Levin advanced beyond the single case study approach in 1985, with their examination of 42 mass and serial murder cases. Numerous studies have since been published that include a larger number of case studies.¹⁴ With this, scholars began to focus on developing descriptive typologies of

¹¹ Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," *see also*: Marsden, "Memetics and Social Contagion: Two Sides of the Same Coin?"

¹² Grant Duwe, "The Patterns and Prevalence of Mass Murder in Twentieth-century America," *Justice Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2004): 729.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 731.

¹⁴ See Kelleher 1997; Lane & Gregg, 2004 and Meloy et al., 2004.

mass murder, but did not reach a consensus on what constitutes mass murder.¹⁵ Mass murder, mass shootings, mass public shootings, school shootings, rampage shootings, active shooter events; these are labels that are utilized interchangeably to describe particular events of mass shootings.¹⁶

As there is an abundance of varying distinctions associated with the concept of mass murder, a common approach within the literature is to adopt the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) definition, created in the 1980s. The FBI defines a mass murder as "a number of murders (four or more) occurring during the same incident, with no distinctive time period between the murders."¹⁷ However, the United States Congress in its *Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012*, defines the term 'mass killings' as "3 or more killings in a single incident."¹⁸ These two definitions differ in a deficient manner as this act authorizes the FBI at the request of either a state or local law enforcement official, to assist in any investigation involving mass killings. Such assistance may be hampered by the inconsistent terminology employed by the two bodies.¹⁹ This highlights the problematic definition of mass killings, in which multiple scholars have called for a consensus definition for mass shootings. Scholars such as Harris & Harris, who recommended uniting different types of shooting events under one single umbrella definition, in order to facilitate a transdisciplinary approach therefore enabling researchers to be better equipped in addressing this multifactorial problem.²⁰ Schildkraut & Elsass echo this opinion in their call for a reconceptualization of the definition of mass shootings and highlight two key issues pertaining to the matter. They note that most terminology and successive definitions tend to be either too vague or too limited in their application, which in turn may exclude certain mass shooting events that bear numerous similarities, solely due to minor categorizational variances. This couples with the second problem of over-diversification, in which these shootings are inclined to be classified as labels, into

¹⁵ Duwe, "The Patterns and Prevalence of Mass Murder," 731. See also, James Alan Fox and Jack Levin, "A Psycho-social Analysis of Mass Murder," in *Serial and Mass Murder: Theory, Research and Policy*, ed. Thomas O'Reilly-Fleming (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1996), 55-76.

¹⁶ Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities*, 13.

¹⁷ United States, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Behavioral Analysis Unit-2, *Serial Murder: Multi-disciplinary Perspectives for Investigators*, ed. Robert J. Morton and Mark A. Hilts, 8.
<https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder#two>

¹⁸ Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012, P.L. 112-265 U.S.C January 14, 2013; 126 Stat. 2435,
<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ265/PLAW-112publ265.pdf>

¹⁹ William J. Krouse and Daniel J. Richardson, *Mass Murder with Firearms: Incidents and Victims, 1999-2013* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2015), 26.

²⁰ John M Harris and Robin B Harris, "Rampage Violence Requires a New Type of Research," *Am J Public Health* 102(2012): 1056.

fragmented categories as opposed to one generally accepted definition.²¹ Shultz et al., reflected the aforementioned statements with their observation of a lack of ‘epidemiologic context of mass shootings’, in which they point out the need to fund such epidemiologic research, specifically in areas where mass shootings are proliferating.²²

As there is a definition dilemma present within the literature of mass shootings, the definition that will be used in this paper stems from the Congressional Research Service (CRS), in its report on mass murder with firearms authored by Krouse & Richardson. They also base their definition on the FBI’s definition, but build upon the concept of mass murder by specifying the use of firearms in these events.²³

*“Mass shooting” is defined as a multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered with firearms, within one event, and in one or more locations in close proximity. Similarly, a “mass public shooting” is defined to mean a multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered with firearms, within one event, in at least one or more public locations, such as, a workplace, school, restaurant, house of worship, neighborhood, or other public setting.*²⁴

This CRS definition will be used from here on, in order to clarify the concept for subsequent examples. The reason for the choosing of this specific definition stems from the fact that it is built upon the FBI’s interpretation, which is an authoritative and legitimate government agency. This sound definitional structure allows for future research to build upon this one, and it is also a definition that supports the framework of this thesis. The definition of mass murder however, does not suffice independently in this regard, as it does not specify the use of firearms. It is exactly with this use of firearms in conjunction with mass murder that we understand the phenomena of mass shootings as exceptionally frightening and dangerous. There is however, always a limitation present in any given definition as it may serve to exclude other mass shooting events from its categorization. For the cases that will be presented, the CRS FBI based definition fits the given case studies and is thus utilized.

²¹ Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities*, 24-25.

²² James M. Shultz, Siri Thoresen, Brian W. Flynn, Glenn W. Muschert, Jon A. Shaw, Zelde Espinel, Frank G. Walter, et al. “Multiple Vantage Points on the Mental Health Effects of Mass Shootings,” *Current Psychiatry Reports* 16, no. 9 (September 3, 2014): 14.

²³ Krouse and Richardson, *Mass Murder with Firearms: Incidents and Victims*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, summary page.

2.1.2 Mass Murder and Mass Shootings Versus Domestic Terrorism

The case studies that will be presented will not contain a terrorism element as that would distort the framework of mass shootings, that of them being a random event and targeting random individuals without a connection to an organization. To clarify, the definition of domestic terrorism is often muddled with that of mass murder and the two often tend to overlap. Thus, a brief description of the definition of domestic terrorism is accounted, along with the justification on why the concept is not further included within this thesis.

There is no single internationally agreed upon definition of what terrorism consists of, therefore any subsequent definition of what constitutes domestic terrorism tends to fluctuate.²⁵ The FBI for example, categorizes instances of terrorism as, “either domestic or international, depending on the origin, base, and objectives of the terrorist organization.”²⁶ Their resulting definitions have changed over the past years, documented within their annual reports which summarize terrorist activities within the United States. One such definition from a 2005 report summarizes it as such;

*Domestic terrorism is the unlawful use, or threatened use, of force or violence by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or Puerto Rico without foreign direction committed against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof in furtherance of political or social objectives.*²⁷

However, currently listed in 2019 on the FBI’s website, the following definition is provided;

*Domestic terrorism: Perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with primarily U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.*²⁸

This definition is more concise and excludes several facets that were present in the previous definition. The former emphasizes the promotion of political and social objectives whilst the latter stresses the role of extremist ideologies. Thus it seems the definitions of terrorism are more prone to accentuate the ideological or political motivation behind such attacks, whilst in mass murder and mass shooting literature, the emphasis is rather placed as more indiscriminate acts of violence, aimed towards an innocent populace.²⁹ There is however, no self-evident distinction between the

²⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), “Terrorism 2002-2005,” *Federal Bureau of Investigation Publication* 6, no. 2 (2005): V. <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Terrorism," FBI, May 03, 2016, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>.

²⁹ Kate Kershner, "What's the Difference between Mass Murder and Terrorism?" HowStuffWorks, May 22, 2013, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://people.howstuffworks.com/difference-between-mass-murder-and-terrorism1.htm>.

two concepts. As there are numerous mass murderers and mass shooters who's actions stem from specific ideological notions and political motivations, that believe their attacks are a form of protest or have the intention of intimidating a government or the civilian population, as is cited within the domestic terrorism definition.

Nevertheless, within this thesis, case studies were chosen that have not been defined as domestic terrorist incidents. It is nonetheless important to mention the resemblance between the two definitions, as the dividing line is often vague. This study is thus based on mass shooter terminology, which is grounded within the media contagion effect that emphasizes the connection between violence exhibited in instances of mass murder and shootings. For the structure of this thesis, terrorism will not be a factor for these analytical purposes, as governments are the decisive authority on how such events are classified and have not deemed these cases as instances of domestic terrorism.

2.2 Media Contagion

To comprehend the effects of self-narrational framing on social media, additional information is essential to discern these complex notions, such as literature which focuses on the implications the media has on mass shootings. The concept of *media contagion* is based on the theory of cultural contagion and was developed by sociologist David Phillips in the mid 1970s.³⁰ He was the first scholar to identify the correlation between the significant influence the media seemed to have on suicide and later presented the first systematic evidence of an association between mass media violence and an increase in US homicides.³¹ His work was met with criticism as it was cited by several scholars to be correlational, nonetheless his theory received traction and was reproduced and established by later authors.³² Notably, Cantor et al., reinstated Phillips's theory to prominence with their work on the media contagion of homicides. They applied qualitative analysis to several murder cases and concluded that contagion applies not to individual homicides but rather to mass murders.³³

In the following years, the contagion theory evolved and took on stronger connotations of how the media influences mass murders, specifically mass shootings. In 2015, Towers et al. made

³⁰ David P. Phillips, "The Impact of Mass Media Violence on U.S. Homicides," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 4 (August 1983): 560.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 560.

³² Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," 23-24.

³³ Christopher H. Cantor et al., "Media and Mass Homicides," *Archives of Suicide Research* 5, no. 4 (1999): 283-284.

use of a contagion model to test the contagiousness of media portrayals of active shooters, hypothesizing that the coverage planted seeds of ideation in vulnerable youths to commit similar acts. They argue in their findings that there is significant evidence that conclude mass killings are indeed incentivized by similar events from a recent past. They also found that for every three incidents of mass shootings, another new incident occurred within 13 days.³⁴ Supporting these findings was the work carried out by Garcia-Bernardo et al., in 2015. In which they claimed that shootings were indeed contagious, within the first 30 days of transpiring, facilitated by substantial media coverage. Garcia-Bernardo et al., thus managed to present a significant contagion effect by way of analyzing tweets via Twitter.³⁵ It is amongst these writings that social media comes into play, as the prevalence of these offences have risen in relation to the media coverage granted to them. Cases in which social media influences school shootings more than other mass shootings, where studies have found that the number of tweets regarding a particular shooting, correlates with an increased number of fatalities in subsequent shootings.³⁶ The proliferation of social media can serve to glorify the perpetrators and account for additional shootings.³⁷ Jennifer Johnston and Andrew Joy are at the forefront of this research, where they examine the effects of the mass shooting media contagion with the goal of suggesting media guidelines in how to narrate perpetrator details with the aim of preventing mass murder.³⁸

Accompanying the exceptionally easy access to the internet, along with weak regulations in the online sphere, mass shooters now have the opportunity to narrate their own offences. They can post their actions and motivations on social media, and in many cases use these platforms to post manifestos as well. Now the general mass media can go straight to the source and spread the perpetrators' justification for them.³⁹ Thus, the contagion effect is not only limited and echoed within social media, as these narratives also find their way into the general mass media. As Schildkraut and Elsass noted in their book, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities*, mediatized communication published by shooters is received and reciprocated by certain "fan"

³⁴ Sherry Towers et al., "Contagion in Mass Killings and School Shootings," *Plos One* 10, no. 7 (2015): 1.

³⁵ Javier Garcia-Bernardo et al., "Social Media Appears to Affect the Timing, Location, and Severity of School Shootings," June 2015, 7.

³⁶ Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

communities on social media platforms.⁴⁰ This highlights the implications of the mass shooting contagion effect, as it is facilitated by way of self-narration within social media, where people have unfettered access to these publications. Nathalie E. Paton continues this account in her chapter titled, "Media participation of school shooters and their fans: navigating between self distinction and imitation to achieve individuation", in which she underscores these new traits of contemporary society where self-glorification and deviant actions have become commended norms, within a mode of media that elevates individuation.⁴¹ The consequences of such are found within the troublesome effects of this new participatory culture, in a realm that remains vastly unregulated.⁴²

A tragic manifestation of such uninhibited access to self-narration on social media is the recent example of the mass shooting terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019, in which the perpetrator live-streamed his attacks on Facebook. The original video was quickly taken down, but was soon replicated by others and shared on several social media platforms such as Youtube, Twitter and the message board 8chan.⁴³ The perpetrator had also posted that he was going to "carry out an attack against the invaders", along with links to his livestream and a manifesto.⁴⁴ The grievous events of Christchurch will not be included within this study as it has been categorized as a terrorist attack, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is however important to broach the subject of such events as they underscore the disconcerting nature of self-narration and publications created by mass shooters online, as will be further demonstrated with subsequent case studies.

2.3 Self-Narration and Online Identities

"For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities*, 140.

⁴¹ Nathalie E. Paton, "Media Participation of School Shooters and Their Fans: Navigating between Self Distinction and Imitation to Achieve Individuation," in *School Shootings: Mediatized Violence in a Global Age*, ed. Glenn W. Muschert and Johanna Sumiala (Emerald Group Publishing, 2012), 203.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴³ Jane Wakefield, "Christchurch Shootings: Social Media Races to Stop Attack Footage," BBC News, March 16, 2019, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47583393>.

⁴⁴ Praveen Menon, "Dozens Killed in Shooting Attacks on New Zealand Mosques," Reuters, March 16, 2019, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-newzealand-shootout/dozens-killed-as-gunman-livestreams-new-zealand-mosque-shootings-idUSKCN1QW05Y>.

⁴⁵ Barbara Hardy, "Narrative as a Primary Act of the Mind," in *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading*, by Margaret Meek Spencer, Aidan Warlow, and Griselda Barton (London: Bodley Head, 1977), 13.

The analysis of narrative spans across numerous disciplines, all from discourse analysis, sociolinguistics to discursive psychology.⁴⁶ Understandably so, as narratives and the art of narration permeates our daily lives in various forms and contributes to the construction of our sense of self. There is an abundance of literature that underscores the connection between narrative and identity,⁴⁷ elucidating how we define ourselves through our choice of narrative language, how we wish to be understood and by whom.⁴⁸ This narrative language allows for multiple perspectives, telling our stories through various lenses, enabling the conveyance of our preconceptions through inferred meanings in our communications. Our identities and sense of self are highlighted in the way we position ourselves in our tellings, we create our own filtered realities and a self is created at the behest of this cultural mix of the social, our beliefs and meanings we ultimately ascribe.⁴⁹ Essentially, “stories tell us who we are: they are central to our social and cultural identity.”⁵⁰ Narratives are thus significant discursive resources as not only do they partake in identity construction, but they can also discern a great deal about an individual. How people use words can reveal substantial information about themselves, their circumstances and even who their targeted audience is. Psychological aspects of narrative language use may discern a person’s motives, social status, age and gender by examining their choice of words.⁵¹

Narratives are important for the understanding of how identities function in self-presentation, or self-narration for the purpose of this study. As narratives can be utilized by tellers, in communicating either a positive self-proclaimed image of themselves or use a narrative to refute unfavorable perceptions, they can effectively be employing strategies of self-presentation.⁵² This self-presentation as well as interrelated identity construction is interesting to note, especially within our current interconnected online domain. Contemporary social media platforms promote self-narration, in the sense that anyone can create an online profile/an online identity, and post almost whatever they want as long as such postings adhere to the relevant platform guidelines.

⁴⁶ Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, *Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Preface.

⁴⁷ See Schiffrin 1996; Pennebaker et al., 2003; Thornborrow & Coates 2005; and De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012.

⁴⁸ Deborah Schiffrin, “Narrative as Self-Portrait: Sociolinguistic Constructions of Identity,” *Language in Society* 25, no. 2 (1996): 169.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

⁵⁰ Joanna Thornborrow & Jennifer Coates, *The Sociolinguistics of Narrative* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005), 7.

⁵¹ James W. Pennebaker, Matthias R Mehl, and Kate G Niederhoffer, “Psychological Aspects of Natural Language Use: Our Words, Our Selves,” *Annu. Rev. Psychol* 54 (2003): 548.

⁵² De Fina and Georgakopoulou, *Analyzing Narrative*, 170.

Thus, the social network and the internet serve well for identity expression and self-narration, allowing for the self to enjoy multiple perspectives in both the virtual and physical social life.⁵³ Identities can also be diverse, where each faction of one's self can be mended and altered within the social structure of social media. As Uğur Gündüz noted in his article on the effects of social media on identity construction;

*Individuals might reflect themselves differently in unexpected conditions and layers of communication. Each new layer of communication seems to require a different identity; each new grouping will blur or clarify, depending upon the others in the communication. Virtual networks create diversity in society, so reflexive society creates reflexive identities. The risk of stereotyping also impacts, and there will be many identities resembling each other in the same community.*⁵⁴

Thus, there are certain limitations in placing an emphasis on an individual's online identity, as the self can be expressed through a prism of identity layers, all reflecting upon different levels within the online sphere. It should be well considered as to what degree, how great of a representation we see of a person online, how much can be interpreted through such reflexive identities? It is nonetheless a compelling concept to consider, how individuals portray themselves online, through their self-presentations and self-narration. A field that is currently understudied in the context of mass shooting literature.⁵⁵

Scholars have instead set their focus upon traits and characteristics of mass shooters. Traditionally, scholars have been reluctant in profiling mass shooting perpetrators, as there is an ongoing debate about whether there are larger societal factors at play that trigger mass shooting events or whether personal characteristics influence the shooters.⁵⁶ Many argue that notions pertaining to mental illness often emerge as an area of concern following a mass shooting event, utilized as a prevalent explanation, but in turn may distort the narrative of mental illness as it, "ceases to be a medical designation and becomes a sign of violent threat."⁵⁷ The debated issue of mental health however, continues to be often recounted in the examination of the characteristics of mass shooters.⁵⁸ The personal characteristics pertaining to mass shooters cited in the literature have

⁵³ Uğur Gündüz, "The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 5 (2017): 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁵ James L. Knoll, "The 'Pseudocommando' Mass Murderer: Part II, The Language of Revenge," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 38 (2010): 263.

⁵⁶ Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," 12.

⁵⁷ Jonathan M. Metzler and Kenneth T. Macleish, "Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 2 (2015): 240.

⁵⁸ See Fox & Levin 1996, 2016; Fessenden 2000; Knoll 2010; Lankford 2016 and Schildkraut & Elash 2016.

focused on behaviors, psychological and personality traits that are often associated with violence, all of which stem from a similar demographic background of perpetrators being mostly white, heterosexual males between the ages of 20 and 50.⁵⁹ Some of these predominant traits frequently mentioned are; depression, narcissism, social isolation, perceived victimization, exaggerated sense of entitlement, alienation, fame-seeking and masked low self-esteem, just to name a few.⁶⁰ There are also several typologies dedicated to what motives are involved in such events. Fox, Levin and Fridel accounted power, loyalty, profit, terror and revenge as motivators and suggested that the act of murder actually stems from a particular mindset but do not elaborate on what that mindset entails.⁶¹ Whilst Meloy et al., noted that a triggering event was present in most of their case studies, whether it be a failure in school, at work or at love.⁶²

Further contributing to the hesitancy of profiling mass shooters is the limitation of information, which is seldom gathered firsthand.⁶³ However, information on mass shooters have become increasingly available in recent years, due to online postings by mass shooter perpetrators themselves. Self-expressions in the form of visual media postings and mediatized manifestos created by perpetrators are now being increasingly explored within academia. In their comparative analysis of North American mass murderers, Meloy et al., constructed a variable termed ‘psychological abstracts’, which they defined as “the sentence or words uttered immediately prior to, or during the mass murder.”⁶⁴ Their data included videotapes, audiotapes, interviews with victims and acquaintances of the mass murderers. They included quotes stated by the perpetrators and discussed the threatening nature of their statements.⁶⁵ Here, a slight insight into the self-narratives of mass shooting perpetrators is provided, but an exclusive focus is not placed on these communications. Furthermore, Schildkraut and Ellass addressed four mediatized manifestos in their chapter “Mass shootings in a mediatized society”, one of which is a case study within this

⁵⁹ See Fox & Levin, 2015; Johnston & Joy 2016; Meloy et al., 2004 and Duwe 2004.

⁶⁰ See O’Toole 1999; Meloy et al., 2004; Johnston & Joy 2016; Lankford 2015 and Newman et al., 2004;

⁶¹ James Alan Fox, Jack Levin, and Emma E. Fridel. *Extreme Killing: Understanding Serial and Mass Murder*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019. Chapter 2.4 (no page number).

⁶² J. Reid Meloy, Anthony G. Hempel, Kris Mohandie, Andrew A. Shiva, and B. Thomas Gray, “Offender and Offense Characteristics of a Nonrandom Sample of Adolescent Mass Murderers,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 40, no. 6 (2001): 726.

⁶³ Johnston and Joy, "Mass Shootings and the Media Contagion Effect," 13-14.

⁶⁴ J Reid Meloy, Anthony G Hempel, B Thomas Gray, Kris Mohandie, Andrew Shiva, and Thomas C Richards, “A Comparative Analysis of North American Adolescent and Adult Mass Murderers,” *Behavioral Sciences and the Law Behav. Sci. Law* 22 (2004): 298.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

thesis. They explored the mediatized communication created by four perpetrators in order to discern their motivations and insights into their attacks. Schildkraut and Elsass further discuss the language use of each perpetrator, highlighting similarities in content and explore what entails in ‘the lure of the media persona’.⁶⁶ Much like what will be examined within the case studies of this paper, albeit with an emphasis on framing strategies and five additional case studies. Fox and Levin also included a sub-chapter titled ‘Killer Communication’, within their book on serial and mass murders. They account a number of cases which included printed manifestos sent to media stations as well as mediatized manifestos posted online. The authors did not content or discourse analyze its contents but rather discussed the stated motives detailed within each communication.⁶⁷

Nathalie E. Paton studied the narrative structures of eight school shooters’ self-produced videos, in what she refers to as ‘audiovisual performances’. Paton content analyzed the videos and noted that her study provides a starting point for future research in visual communication relating to contemporary forms of violence. The author further contended that a conformity is present within the so-called ‘cultural scripts’ of all eight perpetrators.⁶⁸ Her research contributes vastly to the literature of self-narration of mass shooters, as she illustrates how these staged performances/self-presentations are instrumental in the creation of the shooters’ identities as well as concluding that these perpetrators all stress their differences and individualities which paradoxically reveals their conformity in their choice of format of participation.⁶⁹

Much akin to what will be presented in this paper, James Knoll in his article, “The ‘Pseudocommando’ Mass Murderer: Part II, The Language of Revenge”, examined the last communications of two mass murderers in an attempt to uncover emerging themes within the two discourses. He argues that actual communications of mass murderers have received little academic attention despite the acknowledgment that the use of language can provide valuable insights into the psychology and motivations of these perpetrators.⁷⁰

In Chrystie Mykietiak’s article, “Fragile Masculinity: Social Inequalities in the Narrative Frame and Discursive Construction of a Mass Shooter's Autobiography/Manifesto”, she examines the mediatized manifesto of a mass shooter through a narrative frame of masculinity discourse, by

⁶⁶ Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities*, 139-153.

⁶⁷ Fox, Levin and Fridel, *Extreme Killing*, Chapter 1.5 (no page number).

⁶⁸ Nathalie E. Paton, "Media Participation of School Shooters and Their Fans", 203-230.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁷⁰ Knoll, “The ‘Pseudocommando’ Mass Murderer: Part II,” 263.

way of critical discourse analysis.⁷¹ The author identifies several dominant frames pertaining to masculinity within the shooter's manifesto, arguing that mass shootings may be, "understood as grounded in social and cultural discourses that are characterised by inequality."⁷²

Lastly, Michael Serazio analyzed the publicized videos and manifestos of three mass shooters, noting their desire for fame through narcissistic imagery and writings. Serazio accounts the challenges journalists and the media may face within this new era of self-broadcasting on the internet.⁷³ He contends, "With the emergence and proliferation of self-published, online amateur content in the past decade, a kind of celebrity anarchy has ensued. The youth terrorist can now be actor, director, and distributor."⁷⁴

These reflections, into the implementations of narrative by mass shooters shies away from what scholars tend to focus on within the literature of mass shooters. Whether it be mental health issues or personality traits, there is a gap in the literature regarding what the perpetrators themselves have expressed in terms of how they frame their narrative. With an increased understanding, such as the aforementioned research provides, along with this current study, this phenomena is made meaningful as it may elaborate on perpetrators' outlooks, how they might perceive themselves as unique and what they might have in common. With self-narration, we can gain further insights into understanding these perpetrators' worldviews, as it is interesting to note that all six forthcoming case studies had differing motives and ideas, did not share common enemies and yet all expressed their narration through framing strategies that bear striking similarities to one another. This is why self-narration is added value to the literature, it delves into the subject's use of language in the hopes of understanding the phenomena better. Especially during the height of social media usage, where we can only expect to see more postings and mediatized manifestos from future perpetrators.

As has been mentioned, how mass shooters portray themselves cannot be entirely classified into uniform characteristics, as these individuals accounted in this research bear differing motivations but all resorted to the same actions regardless. Their case studies will be accounted for later on in the methodology chapter, along with a framing analysis of their own writings, images

⁷¹ Chrystie Mykietiak, "Fragile Masculinity: Social Inequalities in the Narrative Frame and Discursive Construction of a Mass Shooter's Autobiography/Manifesto," *Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences* 11, no. 4 (2016): 289.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 299.

⁷³ Michael Serazio, "Shooting for Fame: Spectacular Youth, Web 2.0 Dystopia, and the Celebrity Anarchy of Generation Mash-Up," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 3, no. 3 (2010): 416–34.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 427.

and videos posted online and on their respective social media accounts. However, before probing the indicators of use of language, ways of reasoning and portrayals, a brief outline of the framing theory is needed in order to convey the research appropriately.

2.4 Framing

The concept of framing was popularized by sociologist Erving Goffman, in his 1974 book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Goffman explains conceptual frames as definitions of given situations that are strengthened in compliance with what he terms, ‘principles of organization’ that govern events, notably those of a social nature in one’s “subjective involvement in them.”⁷⁵ Thus, Goffman’s phrase ‘frame analysis’ applies to the exploration of the organization of experience. As a disclaimer, Goffman specifically notes that his book is not about the organization of society, but rather how organized experiences shape an individual’s perception of society.⁷⁶ Goffman’s stated aim is to identify and isolate the basic framework of understanding present in society in order to understand the happenings within perspectives. As well as analyzing particular vulnerabilities inherent in frames of reference and making sense of events.⁷⁷ Goffman categorizes frames into frameworks, where the most basic frames adhere to ‘primary frameworks’. Events are generally *perceived* through primary frameworks, and *how* individuals *describe* the event defines what type of framework is applied.⁷⁸ “Whatever the degree of organization, each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms.”⁷⁹ The primary framework thus conveys an individual’s experience or an aspect of an experienced event and makes it meaningful.⁸⁰ There are several facets of primary frameworks, such as the natural framework and the social framework. The former alludes to situations in the natural world that are free of any human influences and is strictly biophysical. The latter framework identifies and describes events and links them to humans.

⁷⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York City, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974), 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24. Emphasis added.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

Goffman sets his focus on the social and attempts to dissect the form, will, aim, structure and experiences of individuals' social lives.⁸¹

Throughout any one moment of activity or an event, individuals will utilize multiple frameworks, allowing them to construct conjectures regarding what has previously occurred and subsequently provide them with an expectation of what is likely to proceed.⁸² Goffman's emphasis on the social, bestows an insight into the context of the social character of individuals' actions, which illuminates the relations between an individual's mental state and resulting behaviors.⁸³ Social frameworks are not merely a product of the mind, but a product of cognitive processes that concerns itself with interactions between human beings. It is also important to note that all frames bear a 'recursive' nature, meaning every frame can be 'reframed' and these reframed frames can be immersed into other more intricate frames.⁸⁴ To elucidate the complexities of framing, Goffman suggests a multilayered schema which consists of; the original frame, which he calls the 'core frame', within the reframing of the core are the 'layers' and the last framing forms what he terms, the 'rim' of the frame.⁸⁵

According to scholar Robert M. Entman, despite such intricate descriptions of what framing consists of, there lacks a general statement of framing theory that actually demonstrates how frames become rooted within and how they in turn manifest in a text, or how framing affects the thought process.⁸⁶ Contradicting this sentiment, William A. Gamson regards the ambiguity of the conceptualization of framing to be a virtue. He contends that this vagueness heightens the usefulness of framing, as it serves as a bridging concept between cognition and culture. Gamson echoes Goffman's assertions that frames are fragile in their use and vulnerable to tampering, but insists that it is no shortcoming, as he declares, "the very vulnerability of the framing process makes it a locus of potential struggle, not a leaden reality to which we all inevitably must yield".⁸⁷

⁸¹ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 22.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 25 & 38.

⁸³ Luiz Carlos Baptista, "Framing and Cognition," in *Goffman's Legacy (Legacies of Social Thought Series)*, ed. Javier A. Treviño (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 160.

⁸⁴ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 249-250.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁶ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51.

⁸⁷ William A. Gamson, "Goffman's Legacy to Political Sociology," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 5 (September 1985): 615.

However, Chong & Druckman resonate the implications of the implicitness of framing, noting that uniform measurement standards are non-existent, but do bring attention to steps within framing that are well utilized in communications, specifically the identification of frames within communication.⁸⁸ Entman follows this same trend by stating that framing does offer ways to relate the power of communicating content. As such analysis illustrates exactly in which way effects on human consciousness is exercised, by the communication of information from one setting to said consciousness, such as speech.⁸⁹ Upholding the importance of framing within communication, Nelson, Oxley and Clawson argue that frames reconcile elite discourse regarding a subject and general apprehension of that said subject.⁹⁰ Frames can thus be both principal and meaningful determinants of public opinion. Framing is thus frequently utilized as a tool of persuasion to influence opinions.⁹¹

However, for framing to be successfully implemented, it has to include essential factors such as selection and salience. According to Entman, salience involves making a piece of information “more noticeable, meaningful and memorable.”⁹² Frames thus determine what people notice, by selecting certain features of a perceived reality and imposing salient communications, affects how an audience remembers the subject at hand and how they will decide to act upon the given information.⁹³ By diverting attention to specific aspects of a given subject, obscuring other elements in the process, is as crucial to framing interpretations as inclusion, as it may lead audiences to harbor differing reactions.⁹⁴ The summation of such denotes what an audience perceives as an issue, is consequently impacted by the accessibility of frames. The frames that are the most accessible, are those at the forefront and the most readily retrievable from memory.⁹⁵ Only some beliefs are thus accessible at a given instant, thus ‘strong’ frames are those that are deemed relevant enough to be applicable. Chong & Druckman describe how individuals assess the strength of a frame. They claim that framing, “can work on all three levels, by making new beliefs available about an issue, making

⁸⁸ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007): 106.

⁸⁹ Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," 51-52.

⁹⁰ Thomas E. Nelson, Zoe M. Oxley, and Rosalee A. Clawson, "Toward a Psychology of Framing Effects," *Political Behavior* 19, no. 3 (1997): 224.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁹² Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," 53-54.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁵ Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 116.

certain available beliefs accessible, or making beliefs applicable or “strong” in people’s evaluations”.⁹⁶ With their concept of strong frames, they reiterate Entman’s salience by identifying the various factors of framing effects, notably; the strength and repetition of a given frame, individual motivations and the competitive environment. According to Chong & Druckman, strong predispositions do diminish these framing effects, when an increase in an individual’s resistance to disconfirming information persists. Those who bear firm values are nevertheless still impressionable to framing, to matters that have not obtained a determined interpretation.⁹⁷

For the aforementioned literature on framing and its subsequent effects to be translated into the analysis of self-narration online, an insight into Goffman’s ‘dramatic scriptings’ may serve as an entry point into the ensuing predefined frame section. This concept or corpus of transcriptions as Goffman labels it, refers to all strips that contain a depiction of personal experiences in the mediums of entertainment such as television, radio, literature and theater. Its significance pertains to how such scripts imitate everyday life, an ensemble of concentrated unscripted social doings which provide valuable insights into our lives and thus carry great social importance.⁹⁸ Goffman does crucially state that the issues of frame limits are often present within dramatic scriptings, in the sense of the delicate uncertainty of what can admissibly be transcribed from real events to scriptings. He does however contend that, “Whatever the body can become involved in can be touched upon, but the view must be veiled and distanced so that our presumed beliefs about the ultimate social quality of man will not be discredited”.⁹⁹ Thus, stories can be told as a part of a dramatic retelling of human experiences, but they should not be considered as isolated examples to be examined on its one, rather regarded in context. The concept of scriptings can be recast in the context of mass shooter narratives, as they are a depiction of personal experiences found within new mediums, such as on social media platforms. However, these are unfortunately not fictional stories, but real perpetrators narrating their own dramatic scriptings.

Goffman’s concept of dramatic scriptings, mirror the previously mentioned concept of a ‘cultural script’ proposed by Newman et al., in 2004, in which mass shooters partake in

⁹⁶ Chong and Druckman, "Framing Theory," 111.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 111-112.

⁹⁸ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 53.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 56.

performance stories with their online postings and mediatized manifestos.¹⁰⁰ In their book on school shootings, the authors explain cultural scripts as ‘prescriptions for behavior’, which essentially serve as blueprints for these expressions of violence. As they explained, “the script provides an image of what the shooters want to become and a template that links the method to the goal.”¹⁰¹ This explanation is in line with Muschert & Ragnedda’s ‘performative script’, which also surmises that violence can be communicative. Noting that a perpetrator’s use of lethal violence as a mode of communication, enables them to project and convey their message to their chosen audience.¹⁰²

The dramatic scriptings of mass shootings go beyond storytelling, towards a prominence of isolated displays of human norm deviations. It seems as if frame limits as Goffman explains, have become strained and exerted, as actual events such as the glorification of mass murders are being transcribed into online scripts, such as manifestos that may serve as a precursor to ultimate calamities. They are no longer a mock-up of everyday life, as these dramatic scriptings of self-narration go beyond make-believe, as they ultimately morph into cultural and performative scripts. According to Goffman, “dramatic scriptings allow for the manipulation of framing conventions and that since these conventions cut very deeply into the organization of experience, almost anything can be managed in a way that is compatible with sustaining the involvement of the audience.”¹⁰³ This aforementioned manipulation of framing conventions is demonstrated in the unconventional framing strategies employed by these mass shooting perpetrators. In the following sections, how these individuals see the world, how they justify their actions and narrate their life prior to their attacks will be presented in accordance with the theory of framing.

2.4.1 Framing Devices

In order to delve into the understandings of Goffman’s frame analysis of the organization of experience and happenings within perspectives, a context for interpreting frames is essential. As Robert Entman had noted, there lacks a general consensus of how frames manifest within a text,

¹⁰⁰ Schildkraut and Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities*, 149 and Katherine S. Newman et al., *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004), 230.

¹⁰¹ Katherine S. Newman et al., *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004), 230.

¹⁰² Glenn W. Muschert and Massimo Ragnedda, "Media and Control of Violence: Communication in School Shootings," in *Control of Violence: Historical and International Perspectives on Violence*, ed. Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Stefan Malthaner, and Andrea Kirschner (New York City: Springer Publishing, 2010), 348.

¹⁰³ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 241.

thus for this study, certain guidelines are required for one to recognize dominant framing patterns within mass shooter communications. William A. Gamson's work on *symbolic framing devices* and *reasoning devices*, will be adapted to this thesis and serve as such criterion. Gamson's framing devices signal the presence of frames and indicate how to think about issues at hand, whilst the reasoning devices are utilized to validate what should be done about them.¹⁰⁴ Gamson lists the five framing devices as; metaphors, exemplars (i.e., historical examples from which lessons are conjured), catchphrases, depictions and visual images. The three reasoning devices include; roots (perceived causal agents), consequences and appeals to principle (i.e., moral codes). In conjunction, these eight devices generate different types of 'signature elements' which in turn states the frame.¹⁰⁵ This will be further explored within the methodology chapter.

2.4.2 Predefined Frames

Much of the literature pertaining to frame analysis examines how mass media frames certain events, be it of a political nature, tragedies or events of great public interest.¹⁰⁶ Within the literature of mass shootings, the use of frame analysis tends to focus on the effects the media may have on these devastating incidents, through media contagion for example.¹⁰⁷ However, an analysis of varying framing strategies employed by mass shooters in their self-narratives has presumably not yet been studied, at least not in the manner presented within this thesis. There have however, been several studies carried out that have analyzed last communications of mass shooters, some within an intersectional analysis approach of mediatized manifestos.¹⁰⁸

Thus standard predefined frames tend to focus on how the media covers a story or how it engages in certain discourses and themes. For this study however, the focus is set upon the perpetrators themselves, which poses quite the conundrum in regards to applying suitable frames to the narratives that are analyzed within this thesis, as predefined frames in previous bodies of works have not studied the framing of mass shooters to a great extent. Despite the examples of textual

¹⁰⁴ William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power : A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (1989): 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3-4. Also, for a complete presentation of this model see Gamson & Lasch 1983, 410-411.

¹⁰⁶ See Gamson & Modigliani 1989; Entman 1993; Scheufele 1999; Chong & Druckman 2007.

¹⁰⁷ See Phillips 1983; Cantor et al., 1999; Muschert & Ragnedda 2010; Towers et al., 2015; Johnston & Joy 2016; Schildkraut and Elsass 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Felice Blake, "Ethnic and Racial Studies Global Mass Violence: Examining Racial and Gendered Violence in the Twilight of Multiculturalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 14 (2016): 2615.

analysis made of mediatized manifestos created by mass shooters, there has not yet been a specific study that serves to identify dominant framing patterns in mass shooter communications. Which may be due to the fact that the literature suffers from a lack of clarification in regards to framing. Thus for this analysis, a narrative of characteristics of mass shooters prevalent within the literature will be understood as frames and framing strategies. Meaning, the predefined frames that are listed in this thesis are recognized recurrent terms that will be converted into frames. These narrative approaches are what the present literature provides and will serve to guide the analysis of the case studies presented within this study.

The chosen frames are those that are meant to reflect the narratives, in order to attempt to categorize them and find commonalities. These predefined frames will provide a plausible analysis schema for the self-narration of mass shooters alongside the contribution of Gamson's signature elements, that serve to guide the findings and signal the presence of dominant framing strategies. The following predefined frames are part of a nonexhaustive list chosen by the author, consequently some frames may have been overlooked in each of the case studies but they are nevertheless what the author perceives to be the most salient frames. A brief description of each frame will now be accounted, a detailed explanation along with examples are provided within the methodology and analysis sections.

I. Fantasy Frame

The fantasy frame is derived and composed of several concepts, articulated by a handful of scholars. The dominant defining characteristics of the fantasy frame stem from patterns, behaviors and traits of mass shooters.¹⁰⁹ These attributes amount to what mass shooters essentially strive for, an aspiration that their fantasies will ultimately manifest into violent attacks. The frame is divided between adolescent and adult mass murderers, the former describing distinguishing attributes of fantasy that consume immense amounts of time, bears the motif of grandiosity and persecution, all the while permeated with violence that supplies a means for the adolescent to identify with the aggressor.¹¹⁰ The latter fantasy is associated with what Meloy et al., termed a 'warrior mentality,' which is a concept rooted within a compensatory fantasy. It describes facets of pathological narcissism that may momentarily morph into a violent reality, a self-representation that harbors two

¹⁰⁹ Meloy et al., "A Comparative Analysis," 303.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

defensive features; “an identification with aggression and authority, and an emotional fueling of grandiosity and omnipotent control.”¹¹¹ Scholar P.E Dietz first accounted the warrior mentality in relation to mass murder in a study that categorized mass murderers into three subgroups, one of which he termed ‘pseudocommandos’, which depicts individuals who have a fixation on firearms and commit their attacks after lengthy deliberation.¹¹² Knoll later expanded on the concept of the pseudocommando,¹¹³ his typology along with the characteristics of the warrior mentality and the workings of conscious fantasies will be utilized to describe how the fantasy frame manifests in mass shooters’ self-narration.

II. Threat Frame

The threat frame is almost self-explanatory, as it denotes any threatening language or an implication of threats within the self-narrations and self-portrayals of mass shooters. However, as claimed by Dr. O’Toole, who is a supervisory special agent for the FBI and who wrote a report on threat assessment perspectives concerning school shooters, “All threats are NOT created equal.”¹¹⁴ Meaning, threats can be classified into different categories specified by their nature and their varying levels of risk. For this frame, a threat is defined in accordance with O’Toole’s work as,

*A threat is an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. A threat can be spoken, written, or symbolic -- for example, motioning with one's hands as though shooting at another person.*¹¹⁵

In order to evaluate a threat and categorize it, understanding the motive that prompts the threat is beneficial. As motivation may provide insights into an individual’s mental and emotional state, however a precipitating event or the influence of alcohol or drugs should also be taken into account.¹¹⁶ Such motivators may emanate from a variety of causes such as; with the intention to taunt, assert power, manipulate, function as a warning or a demand for attention or to protect oneself. Threats

¹¹¹ Meloy et al., “A Comparative Analysis,” 298.

¹¹² Park Elliott Dietz, “Mass, Serial and Sensational Homicides,” *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 62, no. 5 (June 1986): 482.

¹¹³ James L. Knoll, “The ‘Pseudocommando’ Mass Murderer: Part I, The Psychology of Revenge and Obliteration,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 38 (2010): 87–94.

¹¹⁴ Mary Ellen O’Toole, “The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective,” National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC), 1999, 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

can also bear underlying emotions that may stem from revenge, fear, rage or even the need for recognition.¹¹⁷

Threats can be understood and categorized into four groupings; direct, indirect, veiled, or conditional.¹¹⁸ A direct threat is communicated in a clear and forthright manner, which identifies a distinct act against a fixed target. Conversely, an indirect threat is inclined to be ambiguous and vague, with implied violence but with aspects of the threat remaining cryptic. A veiled threat on the other hand, explicitly implies violence without directly stating so, as it merely alludes to a threat which leaves a prospective victim to decipher its meaning. Lastly, a conditional threat is most often present in extortion cases, where a demand has been put forth that threatens violence if terms are not met.¹¹⁹ This four type classification will be adopted in the eventual analysis, with the presented threats examined through these definitions. The threat frame is prevalent within all case subjects included within this study, as will be demonstrated later on.

III. Othering Frame

As has previously been accounted, the notion of ‘identity’ is precarious in nature, one that is difficult to pin down due to its incessant fluidity. Identities can be diverse, multilayered, and they can be multiple based in multiple situations.¹²⁰ Identities are not fixed but rather dynamically concocted on the spot, which creates a flexibility that can be understood and made useful by the notion of the ‘self’.¹²¹ Identities constitute what we regard as our self and the self provides a stable anchor for our identities, as it equips us with the necessary tools that allow us to make sense and make choices. When one knows oneself, a feeling based on an presumption of stability flourishes, as our identities unlike our selves, are pragmatic and yet constrained to their immediate contexts that limit our decision making.¹²² The self is an important motivational medium for individuals, as it influences not only how people think, but how they make sense of themselves and others. The social construction of the self derives from how others endorse and strengthen one’s selfhood, thus as individuals we experience a need to validate our worth through others’ perception of us.

¹¹⁷ O’Toole, “The School Shooter: ,” 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁰ Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore, and George Smith, "Self, Self-Concept and Identity," in Handbook of Self and Identity, ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, 2nd ed. (New York City, NY: Guilford Press, 2012), 74.

¹²¹ Ibid., 70.

¹²² Ibid., 70.

Essentially, “people do generally incorporate what they think others think of them in the self.”¹²³ This discernment is significant in relation to the ‘other’, as identity is relationally constructed, the notion of the self is expressed through a distinction of the other.¹²⁴

The other, otherness and othering are all interchangeably concepts that essentially describe how we understand ourselves in relation to others. There are various degrees of otherness, in which a process of linking and differentiating is noted within each gradation; how we may assume a positive identity against what we deem to be a negative identity. Determining such terms within each positional identity, assists in indicating a clear construction of the other. As there are multiple identities and multiple selves, there can correspondingly be multiple others. Our self is thus articulated through a differentiation against an other, opposite to something or oneself.¹²⁵ “The existence of each of us as an independent or self-standing self is challenged by the other. We are caught up in the struggle over the independence and dependence of self-consciousness.”¹²⁶ Thus, what we identify as an other, affects our notion of sense of self and identity. This concept is crucial in the understanding of mass shooter narratives, as the perceived causal agents and the motivators for mass shooting attacks are often strongly associated with what other the perpetrator feels he has been set up against. A perpetrator’s use of language conveys their self versus an other distinction and thus highlights the reflexivity of their self.¹²⁷ Within this analysis, it will be exhibited in which ways each perpetrator has distinguished an other and how such a differentiation has influenced both their communications and motivations. Their designations of an other range from; an ‘alpha male’ self, a misfit self, a martyr self to an otherness rooted in racial distinctions, religion as an other, to law enforcement and even the whole of humanity classified by othering.

IV. Fame-Seeking Frame

This frame is partly based on the research done by Dr. Adam Lankford, who conducted a study on the behavior of fame-seeking rampage shooters by analyzing their statements in order to elucidate

¹²³ Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith, "Self, Self-Concept and Identity," 76.

¹²⁴ Lene Hansen, "Research Designs: Asking Questions and Choosing Texts," in *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2008), 39.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²⁶ David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), 140.

¹²⁷ Deborah Schiffrin, "Narrative as Self-Portrait: Sociolinguistic Constructions of Identity," *Language in Society* 25, no. 2 (1996): 169.

their behaviors.¹²⁸ He classifies fame-seeking into several sorts; one variety stems from perceived victimization in which the longing for fame through an act of violence may be understood as compensatory for feeling maltreated, underappreciated or disrespected. This amounts to what Lankford terms ‘criminal delusions of grandeur’, to which mass shooting perpetrators commit offences in order to express their belief that they deserve attention and will not be ignored, forgotten or marginalized.¹²⁹ Another facet of fame-seeking is that of postmortem fame, with many perpetrators having decided they will not survive their attacks, but are nonetheless drawn to the idea of recognition beyond death.

Lankford also denotes that every perpetrator that leaves behind any last communication, whether it be a suicide note, a video or a manifesto, should be labeled as a fame-seeker. These last communications are termed ‘legacy tokens’, as they allow the perpetrators to shape their own narratives and be remembered on their own terms.¹³⁰ He further argues, that perpetrators who make a political or ideological statement should also be regarded as fame-seekers, as these individuals attempt to garner public attention in order to convey their convictions to an audience. A final dimension of fame-seeking is the notion of leaving no communication, leading others puzzled by their lack of stated motives, which could in fact garner more attention and fame.¹³¹ Finally, Lankford concludes that fame-seeking shooters have a greater incentive to make their attacks as deadly as possible, as he presented a correlation between the number of deaths perpetrators cause with the consequent amount of attention they receive. Fame-seeking offenders also tend to be younger than other mass shooters who do harbor fame as a prime incentive.¹³²

Dr. Michael Serazio proposed another typology of fame-seeking, in which he places an emphasis on the association between identity and fame-seeking. He argues that an alienated individual in late modern society, can surmount his social status through visually mediated fame or self-broadcasting. By this, the author implies that with such communications, perpetrators may obtain the sort of fame that can ‘transcend mortality’, as their narratives live on online after they are gone.¹³³ Serazio classifies this celebrity desire into three categories;

¹²⁸Adam Lankford, "Fame-seeking Rampage Shooters: Initial Findings and Empirical Predictions," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 27 (2016): 124.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³⁰ Lankford, "Fame-seeking Rampage Shooters:" 124.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 126.

¹³³ Serazio, "Shooting for Fame: Spectacular Youth," 419.

It provides one with the experience of individuality; it offers transcendence above powerless anonymity; and it entices with the potential for immortality. These will help illuminate the logic behind the mediated productivity of the youth shooters; these are the ‘‘worth ratio’’ values cultivated by decades of mass media ritual.¹³⁴

Serazio argues that fame has become somewhat of a dominant currency in our highly connected modernized society.¹³⁵ Thus, the implications of this need for fame found within the motivations of mass shooters as well as their desire for ‘generativity’, which is the ability to affect successive generations by way of inciting other shootings, is concerning to say the least.¹³⁶ These typologies found within the fame-seeking frame, will be further utilized within the case analysis.

¹³⁴ Serazio, “Shooting for Fame: Spectacular Youth,” 420.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 421.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 421.

3. Methodology

This chapter focuses on the research design implemented in this study along with its specific research methodology of discourse analysis and its methodological justifications. The case selection of six different mass shooters will be presented along with an explanation of how the aforementioned framing categories are operationalized, with an application of indicators and framing devices that serve to connect each case study with adhering framing strategies. An analysis scheme guided by Gamson's eight signature elements will highlight the framing involved. Lastly, the limitations pertaining to reliability and validity of this study will be touched upon.

3.1 Case Study Design and Case Selections

A multiple-case study design will be implemented as it serves well in this comparative case study selection, as it is grounded in research methodology in which cases are examined. It serves to provide extensive descriptions of the issues presented, as a cross-case examination encourages in-depth understanding.¹³⁷ In accordance with Lena Hansen's recommendations for an intertextual analysis research design, multiple selves or in this case multiple shooters will be examined over the course of a particular moment (this being the moment of peak usage in social media), based on an analysis of multiple events, which in this case will be six separate events. Comparative moments will be illustrated as some of these cases reference each other in various ways.¹³⁸ A selection criterion is also necessary for this research to be viable.

The theories and concepts presented in this paper are not new. However, as previously mentioned, social media is still largely uncharted territory and policy recommendations are still at a developmental stage. This research thus seeks to contribute to the literature of mass shooters and contagion by way of assessing their self portrayals, going beyond mass shooting statistics and instead setting a focus upon framing analysis, in an attempt to dissect possible recurrent themes that can be applied to divergent mass shooting cases. Which may enable the possibility of identifying such narrations online, before they receive wide circulation.

Choosing an appropriate time frame and a suitable selection criteria is essential to this study, as any deviation may skew the findings. The six chosen cases all occurred within the United States and range from the years 2014 - 2018, and the justification for these dates are several. First off, as

¹³⁷ Linda Chmiliar, "Multiple-Case Designs," in *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, ed. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2010), 584.

¹³⁸ Hansen, "Research Designs: Asking Questions and Choosing Texts," 65.

the focus of this study is on the online self-narration of mass shooting perpetrators, the time frame should reflect the pinnacles of social media as it would provide an inclination to the ramifications of widespread postings. MySpace and Facebook were the first social media platforms to be created and the largest at the time of their inception, in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Within five years, both platforms had over 100 million registered users.¹³⁹ This provides an insight into how the use of social media has been growing rapidly in recent years, and within this usage, some individuals use these platforms to post their last communications before committing heinous crimes. Other factors that serve to justify these chosen case studies include; the amount of publicly available self-narration data, meeting the terms of both the selection criteria and the provided definition of mass shootings, as well as the importance of choosing diverse cases with the aim of generalizing the findings, ultimately seeking to explain the features of a broader population.¹⁴⁰ The case selections are based on theory as there is no consistent profile of perpetrators, but further insights may be gained by an examination into whether commonalities can be found within their narratives. This is why it is essential to present individuals who come from different backgrounds, have diverse world views and contrasting motives. A brief mention of the first available online self-narrations posted by American mass shooting perpetrators is accounted, to place the case studies in perspective and finally a description of each of the six case studies is provided.

The first online self-narration by an American mass shooter was in 2009, in which the perpetrator George Sodini, kept an online journal on a website registered to himself. The journal contained information on planned attacks, his anger over women rejecting him, as well as a posting in which Sodini posted his date of death, just prior to his rampage in which he killed three women at an LA Fitness centre and then turned the gun on himself. It was undetermined whether anyone had frequented the website or had read his posts before the attacks occurred.¹⁴¹ Thus, Sodini will not be included within the given case studies, as he did not post anything on social media and it is not known if his website was ever accessed by others. It is nonetheless worth mentioning when the first known online self-narration by an American mass shooter occurred.

¹³⁹ "About Myspace," Myspace, accessed May 03, 2019, <https://myspace.com/pressroom/aboutmyspace>. And "Company Info," Facebook Newsroom, accessed April 03, 2019, <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>.

¹⁴⁰ Jason Seawright and John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options," *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2008): 294.

¹⁴¹ CTV.ca News Staff, "Gunman in Health Club Shooting a 48-year-old Loner," CTVNews, August 06, 2009, accessed April 03, 2019, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/gunman-in-health-club-shooting-a-48-year-old-loner-1.422779>.

The first self-narration by an American mass shooter posted on a social media platform was that of former Los Angeles police officer Christopher Jordan Dorner's manifesto in 2013. In his 11,000 word post, he writes about his plans and motivations along with his personal history.¹⁴² His case is of somewhat importance as his attacks inspired at least three other mass shooters that have explicitly cited him in their own narrations prior to their own attacks.¹⁴³ However, Dorner's manifesto and his case will not be a subject in this thesis as it does not fit within the selection criteria. Dorner committed his offences over the course of several days, which conflicts with the FBI's definition of mass shootings listed earlier. He is nonetheless mentioned, as there will be a presented case study of perpetrator Gavin Eugene Long, who not only mentioned Dorner in his Youtube videos, but also plagiarized a section of Dorner's manifesto in his own last communication, which will be exhibited later on.

Self-narration has been somewhat researched within the academic literature of mass shooters as was previously described, but a wide ranging frame analysis comparison of six very different perpetrators has not yet been studied, therefore adding to the body of literature. To clarify, this analysis of mass shooters' self-narration is solely an examination of language use and framing strategies utilized by these offenders in an effort to gain a further understanding of the mass shooter phenomenon.

The first case study chosen for this thesis is that of Elliot Rodger's last Youtube video, posted on the day he committed his assaults. Rodger's case was chosen due to the views and circulation his video received. He has also been referred to and cited by other mass shooters as a prime motivator for subsequent attacks.¹⁴⁴ Rodger's attacks transpired in May 2014, a time when social media had been in existence for over a decade. The last case presented is dated from February 2018, but there have been numerous mass shootings at the time of this writing in 2019, such as the Thousand Oaks shooting that was briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter as well as the New Zealand attacks of March 2019. However, the case studies presented here fit the criteria of an active online presence, no apparent affiliation to terrorist organizations and within each case are various

¹⁴² "Christopher Dorner's Manifesto (Disturbing Content and Language)," KTLA, February 13, 2013, accessed April 03, 2019, <https://ktla.com/2013/02/12/read-christopher-dorners-so-called-manifesto/>.

¹⁴³ Shawn Hamilton, "Micah Johnson Was Not Who You Think He Was. But You Know Him Well.," HuffPost, July 17, 2016, accessed April 03, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/micah-xavier-johnson-assassin_n_578936ede4b08608d3347fa8.

¹⁴⁴ John Whitefoot, "Who Is Elliot Rodger? What Is the Incel Movement?" Crimeola, April 24, 2018, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://crimeola.com/elliott-rodger-incel-movement/>.

backgrounds and differing ideological motivations. These backgrounds of each individual and their motivations will be further detailed in chapter four. For now, the incident descriptions and brief insights into each perpetrators' motivations will be presented.

3.1.1 The 2014 Isla Vista Killings: Incident Description

In Isla Vista, California on May 23rd 2014, 22-year-old college student Elliot Rodger initiated a series of violent attacks. The perpetrator stabbed three people to death inside his home, subsequently drove to a sorority house and attempted to gain access but failed, subsequently resorting to shooting three women in front of the building. He later carried out several drive-by shootings and intentionally struck pedestrians with his car. During the course of these events, the perpetrator encountered sheriff's deputies in two standoffs, was wounded in the gunfire exchange and eventually took his own life, turning the gun on himself.¹⁴⁵ These attacks were committed at 17 different locations, resulted in seven deaths, including the perpetrator and fourteen non-fatal injuries.¹⁴⁶

3.1.2 The 2015 Charleston Church Shooting: Incident Description

Charleston, South Carolina often referred to as the Holy City due to its vast amount of churches, was shaken to its core when a mass shooting event unfolded in one of the city's landmark black churches. Nine people were killed during an evening Bible study session at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The perpetrator was identified as 21-year-old Dylann Storm Roof, a self-proclaimed white supremacist. The perpetrator had entered the church, specifically asked for the church pastor, sat down next to him and joined the congregation in listening to Scripture. Roughly an hour after the offender had first arrived, he abruptly got up and pulled a gun. One of the church attendees implored him not to resort to violence, telling the gunman that he did not have to go through with what he had planned. The perpetrator replied by stating, "Yes. You are raping our women and taking over the country."¹⁴⁷ This tragic incident was the biggest mass shooting to transpire in a house of worship since 1991.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Bill Brown, "Isla Vista Mass Murder, May 23, 2014 Investigative Summary," 2015, 2, <http://www.sbsheriff.us/documents/ISLAVISTAINVESTIGATIVESUMMARY.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴⁷ Nick Corasaniti, Richard Pérez-peña, and Lizette Alvarez, "Church Massacre Suspect Held as Charleston Grieves," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2015, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/19/us/charleston-church-shooting.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "The Charleston Shooting Is the Largest Mass Shooting in a House of Worship since 1991," *The Washington Post*, June 18, 2015, accessed April 09, 2019,

3.1.3 The 2016 Baton Rouge Shooting: Incident Description

At 08:40 on July 17th, 2016, police received a call from their dispatch that relayed the message, “subject walking with a coat and an assault rifle.”¹⁴⁹ What transpired in Baton Rouge, Louisiana when police responded to the call, was described as an ambush, carried out by former Marine sergeant Gavin Eugene Long. On his 29th birthday, Long had armed himself with two rifles and a handgun, completely clothed in black and actively sought out police officers to gun down.

A gun battle ensued between the police and the perpetrator, which resulted in the perpetrator wounding three police officers and killing an additional three officers. The perpetrator was subsequently shot and killed by the responding SWAT team.¹⁵⁰

3.1.4 The 2017 Eaton Township Weis Market Shooting: Incident Description

On June 8th at the Weis Market, in Eaton Township, northwest of Scranton Pennsylvania, 24-year-old Randy Robert Stair reported to his night shift after the store had closed. Unbeknownst to his coworkers, Stair had begun blocking the entrances and all exits with various items such as pallets. He then proceeded to his car and retrieved a duffel bag that contained two shotguns. He then reentered the store around 01:00 and fired 59 shots, killing three of his coworkers; three men and one woman, but spared a fourth employee after meeting her gaze and instead opted for another aisle within the store. She hid, managed to escape and called the police, whilst the perpetrator turned the gun on himself and committed suicide.¹⁵¹

The Weis Market shooting is debatably categorized as a mass shooting incident, as the assault left four people dead, conversely including the perpetrator himself who may not be considered a victim. However, the case does present multiple characteristics of a mass shooting

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/06/18/the-charleston-shooting-is-the-largest-mass-shooting-in-a-house-of-worship-since-1991/?utm_term=.3f5d7da3922e.

¹⁴⁹ Maya Lau and Jim Mustian, "Baton Rouge Police Shooting Brings Renewed Attention to Louisiana's 'open Carry' Rights," *The Advocate*, August 06, 2016, accessed April 14, 2019,

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/baton_rouge_officer_shooting/article_83d7317a-5b60-11e6-84b4-13cf89c9f22f.html.

¹⁵⁰ Laura Bauer, Mará Rose Williams, and Ian Cummings, "Gavin Long's Last 10 Days, from Book Peddler to Baton Rouge Cop Killer," *Miamiherald*, July 25, 2016, accessed April 13, 2019,

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article91002377.html>.

¹⁵¹ The Associated Press, "Weis Employee Kills 3 Co-workers, Self in Store Spree," *York Dispatch*, June 08, 2017, accessed April 25, 2019,

<https://eu.yorkdispatch.com/story/news/local/pennsylvania/2017/06/08/dead-murder-suicide-pennsylvania-supermarket/102621250/>.

incident, whereas the perpetrator shot his victims indiscriminately and did not seem to have chosen these individuals purposefully, despite having premeditated the attacks months in advance. The perpetrator had also left behind a sizable digital footprint, as he was highly active across several social media platforms, moderating numerous social media accounts. Thus, this case is included within this study as it contains an abundance of online self-narration, underscoring the essence of this research.

3.1.5 The 2017 Sutherland Springs Church Shooting: Incident Description

Surpassing the Charleston Church shooting as the deadliest mass shooting to transpire in an American house of worship, is the heinous attack on the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. 26-year-old Devin Patrick Kelley began firing an assault rifle outside the church around 11:15, and continued shooting whilst he entered into the building. Clad in all black tactical gear with a ballistic vest, donning a white face mask with a white skull, the perpetrator indiscriminately killed 26 people, almost half of whom were children, and injured another 20. Two neighboring citizens of the church pursued the fleeing Kelley in a car chase and shot him twice. Kelley crashed his car when injured and was found with three gunshot wounds, one of which was a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.¹⁵²

3.1.6 The 2018 Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting: Incident Description

19-year-old Nikolas Jakob Cruz arrived at his high school on Valentine's day in an Uber. He entered the freshman building, carrying a backpack filled with smoke grenades and ammunition, as well as a rifle case. He wore a gas mask and pulled the fire alarm, causing students and teachers to stream out into the hallway, which is when the perpetrator began shooting at whomever he could target. He then exploited the ensuing chaos to his advantage, blended into the crowd and exited the school. He had carried out the deadliest high school shooting in US history, killing 17 people and gravely injuring another 17.¹⁵³ He was apprehended roughly two hours later and in March 2018, he

¹⁵² Chris Bucher, "Devin Kelley's Social Media: Shooting Suspect Posted Photo Of Gun," Heavy.com, November 06, 2017, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://heavy.com/news/2017/11/devin-kelley-facebook-gun-photo-social-media/>. And Jessica McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts You Need To Know," Heavy.com, November 08, 2017, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://heavy.com/news/2017/11/devin-kelley-p-sutherland-springs-church-shooter-patrick-kelly/>.

¹⁵³ "Florida Shooting: FBI Was Warned about Alleged High School Gunman Nikolas Cruz, but Couldn't Find Him," ABC News, February 16, 2018, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-16/florida-shooting-fbi-warned-about-alleged-gunman-nikolas-cruz/9453156>.

was indicted by a Broward County grand jury on all accounts laid against him, with prosecutors seeking the death penalty.¹⁵⁴

3.2 Data Collection and Frame Analysis

For the study of self-narration within mediatized communications of mass shooters online, an examination of these perpetrators' online postings is analyzed. The focus will thus be on data gathered from shooters' social media accounts and other online postings, whether they were posted on message boards, on perpetrators' own websites or as written texts associated with images they have posted. Customarily, when a mass shooting event has recently transpired, the mass shooting suspects' online profiles are rendered void. Due to this fact, secondary sources are needed and utilized within this study. Secondary in the sense of reproduction or screenshots taken of perpetrators' postings before the removal of content. This is however, not the case with all the data as four out of the six perpetrators listed within this study, had left behind a mediatized manifesto which detailed their motivations, premeditated planning and their upbringings and social standings.

There is no definite time frame which can be applied to every single case, as they differ in the timing of their last communication postings. Three of the individuals within this case study uploaded either a video, a last letter, a manifesto or wrote a Tweet on the same day of their assaults, whilst another uploaded his entire journal online the night before his attacks. Two case studies did not post any last communication pertaining to their upcoming attacks, one did however record cellphone footage of himself detailing his plans, motives and desire for fame, but the videos were only released by prosecutors after the suspect was apprehended.¹⁵⁵ Thus, at least for the last two individuals in this study, an examination of their Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as several comments posted by them will be analyzed, all from within a year of their attacks. The reason for such an imprecise time frame is due to the sporadic postings of these individuals, as no definite last posting was created.

¹⁵⁴ Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Prosecutors Will Ask for the Death Penalty against Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz," CNN, March 13, 2018, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/13/us/nikolas-cruz-parkland-massacre-death-penalty/index.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Rafael Olmeda, "Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz Brags on Cellphone Videos, 'I'm Going to Be the next School Shooter'," Sun Sentinel, March 28, 2019, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-reg-florida-school-shooting-phone-vid-eo-release-20180530-story.html>.

The empirical data will solely stem from qualitative means, with the use of both primary and secondary sources. Qualitative in the sense, that last communications posted online will be examined by means of framing analysis, in order to decipher what frames are being utilized and whether there are commonalities present across the case studies. Framing devices are an optimal methodological tool for this study, as they serve to discover the manner of which reality is produced. This method allows for the qualitative investigation of texts and attempts to recognize the meanings of socially produced ideas through the constructive impacts of language use.¹⁵⁶ The ontological and epistemic roots of framing stem from a constructionist approach, which describes reality as socially constructed, entailing fluidity in meaning that can be postulated by means of interpretive methods such as frame analysis. As discourses and texts do not harbor innate meanings independently, they must be sought and located historically and socially.¹⁵⁷ Meanings and social realities emerge from discourses that develop “a material reality in the practices that they invoke.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, what we perceive as social reality, is the result of what we continuously create through meaningful interactions. Which is exactly what framing provides, “a way to describe the power of a communicating text.”¹⁵⁹ Hence, frame analysis with its deductive, inductive and subjective means, focuses on the evolution of meaning and how it transforms over time. Therefore, framing adheres to the systematic examination of texts, to locate their meaning and salience, and subsequently explores how it all transcribes into social reality.¹⁶⁰ Just as Goffman noted within the workings of the primary framework, which concerns itself with transforming an individual’s experience and making it meaningful, its affiliated frame analysis uncovers these meanings and the two conflate into the analysis essentials utilized in this thesis.

The study of language will present itself in various forms, primarily found within Gamson’s five framing devices; with the use of metaphors, catchphrases, depictions, exemplars and visual images. A focus will also be set upon Gamson’s three reasoning devices; the roots within each frame, consequences and appeals to principle. As framing can be deductive, inductive or both, I will

¹⁵⁶ Bill Harley, Cynthia Hardy, and Nelson Phillips, “Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis: Two Solitudes?” In *Qualitative Methods*, edited by John Gerring, Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods 2, no.1 (Spring 2004): 19. *And* Gamson and Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion,” 3-4.

¹⁵⁷ Harley, Hardy and Phillips, “Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis:” 19-20.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵⁹ Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” 5.

¹⁶⁰ Harley, Hardy and Phillips, “Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis:” 20.

begin with a deductive analysis on what dominant predefined frames suggested by the literature are present and then proceed to the inductive, through the discernment of labeling and identifying other framing strategies that may be present.

3.3 Operationalization

Defining the measurement of the prevalence of certain frames through the extension of framing theory, is performed through the use of predefined frames as well as with the framing devices proposed by Gamson. All in order to accurately detect the framing strategies utilized in each communication presented. Analyzing each text with these frames in mind accompanied by various labelling and language use, commonalities will be established and presented.

In respect to defining and analyzing framing strategies within self-narration with the use of Gamson's framing devices, a manner of implementing such tools is pertinent. Essentially enquiring how these narratives framed and how is that information understood and with effects? Whilst analyzing each last communication by perpetrators through framing, several questions may serve as guidelines for the operationalization of the theory, therefore assisting in the process of extracting frames from such texts, for instance;

1. Do narratives contain any of the five framing devices? Are they comparable across any of the cases?
2. Are there similar roots present within the narratives, accusations towards specific authorities?
3. What are the stated consequences within each narrative, preceding motivations (presumed effects of the shooting events)?
4. Are there comparable appeals to principle within the narratives?
5. Are there any outstanding mutual labels, concepts, values and qualities?

A brief example of the fantasy frame is presented featuring one case study, in accordance with the aforementioned questions and framing devices provided in order to demonstrate how the analysis is structured. Every narrative will however be discussed in relation to one another, by highlighting commonalities as well as variations observed within each frame. Each subsequent frame will then be detailed within the analysis.

Elliot Rodger's last communication is saturated with both threatening language and traits associated with the fantasy frame. "I would stop at nothing (points finger at camera) to reduce every single one of you to mountains of skulls and rivers of blood. And rightfully so."¹⁶¹ The fantasy element of this statement is illustrious in which the perpetrator explicitly strives to morph his fantasy into a violent reality, 'stopping at nothing'. His communication is fueled by notions of grandiosity, as if he is somehow entitled to the infliction of harm upon others, just as the characteristics within the fantasy frame represent. Gamson's signature elements are also discernible within this short excerpt, as it is permeated with violent *imagery*, vivid *depictions* and a ghastly *metaphor*. Rodger states the consequences for the perceived causal agents to be 'mountains of skulls and rivers of blood', directed towards those he feels have wronged him. With this in mind and the aforementioned questions serving as guidelines, the analysis will further compare the cases to attempt to find commonalities within each narrative.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability is recognized within this research, as it is understood that there is a need for possible reproduction of this study. However, variations in interpretation do not necessarily constitute a problem, as such differences may be seen as a source of data. Thus formal measures of reliability within frame analysis often tend to be a non factor. However, as this analysis occasionally relies on secondary sources in the form of screenshots of online content that have been rendered void, it can be viewed as a reliability issue. Notwithstanding the lack of primary sources, the screenshots were collected from legitimate sources, which had verified the data before it was removed.¹⁶² Due diligence will be exercised in the explanations and justification of the analysis findings, in a manner that readers can discern.¹⁶³

The validity of this research in regards to self-narration is justified in the sense that each perpetrators' online identity is also a part of their actual identity within the physical realm. However, a limitation of this study concerns the provided justifications presented within each narrative, as they do not necessarily reflect definite motives. Meaning, there can be no direct link

¹⁶¹ CNN Staff, "Transcript of Video," CNN.

¹⁶² Dan Evon, "FACT CHECK: Did the Florida Shooter's Instagram Profile Picture Feature a 'MAGA' Hat?" Snopes.com, February 15, 2018, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/did-shooters-instagram-picture-maga-hat/>.

¹⁶³ Harley, Hardy, and Phillips, "Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis:" 21.

established between what each perpetrator communicates online and what their actual motives are, as investigating the latter would require a different research design and alternative methods. The reason for this can be traced to mass shooter profiles, as they are not uniform, do not share the same cultural backgrounds, ethnicity or motives. An emphasis is thus solely placed upon social media postings to present a comparative analysis and not an in depth psychological profile, as that does not reflect what the research question is attempting to answer. Nevertheless, if one were to consider validity as the manifestation of “performativity”, it can be argued that the study is valid as it measures the phenomena of patterns in the meaning of texts by way of framing strategies, which in turn reflect the discourses as a constitutive function of reality.¹⁶⁴ Thus, validity is important for operationalizational purposes, which is demonstrated within the analysis of this study. As this study focuses its analysis of mass shooters’ self-narration in an inductive and subjective manner, the reflexivity is high as the author acknowledges the role she has in the process of discerning meanings within the texts that are analyzed. An attempt will naturally be made to present the various ways in which meanings within each text might be understood, within the framework of chosen predefined frames. An effort is made to ensure that the given analysis is “sensitive to the way the patterns are identified and explained.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Harley, Hardy, and Phillips, “Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis:” 21.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

4. Perpetrators' Background, Ideology and Motives

This chapter sets its focus upon the brief accounts of each mass shooters' social circumstances, ideological orientations and incentives. This section also reveals on which platforms the perpetrators were active and includes concise excerpt of their communications. These excerpts serve to provide a context for the subsequent analysis, which is fundamental for the understanding of the ideological variances between each perpetrator.

4.1 Elliot Oliver Robertson Rodger

The perpetrator was a London born, California raised, Chinese/English biracial male. He supposedly was never exposed to weapons whilst growing up, had never revealed any interest in firearms and had no prior criminal history.¹⁶⁶ Rodger had no known friends, had told his therapist that he had been bullied in high school, appeared to be a loner and isolated himself throughout his life.¹⁶⁷ Concerning the state of his mental health, he was deemed qualified for special education as he was considered to have displayed behaviors associated with Asperger's Syndrome, but he was never hospitalized due to any sort of mental illness.¹⁶⁸

The perpetrator was very preoccupied with his appearances as believed if he projected an image of opulence, that it would eventually culminate in women finding him attractive.¹⁶⁹ His main frustrations were grounded in the fact that he did not have a girlfriend, was a virgin and became progressively angry over his self-perceived rejection by women.¹⁷⁰ This was conveyed within his 137-page autobiographical manifesto that he had sent to family members and acquaintances shortly before he made his way to the sorority house. In this manifesto, he outlined his motives in what he titled, "Day of Retribution," classified into three phases.¹⁷¹

My orchestration of the Day of Retribution is my attempt to do everything in my power, to destroy everything I cannot have. All of those beautiful girls I've desired so much in my life, but can never have because they despise and loathe me, I will destroy. All of those popular people who live hedonistic lives of pleasure, I will destroy, because they never accepted me as one of them. I will kill them all and make them suffer, just as they have made me suffer. It is only fair.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Brown, "Isla Vista Mass Murder," 48-49.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 50 & 52.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 51 & 54.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷² Elliot Rodger, "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger," 2014, 141.
<http://abclocal.go.com/three/kabc/kabc/My-Twisted-World.pdf>.

The perpetrator had also uploaded a seven minute Youtube video titled ‘Retribution’, just prior to sending out his manifesto, in which he again outlines his motives of his upcoming attacks. He was very active on social media and on internet blogs, as well on websites frequented by other ‘involuntarily celibate’ men or self-proclaimed ‘incels’. Rodger had notably searched the internet for George Sodini prior to the rampage, who was mentioned earlier as the first mass shooter to post motives online. He had also uploaded several other videos on Youtube’s platform, which have now been removed by his family members but were duplicated by others online prior to their removal.¹⁷³ For this case study, Rodger’s manifesto will not be further accounted but rather his aforementioned last video’s transcription will be analyzed in comparison with the other cases within this study, as that video was his last communication posted on social media.

4.2 Dylann Storm Roof

Dylann Storm Roof was born in Columbia, South Carolina and was by all accounts raised within a difficult home environment, encumbered by domestic abuse and financial troubles. According to school records, he had attended several different schools before dropping out of ninth grade in 2010.¹⁷⁴ Growing up, Roof displayed signs of obsessive compulsive behavior and was later diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.¹⁷⁵ He was however noted to interact well with his family, attended church and Bible camp and actively played video games. The perpetrator did have a criminal record, with at least three run ins with the local police, with two misdemeanor convictions due to illicit prescription drugs found in his possession and semi-automatic rifle parts found in his car.¹⁷⁶ Unlike Elliot Rodger, Roof exhibited an affinity to firearms and for his 21st birthday, he bought himself a semi-automatic handgun.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Brown, “Isla Vista Mass Murder,” 42.

¹⁷⁴ The Associated Press, "Charleston Shooting Suspect Led Troubled Life Long before Radicalization," Oregonlive.com, June 27, 2015, accessed April 08, 2019, https://www.oregonlive.com/today/2015/06/dylann_roof_troubled_life_pave.html.

¹⁷⁵ Clare S. Allely and Lino Faccini, “Clinical Profile, Risk, and Critical Factors and the Application of the “Path toward Intended Violence” Model in the Case of Mass Shooter Dylann Roof,” *Deviant Behavior*, 2018, 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1437653>.

¹⁷⁶ Frances Robles and Nikita Stewart, "Dylann Roof's Past Reveals Trouble at Home and School," The New York Times, July 16, 2015, accessed April 09, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/us/charleston-shooting-dylann-roof-troubled-past.html>.

¹⁷⁷ The Associated Press, "Charleston Shooting Suspect Led Troubled Life Long before Radicalization,"

A recluse individual by nature but had a few friends, whom had stated Roof was not considered an outcast at school but had a tendency to drink heavily and abuse drugs, namely pills.¹⁷⁸ Roof had several African-American friends but was not known to spew racial slurs or hate speech in their presence.¹⁷⁹ This however, conflicts with the perpetrator's online activities which portrays foul and offensive views directed towards minorities, namely African-Americans.

The perpetrator had a Facebook page, in which his profile picture shows him wearing a jacket donning patches that bear symbols of two former white supremacist governments, the former South African apartheid-era flag and that of former Rhodesia. There are various other photos that were on Facebook, which display Roof with various Confederate memorabilia.¹⁸⁰ He also frequented white supremacist websites and commented under the username "AryanBlood1488".¹⁸¹ Following his attacks, a website was discovered titled 'The Last Rhodesian', confirmed by officials to had been owned and operated by the perpetrator. On this site, were a variety of photos that contained neo-nazi and white supremacy symbolism, and the icon for the browser tab on this website was an Othala rune, an antiquated symbol which was later appropriated by the Nazis and revitalized within the neo-nazi movement. Officials believe he had 'self-radicalized' online and was thus not officially affiliated with any hate groups, notwithstanding he is regarded as a white supremacist.

Amongst these pictures and icons, was a 2500 word manifesto written by him, which he last modified at 16:44 on the day he committed his attacks and forebodingly explains within this text that, "at the time of writing I am in a great hurry."¹⁸² It is within this mediatized manifesto where he outlines his radical racist ideology and motives, that will be the focus of his case study.

I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is [the] most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites

¹⁷⁸ The Daily Beast, "Everything Known About Charleston Church Shooting Suspect Dylann Roof," The Daily Beast, June 18, 2015, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/everything-known-about-charleston-church-shooting-suspect-dylann-roof-1>.

¹⁷⁹ Robles and Stewart, "Dylann Roof's Past Reveals Trouble at Home and School," The New York Times.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid and Sarah Ellis and Harrison Cahill, "Dylann Roof: Hindsight and 'what ifs'," Thestate, June 27, 2015, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.thestate.com/news/local/article25681333.html>.

¹⁸¹ The Associated Press, "Charleston Shooting Suspect Led Troubled Life," Oregonlive.com

¹⁸² Frances Robles, "Dylann Roof Photos and a Manifesto Are Posted on Website," The New York Times, June 20, 2015, accessed April 09, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/us/dylann-storm-roof-photos-website-charleston-church-shooting.html>.

*in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.*¹⁸³

On April 10, 2017, Roof received a life sentence for each of the murder charges indicted against him, he is currently serving his time without the possibility of parole.¹⁸⁴

4.3 Gavin Eugene Long

Gavin Eugene Long, or as he referred to himself as Cosmo Ausar Setepenra to describe his ‘indigenous identity’,¹⁸⁵ was born and raised in Kansas City. Court records provide an insight into a strenuous family life afflicted by financial difficulties. Long enlisted in the Marines straight out of highschool, where he served for five years which consisted of two deployments to Iraq and later served as a data network specialist. He was honorably discharged in 2010 and had received several medals during his stint in the Marines Corps.¹⁸⁶ Despite not having been in combat whilst deployed, Long sought treatment for Post-traumatic stress disorder at the Veterans Administration Medical Center. The doctors instead diagnosed him as being afflicted by, ‘adjustment disorder with depressed mood,’ and concluded he was stable, had no mental health conditions and did not exhibit any signs of being a threat to himself or others for that matter.¹⁸⁷

Long obtained an associates degree from a Texan college, got married and later divorced, and then pursued a life online. He was active on several social media platforms, namely Youtube and Twitter and produced podcasts in which he pontificated about black separatism and called for black people to rise up together against what he rendered an unjust society.¹⁸⁸ He echoed this

¹⁸³ Dylann Roof, “The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,” 2015.

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2108059-lastrhodesian-manifesto.html>

¹⁸⁴ Kevin Sack, "Grandfather Apologizes After Dylann Roof's Guilty Pleas Add to Sentence," The New York Times, April 10, 2017, accessed April 10, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/us/dylann-roof-grandfather-charleston-shooting.html?searchResultPosition=2&login=google>.

¹⁸⁵ Ned Parker and Mark Hosenball, "Baton Rouge Shooter Said He Was Member of Anti-government Group: Documents," Reuters, July 19, 2016, accessed April 14, 2019,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-police-domesticsecurity-idUSKCN0ZY24V>.

¹⁸⁶ Kansas City Star, "Gavin Long's Path to Baton Rouge Marked by Big Plans, 'bizarre' Claims," July 19, 2016, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article90433917.html>.

¹⁸⁷ Roxana Hegeman, "VA Records: Baton Rouge Gunman Gavin Long Had Mood Disorder, Not PTSD, Wasn't Seen as Threat," The Advocate, August 29, 2016, accessed April 14, 2019,

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/baton_rouge_officer_shooting/article_4c364eb6-6e3b-11e6-a5ec-276c72f8bba0.html?sr_source=lift_amplify.

¹⁸⁸ Louis Sahagun and Jaweed Kaleem, "A Study in Anger: How Gavin Long Went from Decorated Iraq Veteran to Cop Killer," Los Angeles Times, July 19, 2016, accessed April 14, 2019,

<https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-baton-rouge-gavin-long-20160718-snap-story.html>.

sentiment across his vast online postings, particularly in blog postings on his website ‘ConvoswithCosmo.Com’, which has since been taken down. He also self-published several ebooks on Amazon, which the company has also removed from their website in light of the attacks. Within his online identity and self-narration, he presented himself as a lifestyle guru, an activist and life coach.¹⁸⁹

He regularly posted videos that conveyed the resounding message of police brutality committed against black men. In his last video titled ‘Convos With Cosmo on Protesting, Oppression, and how to deal with Bullies’ with the subheading, ‘In Dallas Imparting wisdom about the current events and the proper action to take,’ he tirades about fighting back against bullies. He concluded the video with these parting words,

*You think it's wrong when you fight back, but you celebrate it when someone else fights back. But hey, salute to the rebels man, I'm out here, I'm in these streets, You look up, you get up and don't ever give up!*¹⁹⁰

This incident was the second mass shooting which targeted law enforcement officers, taking place only ten days apart. The first attack had been perpetrated by another veteran, Micah Johnson who was an Army reservist that shot five Dallas police officers during a peaceful protest concerning previous fatal police shootings.¹⁹¹ Long would later post a picture of Johnson on his Twitter account eight days before his own offensive with the caption, “The Shooter was NOT WHITE, He was one of us! # My religion is Justice.”¹⁹² Retrospectively, this can be interpreted as one of the many foreshadowing final communications posted by Long before his attacks, with his reference to justice within the context of a mass shooting. However, if understood within a pre-assault context, this statement could also be acknowledged as coming from an individual who was politically conscious, someone who was a member of several anti-government groups and identified as a ‘black separatist’.¹⁹³ Black separatism is a political movement grounded within the notion of racial solidarity that calls for black people to organize based on their mutual conversance with oppression.

¹⁸⁹ Sahagun and Kaleem, "A Study in Anger:" Los Angeles Times.

¹⁹⁰ Gavin Long, “Convos With Cosmo on Protesting, Oppression, and how to deal with Bullies,” Youtube video, duration 8:44, posted July 10, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4oTAoOpW48>.

¹⁹¹ Hegeman, "VA Records: Baton Rouge Gunman," The Advocate.

¹⁹² Gavin Long, Twitter post, July 8, 2016, 6:37 PM, <https://twitter.com/ConvosWithCosmo/status/751439976831684609>.

¹⁹³ Bill Gertz, "La. Cop Killer Renounced 'slave Name,' Joined Black Anti-government Group," The Washington Times, July 20, 2016, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jul/20/gavin-long-cop-killer-linked-to-separatists/>.

It is regarded as a subcategory of black nationalism which entails separate economic growth and the regaining of ‘cultural control’ for those of African descent in the population, specifically within the United States.¹⁹⁴

Long had three notable last communications; the aforementioned video posted on Youtube a week before the shootings, a cryptic Tweet which was posted less than an hour before his attack which stated, “Just [because] you wake up every morning doesn't mean that you're living. And just [because] you shed your physical body doesn't mean that you're dead.”¹⁹⁵ As well as a handwritten letter that can be perceived as his manifesto, which was emailed also within an hour of the incident, to Yarima Karama, an Ohio based rapper. The rapper asserts that he did not know the perpetrator personally but noted that Long had periodically posted comments on his Youtube videos. Two days after the incident, Karama read the letter in a Facebook live video, as well as on his Youtube channel.¹⁹⁶ He later forwarded the document to BuzzFeed news at their behest, thus Long’s manifesto received widespread online circulation, despite the shooter not posting it himself online. It can be assumed that Long had an inclination that his final communications would be distributed, as he had sent the documents to an individual who is highly active on social media. This manifesto will thus be the subject of analysis for this case as well as several of his Tweets.

4.4 Randy Robert Stair

From Dallas, Pennsylvania, Randy Robert Stair or as he referred to himself as Andrew Blaze, was known for his numerous social media accounts for which he had many followers. What is known about his background, ideology and motives is mostly detailed in the two journals he kept from 23 November 2016 through 5 June 2017. He had uploaded these journals along with ‘suicide tapes’, which are audio and video recordings that document the process of his premeditated planning for his attacks. This digital set was uploaded onto his blog as well as his main Twitter account, which in its entirety includes the final months of his life.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Raymond L. Hall, *Black Separatism in the United States* (Dartmouth College, 1978), 3.

¹⁹⁵ Gavin Long, Twitter post, July 17, 2016, 8:12 AM, <https://twitter.com/ConvosWithCosmo/status/754544382829731841>

¹⁹⁶ Ansari, "Gavin Long's Alleged Manifesto ," BuzzFeed News.

¹⁹⁷ Randy R. Stair, ""Please Read"," Mediafire (blog), June 8, 2017, accessed March 3, 2019, https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Stair_Please_Read.pdf

Stair lived a fairly atypical suburban life with his parents and younger brother. He had no history of mental illness or substance abuse. He was employed at the Weis Supermarket for seven years, during which he completed high school and later college. He described that he has had many wonderful memories in his last years despite experiencing severe bouts of depression. In his last letter, he thanks his various fans that he had accumulated over the years through his animation called ‘The Ember’s Ghost Squad’, which he had based the characters on the Nickelodeon cartoon ‘Danny Phantom’, but had disturbingly morphed the personas into school shooters. These episode shorts were posted onto his Youtube channel, but he had also created up to eight different Twitter handles for the characters of the show.¹⁹⁸

He conversed with fans online, but did not have an active social life outside of the internet. He stated in his journals that he hated trying to make friends and in high school had simply given up the attempts. By the time he enrolled in college, he claimed to ‘despise the human race’ and noted that 2016 and 2017 “have been full of almost nothing but hatred towards humans. I wanted to kill as many people as I could...”¹⁹⁹

His personal writings became increasingly sinister with each journal entry, where he glorifies the 1999 Columbine High School shooting frequently, and expresses an acute affinity for firearms where he describes his love of fire and shooting weapons.²⁰⁰ He notes on several occasions that he wanted to have been born female and that he is stuck inside a boy’s body, which he acknowledges as being transgender but does himself not completely agree with the term.²⁰¹ He also stated that he cares a lot about his looks and is never completely satisfied with how he presents himself, much akin to the fixation Elliot Rodger exhibited. In an entry dating from 17 February 2017 he states,

*I sit here alone on my bed full of emptiness. I’m wearing my girl clothes with my legs crossed. Why am I damned to spend two to three decades in this disgusting body?? I’m not a man. Sorry mom and dad, but I’m not sorry. I’m a fucking woman.*²⁰²

He further clarifies that he is not gay and is upset that his parents never noticed how he felt. He does not lend kind words for his family in his journals, rather he slanders his father and hopes he never

¹⁹⁸ Stair, ""Please Read", "

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Randy R. Stair, "Randy Stair’s Journal," Mediafire (blog), June 8, 2017, accessed March 3, 2019, 12, https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/stair_journal.pdf

²⁰¹ Ibid., 50.

²⁰² Ibid., 49.

recovers from the calamities Stair is about to inflict, and describes his mother as a ‘brainwashed human’.²⁰³

In regards to motives and ideology, Stair did not express any dogma he adhered to. He rather explained his deep desire of becoming famous for a ruthless act, much like the Columbine shooters’ postmortem notoriety. He described himself as a sexist towards men and a racist against African-American men, but does not provide any further details. Stair’s ideological underpinnings are thus quite enigmatic, he does state on several occasions in his journals that he wanted to be famous and emulate the Columbine shooting. “I’ve always desired to be famous, to make a name for myself and inspire others. Sometimes you gotta do evil deeds to be famous; it’s fate, nothing more, nothing less. Granted, shooting 2-3 coworkers in a store and taking your own life isn’t national newsworthy, it gets your name out there.”²⁰⁴ He decided on attacking his place of employment by a coin toss, in which he would either commit suicide at home or commit a mass shooting.²⁰⁵ He had planned his attacks months in advance and had an idea of who would be staffed during his shift. The victims did not matter to him, as he stated his goal was to ‘scare the world’ and damage the reputation of the supermarket. He executed his plan almost exactly as he had described it in his journals and committed suicide with the hopes that he could inspire further mass shootings with his actions.²⁰⁶ His attacks did not make national headlines, but most of his social media accounts are still active to this day. His appeals to principle and beliefs tend to be scattered within his writings. Ranging from a conflicted transgender identity to the glorification of past shooters. His online journal will thus be the subject of this case study.

4.5 Devin Patrick Kelley

An abnormal case study included within this thesis is that of Devin Patrick Kelley. Abnormal in the sense that the perpetrator did not leave behind any manifesto or clues that indicate a solid motive. His abhorrent actions have been subject to vast speculation as his crimes amounted to the fifth deadliest mass shooting in the United States.²⁰⁷ The perpetrator was active on Facebook, but as his

²⁰³ Stair, "Randy Stair's Journal," 163.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 85.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 198.

²⁰⁷ Saeed Ahmed, "2 of the 5 Deadliest Mass Shootings in Modern US History Happened in the Last 35 Days," CNN, November 06, 2017, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/05/health/deadliest-mass-shootings-in-modern-us-history-trnd/index.html>.

account has been deactivated, screenshots of his writings as well as his 'likes' on the social media platform will be the subject of analysis. The rationale behind the inclusion of this specific case is due to the subject's online media identity, which has been cited to have displayed 'alt-left' sentiments, contrasting other subjects within this research. Thus serving to broaden the scope of the perpetrators included in this study. It is albeit, quite speculative as no posting portrays obvious indicators that a mass shooting was about to take place. However, the subject had a violent history and was known to post raving rantings on Facebook, much of which falls in line with mass shooter characteristics.

The perpetrator was from Comal County which is situated northeast of San Antonio, Texas, but later relocated to a suburb of San Antonio. Whilst in high school, he received seven suspensions for a variety of reasons such as drug-related misconduct and insubordination. He was described by a former classmate as 'an outcast but not a loner' who was even considered popular among other outcasts.²⁰⁸ After high school, he enlisted in the U.S Air Force from 2009 until 2013, when he received a dishonorable discharge. He was subsequently court martialled due to bad conduct where he was sentenced to a year of confinement as a consequence of assaulting his first wife and stepson. This grave offence adds up to a long history of aggression, ranging from several misdemeanors concerning cruelty to animals to assault.²⁰⁹ He had escaped from Peak Behavioral Health Services mental health center in New Mexico, where he had attempted to make death threats against his military supervisors a mere five years before his attacks. He was also investigated for rape when he was 18-years-old, but was not charged despite ample evidence which was corroborated by his ex-wife, who also suffered long periods of abuse inflicted by Kelley.²¹⁰ All of these charges should have preventing him from purchasing and owning a firearm, but as the Air Force had not entered his criminal record into the National Criminal Information Center database, he managed to pass five

²⁰⁸ Eli Rosenberg, "Texas Gunman's Ex-wife Said He Once Put a Gun to Her Head and Asked, 'Do You Want to Die?'" The Washington Post, November 12, 2017, accessed April 28, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/12/texas-gunmans-ex-wife-said-he-once-put-a-gun-to-her-head-and-asked-do-you-want-to-die/?utm_term=.b680a1589ded.

²⁰⁹ Jessica McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts You Need To Know," Heavy.com, November 08, 2017, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://heavy.com/news/2017/11/devin-kelley-p-sutherland-springs-church-shooter-patrick-kelly/>.

²¹⁰ Emilie Eaton, "Comal County Authorities Didn't Charge Sutherland Springs Gunman with Rape, Even Though the Victim Described Brutal Attack," ExpressNews.com, February 17, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Sutherland-Springs-killer-accused-of-12620605.php>.

background checks in subsequent years, four pertaining to gun purchases and one relating to employment.²¹¹

Kelley was once more accused of abuse in 2014, against his girlfriend who later became his second wife. Deputies were called to their home, where the situation was logged as a misunderstanding. This however would later escalate into a ‘domestic situation’ between Kelley and his wife’s family, as he began sending his mother-in-law threatening text messages which has been cited as a precipitory event that would lead to the deadliest mass shooting in Texas.²¹² Kelley had ties to the church through his wife’s family, who frequented the church where the shooting took place. He had also briefly taught Bible school.²¹³ He himself was a self-proclaimed atheist, which is substantiated by the various pages dedicated to atheism he had liked on Facebook. His Facebook friends also noted that he would rant about atheism in such a way that prompted many to unfriend him on the platform. Jessika Edwards, a former fellow Air Force service member, accounted the discussions her and Kelley would have online, in which he conveyed admiration for Dylann Roof, the South Carolina mass shooter who is also a subject within this thesis. He would further express he wished he, “had the nerve to do it, but all he would be able to do is kill animals.”²¹⁴

With regards to his motivations, ideological underpinnings and why he has been labeled as “Alt-Left” or an extremist liberal, is mainly due to his likes on Facebook as well as what was listed as causes he ‘cares about’ on his LinkedIn profile which includes ideals such as; animal welfare, children, civil rights and social action, human rights, the environment and arts and culture.²¹⁵ However, in spite of various rumors circulating on social media that Kelley was affiliated with the Antifa movement (anti-fascism), or that he had perpetrated the attack on behalf of the far left group, those have all been unsubstantiated claims as there is no evidence that links him to them.²¹⁶ Thus, his motives remain somewhat uncertain, but the stated evidence suggests the domestic disturbance within the family is likely to have been a trigger.²¹⁷

²¹¹ Claudia Koerner, ""I'm Really Not Surprised This Happened": Texas Church Shooter Left Trail Of Warning Signs," BuzzFeed News, November 8, 2017, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/claudiakoerner/texas-gunmans-trail-of-violence-ended-in-deadly-church?fbclid=IwAR2j3siFRI6vKv9uTG3rp3sh0j-1V-f9QfYJyX0ZPMryruV1qMvMeOTl87A>.

²¹² McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts," Heavy.com.

²¹³ Koerner, ""I'm Really Not Surprised This Happened," BuzzFeed News.

²¹⁴ Rosenberg, "Texas Gunman's Ex-wife Said," The Washington Post.

²¹⁵ McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts," Heavy.com.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

4.6 Nikolas Jacob Cruz

Adopted at birth in South Florida, Nikolas Jacob Cruz lived a comfortable life with his parents and brother who shared the same birthmother, but was nonetheless plagued with troubles. His father passed when he was six-years-old, leaving his mother to care for her two boys on her own. According to the State Department of Children and Families, Cruz was diagnosed early on with developmental delays, autism, emotional behavioral disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and depression and was on medication. The combination of these series of disorders amounted to quite a strain in his upbringing, as he not only acted up at home but also had problems at school. He alternated between schools, attended programs for emotionally and behaviorally disabled children but to no avail. He had a difficult time making friends, was reportedly bullied at school and had developed a fascination for guns and death in his early teens. He also displayed certain racist attributes, such as covering his backpack with racial slurs and hate signs, which included a Nazi symbol and a derogatory expletive towards African-Americans.²¹⁸

During his time at Stoneman Douglas high school, he had posted on his Instagram page that he had the intention of shooting up the school, an incident that a neighbor's son reported to the Broward Sheriff's Office, who then notified a deputy assigned to the school. This would not be the final forewarning in relation to Cruz, as two other individuals had contacted the FBI, relaying Cruz's concerning behavior. Specifically referencing comments made by Cruz on Youtube in which he had written, "I'm going to be a professional school shooter," and the other expressing troubling pictures posted by him on Instagram. However, neither tip was acted upon. Several calls had also been made to the local police, with one caller describing Cruz's gun and knife collection and noting that the teen was a "school shooter in the making."²¹⁹

In January 2017, he abruptly discontinued his medical treatment and had assaulted a fellow student at Stoneman Douglas high school and was consequently expelled. His behavioral issues worsened, with his mother having had called the police over 23 times over 10 years, citing Cruz becoming physical and aggressive towards her and his brother. She had also told officers that Cruz had anger management problems and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Three days after his ejection

²¹⁸ Brittany Wallman et al., "A Lost and Lonely Killer," Sun Sentinel, February 24, 2018, accessed April 29, 2019, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-florida-school-shooting-nikolas-cruz-li-fe-20180220-story.html>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

from school, passing a background check, the perpetrator purchased an AR-15 firearm which he would eventually use in his attacks.²²⁰

In November 2017, Cruz's mother passed away which had a great impact on him. The two brothers then went on to live with a former neighbor, which was short lived as Cruz was kicked out soon after, as the family were forced to call the police during one of Cruz's outbursts. His gun collection made the family all the more nervous, as they stated that he had already accumulated eight firearms. Another family in Parkland took him in, as Cruz was amicable with the son. He followed the rules of the household and kept his guns locked up, they had also encouraged him to enlist in classes to finish his schooling and got him a job at the local dollar store.²²¹ However, the host family were not aware of Cruz's online activities, in which a darker side of his identity emerged. He was for example, active on a private group chat within Instagram, where he would tirade racist messages against the Jewish, African-Americans, Mexicans, gays and white women in interracial relationships, who much like Roof had expressed a disdain for in his own manifesto.²²² He also spoke of mutilating animals and wanting to kill people. He was however not affiliated with any extremist groups, despite right supremacist inclinations and writings.²²³

Damning cellphone footage recorded by Cruz were made public by the Broward State Attorney's Office. These three videos, detail premeditated plans of the mass shooting, authorities have however not revealed when the recordings were created.²²⁴ His motives were vague, despite all the footage and instagram postings that glorified violence. An excerpt from one of these videos provides an inclination to his motives, which seem to point to fame-seeking. Exhibiting what Lankford describes as the 'three hallmarks' of school shooters which includes, "suicidal ideation, perceived victimization and a desire for attention or fame."²²⁵

*"Today is the day. The day that it all begins. The day of my massacre shall begin, all the kids in school will run in fear and hide. From the wrath of my power they will know who I am."*²²⁶

²²⁰ Brittany Wallman et al., "A Lost and Lonely Killer," Sun Sentinel.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Roof, "The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,"

²²³ Paul P. Murphy, "Exclusive: Group Chat Messages Show School Shooter Obsessed with Race, Violence and Guns," CNN, February 18, 2018, accessed April 09, 2019, https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2018/02/16/us/exclusive-school-shooter-instagram-group/index.html?_twitter_impression=true.

²²⁴ David Ovalle and Nicholas Nehamas, "'You're All Going to Die.' Nikolas Cruz Made Cellphone Videos Plotting Parkland Attack.," Miamiherald, May 31, 2018, accessed April 29, 2019, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/broward/article212199899.html>.

²²⁵ Olmeda, "Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz Brags," Sun Sentinel.

²²⁶ Ibid.

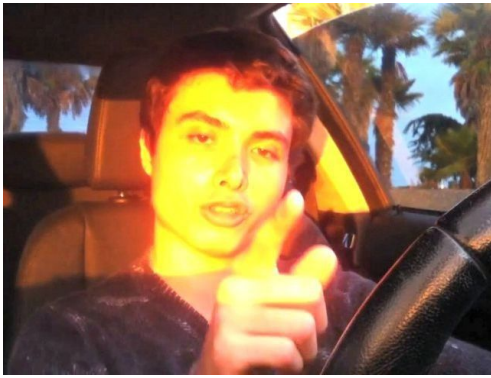
5. Analysis

This chapter focuses on the final two sub-questions; What dominant framing strategies do these mass shooters engage in? Do these shooters present similar framing strategies despite differing motives? Each predefined frame listed within the theoretical framework will be associated with each of the six case studies with a subsequent examination of what dominant framing patterns are most observable, guided by the aforementioned operationalization questions and finally analyzed through Gamson's eight signature elements.

The images provided below are of the perpetrators featured within this study, all of which had been posted as a final image or retrieved as a still from a final video. Excluding the image of Nikolas Cruz, which was the fifth recent image posted onto his personal Instagram account. His newer pictures did not reveal his face. Each picture and screenshot were originally posted onto each perpetrators' respective social media accounts, with Dylann Roof's photo having been posted on his personal website along with his manifesto. Most of the images are from secondary sources as the perpetrators' profiles have since been terminated, excluding the Youtube profiles of Elliot Rodger and Gavin Long. As can be observed, three of the six offenders are pictured with a firearm. Their visual communicators can be associated with the fantasy frame, threat frame and fame-seeking frame. However, in order to identify whether these frames are salient within their actual textual narrations and whether the perpetrators present similar framing strategies, an in depth analysis is needed and will now be presented.

Table 1. Summary of the Selected Self-Narrations and Perpetrators

Perpetrator	Communication Type	Social Media Activity	Status
Elliot Rodger	Last Youtube video posted, mediated manifesto transcribed	Primarily active on Youtube	Deceased
Dylann Roof	Manifesto posted on personal website	Active on Facebook and operated his own website	Incarcerated
Gavin Long	Last letter forwarded, tweets	Active across several platforms namely; Twitter and Youtube	Deceased
Randy Stair	Online journals (2)	Highly active on Twitter in which the perp oversaw nine separate accounts. Active on Youtube.	Deceased
Devin P. Kelley	Likes and images posted on Facebook	Two social media accounts were discovered; Facebook and LinkedIn	Deceased
Nikolas Cruz	Footage from personal cellphone, images posted on Instagram and Youtube comments.	Active on Instagram and Youtube.	Incarcerated



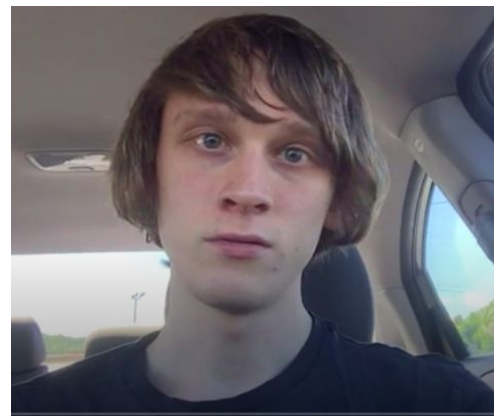
Elliot Rodger - fig. 1²²⁷



Dylann Roof - fig. 2²²⁸



Gavin Long - fig. 3²²⁹

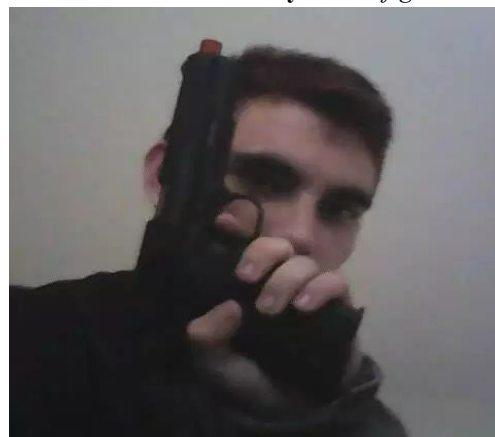


Randy Stair - fig. 4²³⁰



Devin Kelley

Devin P. Kelley - fig. 5²³¹



Nikolas Cruz - fig. 6²³²

²²⁷ Wall Street Journal, "Elliot Rodger: His Biographical Manifesto," Youtube video, duration 5:18, posted May 26, 2014, <https://youtu.be/hJbnEJGj2yg>.

²²⁸ Robles, "Dylann Roof Photos and a Manifesto," The New York Times.

²²⁹ Long, "Convos With Cosmo on Protesting,," Youtube video.

²³⁰ Randy Stair, "Goodbye Earth (Final Video)," Mediafire video, duration 1:21:37, posted June 3, 2017, [https://archive.org/details/EGSPioneersProductionsDigitalSet/%5BAndrew+Blaze+Suicide+Tapes%23Video+Versions%5D13+Goodbye+Earth+\(Final+Video\)+-+June+03%2C+2017.m4v#](https://archive.org/details/EGSPioneersProductionsDigitalSet/%5BAndrew+Blaze+Suicide+Tapes%23Video+Versions%5D13+Goodbye+Earth+(Final+Video)+-+June+03%2C+2017.m4v#)

²³¹ McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts," Heavy.com.

²³² Jessica McBride, "Nikolas Cruz's Instagram Profile Contains Trump MAGA Hat," Heavy.com, February 17, 2018, accessed April 09, 2019.

<https://heavy.com/news/2018/02/nikolas-cruz-maga-nikolaus-trump-politics-democrat-rpublican/>.

5.1 Fantasy Frame

The fantasy frame is both salient and dominant in the case of Elliot Rodger. His use of fantasy as a reparation tool for the handling of genuine failure, rejection, frustrations and humiliation that surface as crucial predisposing perpetrator traits, are especially evident in his self-narration in his Youtube video.²³³ “You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime.”²³⁴

In his last letter, Gavin Long also expressed his own ideals of injustice within a fantasy phrasing that depicted his own frustrations, “Therefore I must bring the same destruction that bad cops continue to inflict upon my people.”²³⁵ Both excerpts include depictions of punishment as stated consequences, albeit with accusations against differential causal agents with the former accusing women as the roots of frustration and ‘bad’ cops as the latter provocateur.

The traits depicted within the frame, specifically within the warrior mentality, includes a fascination with weapons, the lack of alcohol use during the attack, the target selection, the predatory nature of the assault and absence of direct threats.²³⁶ Traits that are vastly evident in Randy Stair’s online journals in which a preoccupation with firearms, chosen targets and predatorial attributes are narrated; “I want a sawn off shotgun so bad..” He further stated, “[I] was full of fantasies of storming into a supermarket (where I work) and shooting everybody.”²³⁷ This predatory overtone was also communicated by Rodger; “Well now I will be a god compared to you. You will all be animals. You are animals and I will slaughter you like animals. And I will be a god.”²³⁸ A clear target selection is also observed within Rodger’s content but there is a strong presence of direct threats rather than an absence of such.

Traits found within the pseudocommando typology, describe a mass murderer who has premeditated plans, is prepared with various weapons and has no intention of escaping but rather expects to be killed during the assault. The pseudocommando is motivated by intense emotions such

²³³ J Reid Meloy et al., “A Comparative Analysis,” 297.

²³⁴ CNN Staff, "Transcript of Video Linked to Santa Barbara Mass Shooting," CNN, May 28, 2014, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/24/us/elliott-rodger-video-transcript/index.html>.

²³⁵ Talal Ansari, "Gavin Long's Alleged Manifesto Calls Baton Rouge Shootings A "Necessary Evil", " BuzzFeed News, July 20, 2016, accessed April 09, 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/talalansari/gavin-longs-alleged-manifesto>.

²³⁶ J Reid Meloy et al., “A Comparative Analysis,” 298.

²³⁷ Randy R. Stair, "Randy Stair’s Journal," Mediafire (blog), June 8, 2017, accessed March 3, 2019, 78, https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/stair_journal.pdf

²³⁸ CNN Staff, "Transcript of Video," CNN.

as resentment and anger that stem from views about feeling oppressed or immensely maltreated. Harboring the belief that the committed attacks are a form of personal payback.²³⁹ Much akin to what is echoed within Roof's manifesto, "We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me."²⁴⁰ This reflects the pseudocommando traits of resentment sentiments, committing an attack as a form of personal vendetta. This outlook is comparable to that of Nikolas Cruz, when he disclosed his motivations on video, "All the kids in school will run in fear and hide. From the wrath of my power they will know who I am." He later states, "I hope to see you in the afterlife."²⁴¹ An indication is provided that the subject has no intention of surviving his own attacks, as he mentions the afterlife, he is motivated by resentment and anger much like described in within the pseudocommando classifications.

Gamson's framing devices are observable in these communications found within the fantasy frame, as metaphors, depictions, roots and consequences were prominent throughout each example. However, in the examples that were accounted, the use of catchphrases were not discerned, nor exemplars or appeals to principle. Accusations against specific authorities all varied across the provided excerpts but the stated consequences all related to an indication of violence. All aforementioned quotes bore the commonality of being sinister in nature and presented the characteristics of the warrior mentality as well as of the pseudocommando concept. Even a quote that Devin Kelley had cited as his favorite on Facebook, authored by Mark Twain, bears characteristics of the fantasy frame as it may be considered as a sort of foreshadowing, "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."²⁴² Kelly did not survive his attack, and exhibited some of the more drastic personality traits associated with the fantasy frame, namely; having served in the military, had an extensive history of violence and a captivation with firearms and war regalia.²⁴³ He not only posted an image of an assault rifle to his Facebook wall, but also included the same picture

²³⁹ Knoll, "The 'Pseudocommando' Mass Murderer: Part I," 87.

²⁴⁰ Dylann Roof, "The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,"

²⁴¹ Olmeda, "Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz Brags," Sun Sentinel.

²⁴² McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts," Heavy.com.

²⁴³ J. Reid Meloy et al., "A Comparative Analysis," 298.

as his Facebook cover photo, with the caption “She’s a bad bitch.” (See figure 7, below).



fig. 7²⁴⁴

5.2 Threat Frame

Randy Stair once remarked in his journal, “I gotta watch though, don’t want to post too many threats;”²⁴⁵ citing the possibility that someone might find out about his plans for a mass shooting. His diary is nonetheless filled with threatening statements, notably numerous direct and indirect threats. All communications featured within this study harbored threatening language, that can be categorized by O’Toole’s threat typology; direct, indirect, veiled, or conditional threats. What is interesting to note within all narratives is that the motivators behind each threat are vastly dissimilar. Some may be veiled threats that clearly imply violence solely by alluding to a threat and a rare few are conditional threats where a demand is put forth. Such a threat was only observed in two of the case studies;

*For the sake of preventing future loss of life rather it be from the hand of bad cops upon melanated people, or from the hand of the people upon good cops, I do not ask but order (With & By the power of the people behind me) for all bad cops to be punished swiftly, completely, & unhesitatingly; & for all unethical police practices & procedure’s [sic] to cease immediately.*²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ McBride, "Devin Kelley: 5 Fast Facts," Heavy.com.

²⁴⁵ Stair, "Randy Stair’s Journal," 13.

²⁴⁶ Ansari, "Gavin Long's Alleged Manifesto ," BuzzFeed News.

Gavin Long demands the punishment of ‘bad’ cops and the cease of ‘unethical police practices’, to prevent ‘future loss of life’, which can be understood as both a conditional,- and a veiled threat. He can be viewed as the one who wields force upon good cops, but it was not yet known that he would commit an attack against innocent officers. The second feasible conditional threat is found within Dylann Roof’s manifesto where he stated, “Who is fighting for these White people forced by economic circumstances to live among negroes? No one, but someone has to.”²⁴⁷ It is almost as if he is demanding that someone ‘fight’ on behalf of white people and if those demands are not met, he insinuates that he will take matters into his own hands. The use of an expletive alludes to a threat within this statement, which consequently implies violence if terms are not complied with.

The three remaining threat categories are more pronounced within all narratives, such as direct threats which are self-evident and identify a specific act against a set target. As perceived with Rodger’s proclamation, “I’m going to enter the hottest sorority house of UCSB. And I will slaughter every spoiled, stuck-up, blond slut I see inside there.”²⁴⁸ And Roof’s “I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state,”²⁴⁹ With Cruz’s chilling specificity, “My goal is at least 20 people with an AR-15. Location is Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, Florida.”²⁵⁰ Even Stair’s unsubtle, “Someone in that store’s gotta die with me.”²⁵¹ As is noted, the perpetrators not only exhibit fervent threats but also illustrate the acts to have been immensely premeditated.

However, not all perpetrators were as forthcoming with their threats. Indirect threats are often ambiguous with an insinuation of violence through oblique communications. In Gavin Long’s last letter, violence was implied with cryptic phrasing, “Therefore I must bring the same destruction that bad cops continue to inflict upon my people.”²⁵² Perhaps even more obscure is the image posted by Devin Kelley (see figure 7), in which the demonstration of possessing such a high grade assault weapon and captioning the picture with the phrase “she’s a bad bitch”, may be perceived as an indirect threat owing to the nonchalant and obscure manner in which the image was posted.

Lastly, a veiled threat suggests violence without unequivocally stating a direct threat, leaving potential victims to interpret the meaning of the message. Interestingly, Stair mentions his

²⁴⁷ Dylann Roof, “The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,”

²⁴⁸ CNN Staff, "Transcript of Video," CNN.

²⁴⁹ Dylann Roof, “The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,”

²⁵⁰ Olmeda, "Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz Brags," Sun Sentinel.

²⁵¹ Stair, "Randy Stair's Journal," 199.

²⁵² Ansari, "Gavin Long's Alleged Manifesto ," BuzzFeed News.

mother's involvement, "ohhh mother..if only you realized you just signed my death warrant by taking me to that gun shop."²⁵³ In conjunction with his other writings, it is now understood that Stair was not only referring to the demise of himself, but others as well. Another veiled statement, which can be perceived as threatening in nature is Long's concluding remark, "A sacrifice for my people, & a sacrifice for the people."²⁵⁴ At this point, the 'sacrifice' would not be acknowledged as the murdering of police officers, thus veiled. A perplexing image was posted onto Cruz's Instagram page that depicts a bullseye riddled with bullet holes which included the phrase, "Group therapy, sometimes it works." However, Cruz had caption the image as, "It really does f*cking work give it a try (winking emoji)."²⁵⁵ On this same account, he had written the word "annihilator" and had added "makarov" to his username, which is a Russian semi-automatic pistol.²⁵⁶ Both may be perceived as threatening references.



fig.9²⁵⁷

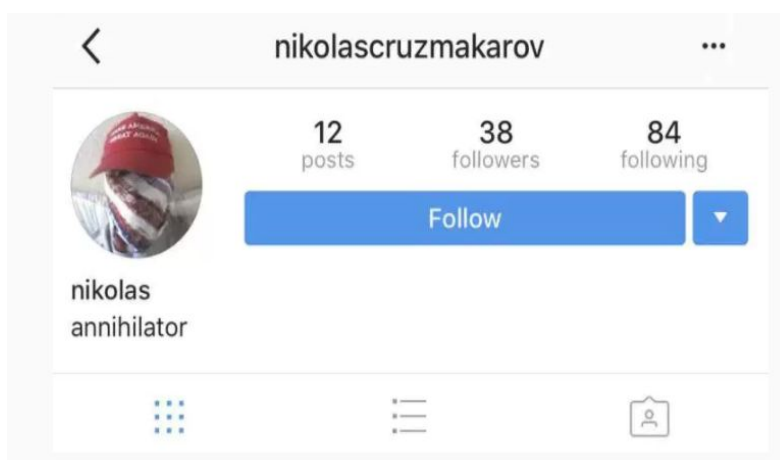


fig.10²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Stair, "Randy Stair's Journal," 165.

²⁵⁴ Ansari, "Gavin Long's Alleged Manifesto ," BuzzFeed News.

²⁵⁵ Jessica McBride, "Nikolas Cruz's Social Media Posts About Guns On Instagram," Heavy.com, February 15, 2018, accessed April 09, 2019,

<https://heavy.com/news/2018/02/nikolas-cruz-florida-instagram-nicolas-nicholas-social-media/>.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

These writings are saturated with threatening language with an intent to do harm, portraying that indeed, not all threats created equal. However, as these statements have demonstrated, these threats have nonetheless resulted in the same actions and outcomes.

5.3 Othering Frame

In all six cases, there are several characteristics that are associated with the *othering* frame. Thus a frame correspondence is present but is solely visible in a competing sense as the *other* does not carry the same representational significance for all perpetrators. Terminology employed within all communications indicate these differentiations, such as within Rodger's text, "I will have my revenge against humanity, against all of you... All those girls I've desired so much, they would have all rejected me and looked down upon me as an inferior man."²⁵⁹ Rodger positions his self against the other, the other being all of humanity and especially women that have rejected him. He projects his understanding of how others may view him as inferior in relation to others. He continued with, "You will finally see that I am in truth the superior one. The true alpha male."²⁶⁰ His text places him as superior to the lesser image of himself viewed by the others, his self creates a clear construction of himself versus everyone else, as an alpha. A variation of otherness can be seen in the other texts, as Stair and Long for example, include multiple selves in their narration.

Stair expresses an othering comparable to Rodger when he stated, "By the end of college I despised the human race... [I am] full of almost nothing but hatred towards humans. I wanted to kill as many people as I could."²⁶¹ Again, an expressed hatred towards humanity as a whole, however an insinuation that the human race is an other by adding 'the' in front of 'human race', as to allude that he himself was not a part of the whole as he continued, "All my life I never seemed to fit in anywhere."²⁶² In his writings, he does refer to his "fans" in a sympathetic fashion as if they were an extension of himself and thus do not adhere to a vilified other. "To the fans that have stuck by my side through the hard times, thank you.. To all of the fans who have believed in me...thank you".²⁶³

²⁵⁹ CNN Staff, "Transcript of Video," CNN.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Stair, ""Please Read", "

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

Gavin Long echos othering within his criticism and labeling of ‘bad’ police officers, “Therefore I must bring the same destruction that bad cops continue to inflict upon my people.”²⁶⁴ However, Long expresses a distinction between bad cops, good cops and “my people”, meaning people of African American decent. His use of war as a metaphor exemplifies his othering, “Right now their [sic] is a unseen & concealed war within America’s police force between Good cops & Bad cops.”²⁶⁵ Long’s use of othering can thus be perceived as his self, his race and who he deems as good police officers are pit against what he considers to be ‘bad’ officers of the law. Multiple selves against the other, with police associated with unfavorable characteristics such as “bad”.

Roof also uses race in his perception of otherness, although with a great deal of hostility. His manifesto is filled with expletive and derogatory statements regarding minorities, predominantly aimed at those of African-American decent. “As an American we are taught to accept living in the melting pot, and black and other minorities have just as much right to be here as we do, since we are all immigrants.”²⁶⁶ This statement is quite modest compared to the rest of his writings, but it sufficiently describes his sentiments pertaining to others. He recognizes that the United States represents a union of otherness, with almost every citizen being a descendant of immigrants or immigrants themselves. He however, disagrees with the teachings of the metaphorical melting pot and regardless denotes minorities as the other. He mentions other ethnic groups such as; the Jewish, Hispanics, East Asians but deems black people to be the preponderance of negative identities.²⁶⁷ He concluded his manifesto by stating he no longer had a choice and had specified that he would target Charleston, further proclaiming that someone had to have the bravery to presumably commit an assault, and that someone would be him. Consequently positing himself as a sort of martyr in his fantasized race war. His othering can thus be perceived as delineated against anyone who is not white whereas he even notes that there are “good hispanics and bad hispanics” but there are nonetheless “still our enemies”.²⁶⁸ However an intense emphasis is placed specifically upon African-Americans.

It can be gathered that Cruz, much akin to both Roof and Long, has an element of race as the other within his narratives. However, he not only attributes negative others through race but he also

²⁶⁴ Ansari, "Gavin Long's Alleged Manifesto ," BuzzFeed News.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Roof, “The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,”

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

casts himself as a victim and expresses a sort of misfit-self. "I am nothing, I am no one, my life is nothing and meaningless... I live a lone life, I live in seclusion and solitude."²⁶⁹

There is not a strong presence of othering within Kelley's communications, except that his otherness leans more towards an established identity that strongly relates to atheism, consequently positioning religion as the other. Combing through what is still publicly available material retrieved from his Facebook likes and groups, no anti-religious sentiment was discernible, but rather those motives were provided by accounts that later given by those who knew him. So it cannot be explicitly stated that he viewed the religious sect and anything pertaining to such as a distinct other.

5.4 Fame-Seeking Frame

Fame-seeking may bear different values for each perpetrator, as Long notes he demanded change within the judicial system whilst Rodger had a fear of rejection and inferiority, rectified with infamy, but Stair was in want of recognition. This makes the fame-seeking frame both symbolic and significant, as much can be observed and understood through the various lenses found within this frame. Fame-seeking can stem from numerous facets, whether it originates from a perceived victimization in which fame through violence is compensatory for maltreatment or underappreciation, or even for the need of generativity. All perpetrators, excluding Kelley had left behind 'legacy tokens'. Cruz had recorded personal videos on his cellphone, Rodger and Stair ceded the more extensive tokens which included both videos and accompanying manifestos, whilst Roof and Long left behind a manifesto and a last letter.

Two perpetrators Roof and Long, committed to fame-seeking through a political or ideological statement, both pertaining to race. Whilst Cruz, Stair and Kelley (who alluded to the fact) set out for fame-seeking by the attempt of making their attacks as deadly as possible. As seen with Stair's statement, "I wouldn't mind shooting up the store but I wish there'd be more people to kill."²⁷⁰ Stair further states, "I know my memory will live on.. it has to.. I hate the thought of being forgotten."²⁷¹ As Serazio had argued, an alienated individual may overcome his social standing through visually mediated fame, much akin to Cruz's ambitions. "Everyday I see the world ending another day. I hate everyone and everything...With the power of my AR-15 you will all know who

²⁶⁹ Ovalle and Nehamas, "'You're All Going to Die.' Nikolas Cruz.,"

²⁷⁰ Stair, "Randy Stair's Journal," 79.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 130.

I am.”²⁷² This falls in line with the assumption that younger mass shooting offenders tend to maintain fame as a prime motivator for such attacks.

Another dimension of fame-seeking pertains to the matter of generativity, or the ability to affect successive generations by way of inciting other shootings. It can be viewed in three of the six case studies. With Rodger’s posterboy status for the involuntary celibate movement (incel) and Cruz’s own generativity desires stemming from a past school mass shooting. However, most prominently the concept of generativity is found within Stair’s narrative. Where he expresses the desire of inciting further mass shooting incidents and even mentions wanting to incite mass suicides. “I’ll be the tale of Luzerne county and then a story nationwide. Screw fame, gimme infamy!...The shooting is just the beginning.. Over time suicide rates will rise and you’ll partly have me to thank for that.”²⁷³

A final dimension of fame-seeking is the notion of leaving no communication behind, leaving everyone else in a continuous state of shock and bewilderment. Devin Kelley had left no trace of a motive before he committed his horrifying assaults, therefore preserving his name and notoriety grounded in the sort of infamy that transcends mortality.

5.5 Simultaneous Use of All Frames

There were few instances in which all four frames were utilized simultaneously within a sentence, perceived within all but one case study. Elliot Rodger’s, “You will all be animals. You are animals and I will slaughter you like animals. And I will be a god”,²⁷⁴ in which he designates others as animals, uses threatening language and states he will be a god after his retribution is enacted which alludes to fame-seeking, and the aforementioned shroud of predatory overtones consistent with the fantasy frame. Whilst Randy Stair rather insinuates a threat with his statement, “I’ll haunt your dreams if you drift away from me.”²⁷⁵ Stair established an other by threatening to haunt *you*, if drifted away from him. He wants to be known and have his memory kept alive after his death, which both exemplifies fame-seeking as well as the fantasy frame on account of alluding to not surviving his offensive. Gavin Long was more cryptic in his writings in regards to categorization, as his terminology is not as explicit as demonstrated by the other perpetrators. “Violence is not THE

²⁷² Olmeda, "Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz Brags," Sun Sentinel.

²⁷³ Stair, "Randy Stair's Journal," 204.

²⁷⁴ CNN Staff, "Transcript of Video," CNN.

²⁷⁵ Stair, "Randy Stair's Journal," 236.

answer (its a answer [sic]), but at what point do you stand up so that your people dont [sic] become the Native Americans...EXTINCT?"²⁷⁶ The insinuation of a threat is made with the mentioning of violence as an answer, along with the othering of *you* and *your people* suggesting his own feelings of persecution which subsequently transforms into the action of carrying out a personal vendetta, as is implied within this tweet which he posted four days before his assault. This is in line with the fantasy frame, as it seems to reflect his personal agenda to answer violence with violence for his experiences of maltreatment. As Dr. Lankford concluded in his study of fame-seeking, any perpetrator that communicates a message concerning either a political or an ideological message, should be considered a fame-seeker. Long's politics and beliefs that African-Americans suffer at the behest of law enforcement, is thus well suited within this frame.

Contrasting Long's views of a systematic oppression of black people, is Roof's own racial input, albeit he assumes a more aggressive and hateful stance; "Who is fighting for these White people forced by economic circumstances to live among negroes? No one, but someone has to."²⁷⁷ Again, all four frames are identified within this sentence. The otherness of race is put forth with the use of a derogatory term in the context of a veiled threat, expressing that "someone" has to take action in response to this victimization. Just as with Long's sentiments of oppression, Roof in fact mirrors this same attitude with his own beliefs that he and his race are the ones that are persecuted, which corresponds with the pseudocommando traits within the fantasy frame. Fame-seeking is not only present with the de-facto legacy token, but also with Roof's longing for fame through his perceived victimization.

Fame-seeking was also a dominant theme in Cruz's Youtube comments, in which he made three remarks on a video about the University of Texas tower shooting, stating he would mimic this first mass school shooting (see figure 8, below);

²⁷⁶ Gavin Long, Twitter post, July 13, 2016, 4:54 PM, <https://twitter.com/ConvosWithCosmo/status/753226170829770752>.

²⁷⁷ Roof, "The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,"



YouTube *fig. 8*²⁷⁸

The fame-seeking is apparent, as Cruz made his commentary three months apart, almost as he wanted to be noticed and accredited for these statements. The othering is noted with his mention of ‘Antifa’, the anti-fascist left wing group that was previously mentioned in relation to Devin Kelley. Cruz sets himself up against the group, in what seems like an ideological stance. However, Cruz’s sense of othering is chaotic and unsystematic as was demonstrated in the othering chapter. But it can nonetheless be perceived as such. The threatening nature of these comments are unmistakable, with a trace of the adolescent fantasy frame in his citing of wanting to ‘kill as many as I can’. This victimization strategy thus relates to both a fame- and fantasy-seeking desire, as was described within both terminologies which detail young mass shooters’ intent for the highest kill count as possible.

5.6 Summary

The presence of othering dominated all texts, followed by the fantasy frame, then the threat frame and lastly the fame-seeking frame. In accordance with Gamson’s framing devices, several corresponding exemplars were noted in which historical examples from which lessons were conjured, were found within the narratives of Roof; in which he chronicles the history of slavery

²⁷⁸ John Elliott, "Alleged Shooter Nikolas Cruz Threatened Mass Campus Shooting 9 Months Ago," Waco FM, February 15, 2018, accessed April 02, 2019, <https://waco100.iheart.com/featured/john-elliott/content/2018-02-15-alleged-shooter-nikolas-cruz-threatened-mass-campus-shooting-9-months-ago/>.

against African-Americans but deems the history to be “all based on historical lies, exaggerations and myths.”²⁷⁹ Whereas Long takes an opposing stance and references antecedents of police brutality against African-Americans. Stair’s examples indulge in the reminiscence of the Columbine mass shooting, whilst Cruz parallels with the desire to emulate the first school shooting occurring in the United States. Several catchphrases were noted within the narrative, however no perpetrator used the same phrasing as another. Visual images were noted in all cases, whether it was presented in the form of a video recording or images posted as a last communication. Most case studies depicted what Gamson conceived as ‘roots’ or perceived causal agents, in which all but Kelley explicitly implicated an incited target. The stated consequence of each narrative came across as fairly consistent throughout all narratives, with similar adjectives used to describe the perceived outcomes of each attack such as Rodger’s ‘utter annihilation’ and Long’s ‘destruction’. The sole case that had any resemblance of an appeal to principle or a moral code, was Gavin Long as his communications portray the devout belief that a systematic oppression could be rectified with violence.

The two sub-questions pertaining to this chapter are answered; “*what dominant framing strategies do these mass shooters engage in?*” And “*do these shooters present similar framing strategies despite differing motives?*” The predefined frames were all present in these narrations with varying emphasis, in line with the stated expectation of the analysis that dominant frames are present. However, there was an expectation of noting a higher instance of both threat framing and fame-seeking which was not the case. The dominating frame was that of othering, which was salient in all narrations and a frame correspondence was expressed. Threat frames were expected to dominant each narrative due to the nature of the texts, and fame-seeking fell short which was unexpected. These categories are broad and somewhat telling, but there are sure to be several other categories that can be noted and explored but cannot be accounted in depth in this thesis without additional research methods.

²⁷⁹ Roof, “The Last Rhodesian Manifesto,”

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the mediatized self-narration and self-portrayals within online communications of mass shooting perpetrators. At the time of writing, there had not been a comparative frame analysis study done with six varying perpetrators that explicitly served to explore whether commonalities were to be found within such discourses. This relates greatly to the current research of mass shooters as it may serve to broaden and deepen the avenues of future studies. Accompanying the main research question were several sub-questions, which will be briefly reflected upon.

The first sub-question was presented within the theoretical framework, “*What does self-narration entail in the age of social media?*”. This question sought to exemplify the diverse manner in which individual identities are expressed through online self-narration, and how the self can be expressed through a prism of identity layers. It was further noted that there are limitations to be found in the examination of self-narration in the age of social media, as it cannot be irrefutably stated that an exact representation of a person can be fully observed online as identities are reflexive. Thus with this discernment, this study acknowledges that one’s identity does not necessarily reflect one’s online identity and subsequent narration, but it is nonetheless of an importance to dissect such mediatized communications in hopes of gaining a further understanding of the mass shooter phenomenon.

Chapter five which was devoted to the analysis of this study, explored the last two sub-questions. The second sub-question examined, “*What dominant framing strategies do these mass shooters engage in?*” The dominant frames selected for this study were the fantasy, threat, othering and fame-seeking frames. These predefined frames were a part of a nonexhaustive list chosen by the author, which inevitably may have neglected other frames perceivable within each case study. The frames were nevertheless recognized as those that were the most pronounced within each narration. Some frames were more dominant than others, such as the fantasy,- and othering frames, whilst it was presupposed that both the threat frame and fame-seeking frame would be more salient.

The third and final sub-question, “*Do these shooters present similar framing strategies despite differing motives?*”, was answered with the implementation of Gamson’s eight signature elements that signaled the presence of the frames and provided an indication on how to perceive the issues at hand, with reasoning devices that validated what should be done with the framing devices. The perpetrators in this study did present similar framing strategies as all dominant frames were observable across all case studies. However, there is yet another limitation in the research, as provided justifications presented within each narrative do not necessarily reflect definite motives. Notwithstanding motives, the perpetrators do present similar framing strategies, often displaying comparable imagery and corresponding phrasing. Leading us to the main research question of, “*To what extent are there consistent frames to be found within divergent mass shooters’ self-portrayals and self-narration online prior to their attacks, despite contrasting ideological profiles and motivations?*”. Each selected frame was accounted in all narrations, albeit with varying emphasis and implementation. There are consistent frames to be found despite differing motives and ideological backgrounds of each perpetrator, which is a significant finding as it may serve to further the understanding of the fairly recent facets of self-narration within the online domain. With the acknowledgement that mass shooters seem to present similar framing strategies, it may be of beneficial value to the literature to be able to discern such commonalities. As such research avenues may lead to further explorations into the development of additional countermeasures that aim to curtail and stunt the increase of future mass shooting incidents.

6.1 Policy Recommendations

As has been presented, mass shootings are acute tragedies that are both complex and distressing. With various approaches aiming to curtail these attacks on the rise, mass shootings nevertheless remain prevalent. Notable campaigns such as ‘No Notoriety’ and ‘Don’t Name Them’, have been utilized and proposed in the hopes of stemming future attacks, with a focus set upon the media’s coverage of mass shooting events.²⁸⁰ This links to the media contagion effect, in which these campaigns encourage the media not to name the perpetrators following attacks, but rather concentrate the narrative on the victims, thus stripping the perpetrators of their fame-seeking incentives. This can currently be seen in a variety of recent cases, such as the June 1st 2019 Virginia

²⁸⁰ Johnston & Joy 2016; Schildkraut & Elass 2016 and Lankford 2016.

Shooting, in which authorities declined to name the perpetrator more than once and later referred to him as “that 13th person”.²⁸¹ Another notable example is of the aforementioned Christchurch mosque mass shooting, where New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern remarked in Parliament, “He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist. But he will, when I speak, be nameless...And to others, I implore you: speak the names of those who were lost rather than the name of the man who took them. He may have sought notoriety but we, in New Zealand, will give nothing – not even his name.”²⁸² However, what also needs to be taken into account is the social media side of these matters. As previously mentioned, the self-governance of social media platforms along with outdated existing regulatory frameworks may incite their own media contagion effects. There is an urgency in stifling the spread of mediatized self-narrations by mass shooters in the online domain, as such mediums may incite copycats and self-radicalization amongst those who are susceptible to such messages, much like Dylann Roof was cited to have been. Thus what is proposed following this study presented within this thesis is a multi-agency deplatforming and distribution deterrence, that may contribute to the reduction of the copycat-effect.

Deplatforming renders online profiles on social media platforms of perpetrators or inciters of aggression void, thus deterring their distribution of self-narratives. Dimensions of such include; limiting hate speech and unwanted deviations of what is considered morally acceptable. Indicators of which are the annulling of these profiles and blocking these individuals from further content distributions.²⁸³ Distribution deterrence may be measurable by interrupting the effects of mainstreaming. Measurable in this research by limiting the instances of mass shootings by generating fewer copycat incidents. These dimensions consist of setting bounds on what is allowed, discouragement and self-regulations in online communities.²⁸⁴ Deplatforming accompanies platform accountability, which is a review of how social media platforms may respond to perpetrators using their mediums to issue their own narratives. By owning these platforms, social media companies are

²⁸¹ Alan Blinder, Glenn Thrush, and Sandra E. Garcia, "Virginia Beach Shooting: A City Grieves Its Workers a Day After Horror," *The New York Times*, June 01, 2019, accessed June 01, 2019, <https://nyti.ms/2WGRqeO>

²⁸² Calla Wahlquist, "Ardern Says She Will Never Speak Name of Christchurch Suspect," *The Guardian*, March 19, 2019, accessed May 07, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/19/new-zealand-shooting-ardern-says-she-will-never-speak-suspects-name>.

²⁸³ Jason Koebler, "Social Media Bans Actually Work," *Motherboard*, August 10, 2018, accessed November 14, 2018, https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/bjbp9d/do-social-media-bans-work.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

accountable for banning hate speech and aggravational material presented on their sites. Without infringing on the freedom of speech, social media platforms may remove content that violates their guidelines.²⁸⁵ Accountability is an abstract concept, especially in the online domain, as it is difficult to attribute actions of individuals using these services. This incorporates the acknowledgement of accountability, trust, legitimacy and safety. Indicators of successful accountability would be action that is taken to ensure safe spaces online. However, there is certainly a limitation within these recommendations, as deplatforming cannot and does not address the causes and conditional factors that incite a mass shooting. There is also the fact that traditional media sources pick up on the unfolding incidents and report on the narrations they can obtain. Therefore, campaigns that aim to encourage the media in not naming perpetrators, in cohorts with deplatforming by social media companies, the two can possibly disrupt the furtherance of mass shootings incidents that stem from copycat instances. Countermeasures are needed, but the freedom of speech should also be protected, thus a conundrum arises. Unfortunately, legal frameworks are poorly matched against social media's self-governance and if there can be any assurances of safe spaces online, action is required. Perhaps by combining these countermeasures, we may learn to see the writing on the wall before it is too late.

²⁸⁵ Koebler, "Social Media Bans Actually Work," Motherboard.

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