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Masculinity, Misogyny, and Mass Shootings: An Exploration of the Relationship Between Mass Shootings and Domestic Violence in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Mass shootings pose vast and powerful threats to fundamental human rights in the United States. Though scholarly and policy discussions of mass shootings typically center around mental health or the deplorable state of American gun laws, these discussions overlook the role of gender in these acts of mass violence. However, a small body of scholarship suggests the existence of a clear relationship between mass shootings, misogyny, and gender-based violence (GBV). Using a mixed methods approach, this thesis builds on existing literature by exploring the relationship between mass shootings and domestic violence. Specifically, I use data from the Violence Project's Mass Shooter Database to analyze commonalities underlying 67 mass shootings from 1966-2022 in which the perpetrator had a history of domestic violence. I also conduct a case-study analysis of three mass shooters—Omar Mateen, Devin Patrick Kelley, and Nikolas Cruz—who were abusive towards their family members and intimate partners. Combined, this analysis reveals that the legal system overwhelmingly and disproportionately confers onto abusers a de facto and de jure impunity despite their violent and misogynistic histories. This conclusion has implications for the development of better gun violence prevention strategies and strengthened domestic violence policies.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, mass shootings have become so commonplace—and the policy solutions to tackle them so lacking—that they are fearfully anticipated but unsurprising occurrences. It is difficult to assess the exact number of people who have been killed by mass shootings, largely because there is no single agreed-upon definition of a mass shooting. Some define a mass shooting as an incident in which three or more people are killed, others as an incident in which four or more are killed.[1] Some broaden these definitions to include instances where individuals were injured.[2] In this thesis, I adopt Everytown's definition, which classifies a mass shooting as any incident in which four or more people are shot and killed at the same general time and location, excluding the shooter.[3] I also focus exclusively on public mass shootings, or shootings that took place outside of the home. Though I recognize the limitations of this definition and do not seek to minimize mass shootings with lower casualties, this definition remains a widely agreed-upon standard for research by organizations ranging from the Congressional Research Service to The Violence Project.[4] By this definition, 240 mass shootings took place in the US from 2009-2020, killing over 1000 people and wounding over 900 more.[5]

Mass shootings threaten the most fundamental of human rights: the right to life.[6] They also undermine human rights, including the right to education, the right to religion, and the right to leisure, threatening children's ability to learn in safe environments, people's ability to safely

[1] Liza H. Gold, "Domestic Violence, Firearms, and Mass Shootings," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, February 5, 2020, 1, https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.003929-20; Everytown, "Mass Shootings in America" (Everytown, 2020), https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/.
[2] Gun Violence Archive, "General Methodology," accessed June 27, 2023, https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology.
[3] Everytown, "Mass Shootings in America."
[4] William J Krouse and Daniel J Richardson, "Mass Murder with Firearms: Incidents and Victims, 1999-2013," July 30, 2015; "Methodology - Mass Shooting Statistics Data," The Violence Project, accessed June 20, 2023, https://www.theviolenceproject.org/methodology/.
[5] Everytown, "Mass Shootings in America."
[6] Amnesty International, "Gun Violence," accessed June 27, 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/.

exist in spaces of worship, and the general public's ability to enjoy public spaces without fear of violence.[7] The implications of mass shootings reach beyond the deaths they cause. In fact, mass shootings have severe long-term community impacts, subjecting millions to the crippling physical and psychological effects of violence.[8] Altogether, these harms undermine individual and collective human rights and threaten the well-being of communities across the country.

Typically, discussions of gun violence prevention strategies center mental health, substance use, and the U.S.'s lack of gun control laws. While these discussions are important and these factors relevant, they tend to exclude intersectional gendered analysis, or analysis of the roles that gendered power hierarchies, misogyny, masculinity, and patriarchy play in instances of mass violence. In the case of mass shootings—which are almost exclusively committed by men—the tendency to overlook these factors renders these discussions woefully incomplete.[9]

While most research on mass shootings ignores gender, a small body of research suggests that there is a link between mass shootings and gender-based violence (GBV). This research indicates that perpetrators of mass shootings often have a history of committing domestic violence, defined as physical, sexual, or psychological violence towards an intimate partner, ex-partner, or family member.[10] Not every perpetrator of domestic violence commits a mass shooting—domestic violence is far more commonplace than mass shootings in the US, with one

[7] Amnesty International.
[8] Amnesty International.
[9] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present," The Violence Project, accessed June 27, 2023, https://www.theviolenceproject.org/mass-shooter-database/.
[10] Aaron J. Kivisto and Megan Porter, "Firearm Use Increases Risk of Multiple Victims in Domestic Homicides," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 48, no. 1 (2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.003888-20; Lisa B. Geller, Marisa Booty, and Cassandra K. Crifasi, "The Role of Domestic Violence in Fatal Mass Shootings in the United States, 2014–2019," *Injury Epidemiology* 8, no. 1 (May 31, 2021): 1, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0; April M. Zeoli and Jennifer K. Paruk, "Potential to Prevent Mass Shootings through Domestic Violence Firearm Restrictions," *Criminology & Public Policy* 19, no. 1 (2020): 129, https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12475.

in three women reporting experience of physical violence by an intimate partner.[11] However, existing research that suggests a connection between domestic violence and mass shootings is clear and mutually reinforcing, warranting further exploration of this relationship. In fact, developing more comprehensive understandings of this relationship could inform a deeper understanding of the nature of mass shootings, as well as the development of more effective gun violence prevention strategies.

Research Question and Significance

This thesis seeks to answer the following question: What is the relationship between mass shootings and domestic violence? Answering this question has both theoretical and practical significance. First, this thesis builds on and addresses a gap in existing literature. As previously mentioned, most scholarship on mass shootings overlooks the ways in which gendered power hierarchies, misogyny, and patriarchy motivate violence.[12] This ignorance is striking and problematic given the fact that 98 percent of mass shootings are committed by men.[13] This thesis seeks to address this oversight by employing an intersectional gendered analysis of mass shootings. This analytical strategy helps to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind such instances of mass violence.

[11] National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, "National Domestic Violence Statistics Fact Sheet" (National Domestic Violence Statistics Fact Sheet, 2020), https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/domestic_violence-2020080709350855.pdf?1596828650457.
[12] Paul M. Reeping et al., "State Gun Laws, Gun Ownership, and Mass Shootings in the US: Cross-Sectional Time Series," *BMJ* 364 (March 6, 2019): l542, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l542; Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism, "Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2022: Including An In-Depth Analysis of Extremist Mass Killings" (Anti-Defamation League, 2022), https://www.adl.org/resources/report/murder-and-extremism-united-states-2021.
[13] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."

In the literature that does explore the relationship between mass shootings and domestic violence, scholars rely exclusively on quantitative research.[14] This research provides important contributions to the body of scholarship on mass shootings. However, its quantitative nature lends itself to two key shortcomings. First, it does not provide comprehensive case-specific analysis of mass shootings where the perpetrator has a history of domestic violence. Second, though this research purportedly seeks to inform the development of stricter gun control laws and better domestic violence policy, it obscures the voices and experiences of survivors of domestic violence. By combining quantitative analysis with a case study analysis, this thesis employs a mixed methods approach focusing on qualitative analysis to account for these shortcomings and to address this gap in existing literature.

Additionally, my analysis of the relationship between mass shootings and domestic violence as a human rights issue offers an original contribution to existing scholarship. While alternative approaches recognize mass shootings and gun violence as human rights issues, they rarely offer intersectional analysis of mass shootings as human rights violations. Specifically, they do not typically incorporate analysis of race or gender, nor do they interrogate the ways in which intersectional identities intersect with these motivators. As such, these approaches fail to prioritize the voices, needs, and experiences of the most vulnerable populations.

Most often, existing analytical strategies lead scholars to argue that better mental health interventions and gun control laws will reduce the occurrence of mass shootings.[15] These solutions are important pieces of the puzzle. However, they fail to address the gendered power hierarchies and patriarchal culture that pervade American society. Instead, these existing

[14] Kivisto and Porter, "Firearm Use Increases Risk of Multiple Victims in Domestic Homicides"; Geller, Booty, and Crifasi, "The Role of Domestic Violence in Fatal Mass Shootings in the United States, 2014–2019"; Zeoli and Paruk, "Potential to Prevent Mass Shootings through Domestic Violence Firearm Restrictions."
[15] Reeping et al., "State Gun Laws, Gun Ownership, and Mass Shootings in the US."

approaches perpetuate the idea that mass shootings are isolated instances of violence, obscuring the fact that they are deeply intertwined with gendered power and violence.

Applying an intersectional human rights-based approach allows me to address these shortcomings. First, it helps me to uplift the voices and experiences of marginalized populations, and specifically, the voices and experiences of survivors of domestic violence. Second, it gives me the opportunity to comprehensively analyze the histories and motivations of mass shooters beyond statistics. Third and finally, it helps me to challenge the idea that mass shootings and instances of domestic violence are isolated occurrences of violence and instead frame them as interconnected. Ultimately, this framing offers a unique contribution to the existing body of literature exploring this relationship.

This thesis also has practical significance. Mass shootings are commonplace in the U.S. and existing policy approaches have thus far failed to reduce their occurrence.[16] This thesis suggests that existing approaches have been unsuccessful predominantly because they fail to conceptualize mass shootings as intertwined with other forms of violence—specifically GBV. By providing a case study analysis to better understand the relationship between domestic violence and mass shootings, this thesis works to provide feminist-, victim-, and survivor-centered policy suggestions that may reduce both types of violence. Theoretically, these recommendations may have a trickle-down effect on gun violence and mass shootings.

[16] Everytown, "Mass Shootings in America."

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mass shootings are motivated and caused by a diverse and complex array of factors. Existing literature has sought to investigate many of them. To lay the foundation for my research, I deconstruct this literature on the explanatory factors of mass violence into four categories: 1) mental health, 2) gun control laws, 3) political extremism, and 4) masculinity, misogyny, and gendered power hierarchies. This organizational structure serves two purposes. First, it allows me to analyze the factors associated with mass shootings from those that are most to least cited. Second, it helps to explain the necessity of gendered analysis. While the first two categories profoundly lack gendered analysis, the third is rooted almost entirely in gendered analysis. It thus provides overlooked but comprehensive insight into the causes of mass shootings. My study builds on this latter scholarship.

Mass Shootings

Mental Health

In the U.S., discussions of gun violence have typically revolved around mental illness. Recent literature has sought to critically examine this proposed association to offer policy solutions that more effectively tackle gun violence. For example, Brucato et al. study the relationship between severe mental illness and violence in their 2021 article "Psychotic Symptoms in Mass Shootings v. Mass Murders Not Involving Firearms."[17] Specifically, they examine the relationship between psychosis and mass shootings. Using Columbia University's Mass Murder Database, Brucato et al. examine 1315 mass murders from 1900-2019—65% of which involved firearms—and found that only 11% of perpetrators in the mass murders studied

[17] Gary Brucato et al., "Psychotic Symptoms in Mass Shootings v. Mass Murders Not Involving Firearms: Findings from the Columbia Mass Murder Database," *Psychological Medicine* 52, no. 15 (January 2021): 3422–30, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721000076.

displayed signs of psychosis.[18] These findings suggest that "policies aimed at preventing mass shootings by focusing on serious mental illness, characterized by psychotic symptoms, may have limited impact."[19]

This study suggests that the traditional focus on mental health policy as a primary gun violence prevention strategy may obscure other predictors of gun violence. Notably, Brucato et al. do not identify misogyny or gendered power hierarchies as important among these other factors associated with gun violence and mass shootings. Even though their statistical analysis and findings are robust, their work reveals that scholarship on gun violence must shift its focus to other factors associated with mass shootings.

The National Council for Mental Well-Being complements and builds on Brucato et al.'s findings in its 2019 report "Mass Violence in America: Causes, Impacts, Solutions."[20] The report summarizes the insights and conclusions of experts who specialize in mental health and violence. These individuals convened for a two-day meeting to conduct an in-depth review and analysis of mass violence and "provided input from their practical experience and research."[21] Like Brucato et al., the report refutes the idea that most perpetrators of mass violence are mentally ill.[22] Rather, the report suggests that "mass violence is caused by many social and psychological factors that interact in complex ways."[23] With these findings, the Council posits that the best way to target gun violence is through "community wide solutions" that are rooted in the public health sector.[24] The Council argues that primary care providers, behavioral health providers, law enforcement,

[18] Brucato et al., 1.
[19] Brucato et al., 1.
[20] National Council for Mental Well-Being, "Mass Violence in America: Causes, Impacts and Solutions" (National Council Medical Director Institute, August 2019).
[21] National Council for Mental Well-Being, iii.
[22] National Council for Mental Well-Being, v.
[23] National Council for Mental Well-Being, v.
[24] National Council for Mental Well-Being, v.

courts, and the media all have a role to play in addressing mental health problems, helping those with unmet needs, and educating the public about mass violence.[25]

The public health approach that the Council proposes is comprehensive, innovative, and interdisciplinary. However, the report suggests that the most important part of tackling gun violence involves identifying "root causes of mass violence and develop[ing] strategies to alleviate them instead of focusing only on quick fixes downstream from the sources of the problem," but remains focused solely on mental health.[26] This serves as a major shortcoming of the report. While the public health response the Council advocates is compelling, the report's failure to include discussions of gendered power and violence constitutes a significant gap in analysis.

Gun Control Laws

Like mental health, lax and unenforced gun control laws are often cited as explanatory factors of mass shootings in the U.S. In "State Gun Laws, Gun Ownership, and Mass Shootings in the U.S.," Paula Reeping et al. conduct a cross-sectional time series analysis of the relationship between state gun laws and mass shootings from 1998-2015.[27] They find that state gun laws have become increasingly permissive in recent years and identify an association between this permissiveness and the rate of mass shootings in the U.S.[28] Reeping et al. recommend that "gun laws involving restraining orders and extreme risk protection orders may be valuable," but that these legislative approaches must be combined with police and bystander training.[29] Their findings are significant because they establish a clear link between the strictness

[25] National Council for Mental Well-Being, vii.
[26] National Council for Mental Well-Being, vii.
[27] Reeping et al., "State Gun Laws, Gun Ownership, and Mass Shootings in the US."
[28] Reeping et al., 5.
[29] Reeping et al., 4.

of gun laws and the frequency of mass shootings. The fact that their data spans nearly 30 years further strengthens the relevance and generalizability of their research.

Studying the effects of the federal assault weapons ban that was in effect in the United States from 1994-2004, DiMaggio et al. corroborate Reeping et al.'s argument that stricter gun control laws reduce the likelihood of mass shootings.[30] Using data from 1981-2017, they found that "the federal ban period was associated with a statistically significant nine fewer mass shooting related deaths per 10,000 firearm homicides."[31] These findings demonstrate that the assault weapons ban likely had a direct effect on mass shooting fatalities, evidencing the role that stricter gun control laws can play in reducing deaths in instances of mass violence.

While Reeping et al. and DiMaggio et al.'s focus on gun laws is certainly important, the authors fail to acknowledge the variety of factors associated with mass shootings. The causes of and motivations behind mass shootings are complex and multifaceted; strengthening gun laws alone does not target the underlying root of the problem of mass violence. Thus, while stricter gun control is a critical component of a legislative response to mass violence, it cannot be a standalone response. Both sets of findings thus spark questions pertaining to other factors associated with gun violence and how those factors might be tackled.

Political Extremism

While previously discussed authors explore mental illness and gun control laws as predictors of mass violence, other literature focuses on political motivations—more specifically, political extremism—as key predictors of and factors associated with gun violence and mass killing. Of note is the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) report "Murder & Extremism in the

[30] Charles DiMaggio et al., "Changes in US Mass Shooting Deaths Associated with the 1994–2004 Federal Assault Weapons Ban: Analysis of Open-Source Data," *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 86, no. 1 (January 2019): 11, https://doi.org/10.1097/TA.0000000000002060.
[31] DiMaggio et al., 11.

United States in 2022."[32] This report investigates the association of violence and murder with different kinds of political extremism and includes a specific focus on extremist mass killings. It identifies right-wing extremism and white supremacy as particularly dangerous forms of political extremism, highlighting that all extremist-related murders in 2022 were committed by right-wing extremists and that 57% of ideological mass killings since 1970 have occurred within the past 12 years.[33] This report thus draws attention to growing concerns surrounding the relationship between right-wing political extremism, white supremacy, and mass violence.

This report lends critical insight into the prevalence and tendencies of right-wing political extremist violence. However, it overlooks a major overlapping factor: gender. While the ADL briefly recognizes the intersection between masculinity and right-wing extremism, it does not examine the role of gender in political violence. As such, this report merely glosses over the ways in which misogyny, masculinity, and patriarchy intersect with violence. This remains an unaddressed gap in existing literature.

Masculinity, Misogyny, and Gendered Power Hierarchies

Other factors associated with mass violence that remain less explored include masculinity, misogyny, and gendered power hierarchies. In her article "The Role of Gender in Political Violence," McDermott provides a theoretical framework that explains why mass violence is intricately interconnected with these factors.[34] McDermott contends that "gender intersects so extensively with political violence" because social dominance hierarchies, which privilege men over women, perpetuate structures and systems of power to the benefit of men and

[32] Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism, "Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2022: Including An In-Depth Analysis of Extremist Mass Killings."
[33] Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism, ii.
[34] Rose McDermott, "The Role of Gender in Political Violence," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (2020): 1–5.

to the detriment of everyone else.[35] This analysis leads her to argue that gender is the most important factor in understanding political violence.[36] While McDermott does not specifically situate her discussion in the context of the relationship between domestic violence and mass shootings, her work lends credence to the idea that domestic GBV is deeply interconnected with other forms of societal political violence. In this sense, it provides my argument with an important theoretical foundation.

Building on and adding to McDermott's theoretical approach, Madfis examines the interconnections between masculinity, male entitlement, and mass violence in his 2014 article "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger: An Exploration of the Intersectional Identities of American Mass Murderers."[37] Madfis states that white heterosexual middle-class men commit mass murder at disproportionately high rates compared to other demographics and provides different explanations as to why this occurs.[38] He identifies several, including white privilege, economic downturn and devastation, and violence as a masculine gender performance.[39] Specifically, he explains that many middle-class white men feel as though their white privilege and entitlement are threatened and their chances at success thwarted by the increased empowerment and success of historically marginalized groups.[40] Ultimately, he argues that American "...culture fosters the notion that violence serves as an appropriate masculine reaction to any shameful loss of masculinity."[41] Thus, acting violently serves to perform, display, and

[35] McDermott, 1.
[36] McDermott, 5.
[37] Eric Madfis, "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger: An Exploration of the Intersectional Identities of American Mass Murderers," *Men and Masculinities* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 67–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14523432.
[38] Madfis, 67.
[39] Madfis, 73.
[40] Madfis, 73.
[41] Madfis, 79.

reinforce one's masculinity. Ultimately, Madfis argues that these factors contribute to the disproportionately high rate of mass shooters who identify as straight, white, middle-class men.

Madfis' intersectional analysis offers important and relevant insight into my research problem. While Madfis does not go as far as to suggest a link between domestic violence and mass shootings, his argument directly connects masculinity—and more specifically, threatened masculinity operating along racial and socioeconomic lines—and mass shootings. In other words, Madfis's work and findings testify to the relationship between patriarchy and violence. Understanding this relationship is critical to understanding the intersections of firearm usage, intimate partner violence, and gendered power. As such, Madfis's findings and analysis are foundational to my argument.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is one of the most violent and injurious manifestations and representations of misogynistic and patriarchal violence. Though often overlooked as a factor associated with mass violence, a joint United States Secret Service and National Threat Assessment Center Report published in 2023 entitled "Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016-2020" highlights the tendency for perpetrators of mass violence to have histories of domestic violence.[42] This report examines 173 targeted public attacks in which three or more individuals were injured or killed to understand common themes underlying instances of mass violence.[43] Researchers found that 64% of attackers had a criminal history, 34% had a history of illicit drug use or substance use, and 58% experienced mental health problems prior to the attacks.[44]

[42] United States Secret Service and National Threat Assessment Center, "Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016-2020" (US Department of Homeland Security, 2023), https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/usss-ntac-maps-2016-2020.pdf.
[43] United States Secret Service and National Threat Assessment Center, 1.
[44] United States Secret Service and National Threat Assessment Center, 21–24.

Notably, 41% of attackers had a history of domestic violence and 19% displayed misogynistic behaviors prior to a mass attack.[45] These findings suggest several commonalities underlying instances of mass violence. Perhaps more importantly, these findings apply gendered analysis to better understand violence—analysis that has historically been overlooked in scholarship and policy addressing mass violence. The report's assertion of a clear and direct link between GBV and instances of mass public violence adds an important dimension to existing literature and policy discussions surrounding mass shootings.

Other quantitative studies have also found a clear link between domestic violence and mass shootings. In their 2020 study "Firearm Use Increases Risk of Multiple Victims in Domestic Homicides," Kivisto and Porter examine the role of firearms in situations of domestic homicide and the relationship between instances of domestic homicide—or homicide committed by a family member or intimate partner—and associated multiple homicide.[46] Kivisto and Porter use data from Supplementary Homicide Reports and from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports spanning 1976-2016 and conduct a weighted negative binomial regression to examine these relationships.[47] Their key findings are twofold. First, their analysis indicates that the use of a firearm by a man in a homicide is more closely associated with the risk of additional victimization than is the use of a firearm by a woman in a homicide.[48] Second, their findings suggest that firearm use in a domestic homicide increases the risk of additional victimization to a greater extent than does firearm use in a non-domestic homicide.[49] In fact, the use of a firearm in an instance of domestic homicide was associated with a 71% increase in the

[45] United States Secret Service and National Threat Assessment Center, 23.
[46] Kivisto and Porter, "Firearm Use Increases Risk of Multiple Victims in Domestic Homicides," 1.
[47] Kivisto and Porter, 1.
[48] Kivisto and Porter, 5.
[49] Kivisto and Porter, 6.

incidence of an associated multiple homicide.[50] Fundamentally, these findings are important because they draw a direct link between male violence, domestic violence, and multiple homicide in cases where firearms are involved.

Geller, Booty, and Crifasi corroborate Kivisto and Porter's findings.[51] Authors use data from 2014-2019 from the Gun Violence Archive on mass shootings—which they define as shootings in which four or more people are killed by a firearm—to study the relationship between domestic violence and mass shootings.[52] They found that of 59% of the mass shootings included in their dataset, one or more of the victims was an intimate partner or family member of the perpetrator.[53] Additionally, the perpetrator of a mass shooting had a history of domestic violence in 54% of cases.[54] Altogether, 68% of mass shootings were related to domestic violence in one of these ways. These findings build on Kivisto and Porter's discovery of the linkages between firearm usage, domestic homicide, and multiple homicide. Specifically, they broaden the scope and generalizability of Kivisto and Porter's findings by uncovering a distinct and specific relationship between mass shootings and domestic violence.

Kivisto and Porter's and Geller, Booty, and Crifasi's quantitative studies provide important insight into the relationship between domestic violence and mass violence. However, the quantitative nature of their work somewhat obscures the complexities of the cases they examine. Supplementing their work with qualitative research would provide an opportunity to develop deeper understandings of the relationship between domestic violence and mass shootings. This research project seeks to fill this gap in existing literature.

[50] Kivisto and Porter, 6.
[51] Geller, Booty, and Crifasi, "The Role of Domestic Violence in Fatal Mass Shootings in the United States, 2014–2019."
[52] Geller, Booty, and Crifasi, 1.
[53] Geller, Booty, and Crifasi, 1.
[54] Geller, Booty, and Crifasi, 1.

Some scholars, like Zeoli and Paruk, argue that the best way to address the established link between domestic violence and mass shootings is by creating and strengthening firearm restrictions. In "Potential to Prevent Mass Shootings Through Domestic Violence Restrictions," Zeoli and Paruk study 89 mass shooters, their history of domestic violence, their previous engagement with the justice system, and the legal restrictions on their ability to access firearms.[55] They found that of the total of 28 mass shooters who were suspected to have a history of domestic violence, 61% had previously been involved with the justice system for domestic violence-related issues.[56] They also found that half of the 28 mass shooters with a suspected history of domestic violence were restricted from purchasing and possessing firearms at the time they carried out the attack.[57] These findings lead Zeoli and Paruk to argue that "domestic violence firearm restrictions will only prevent mass shootings if high-risk individuals obtain restrictions through criminal convictions or domestic violence restraining orders and have those restrictions enforced."[58]

Zeoli and Paruk's study provides a critical foundation for my research. Specifically, by studying the relationship between domestic violence, mass shootings, and gun control laws, Zeoli and Paruk not only corroborate Kivisto and Porter's and Geller, Booty, and Crifasi's respective works, but propose concrete policy solutions. My study thus seeks to build on Zeoli and Paruk's in two ways. First, I offer qualitative insight to complement Zeoli and Paruk's quantitative approach. While this quantitative approach lends important insight into the broader nature of the relationship between domestic violence and mass shootings, it fails to include survivors' voices, which are crucial to understanding survivors' experiences and needs. My work

[55] Zeoli and Paruk, "Potential to Prevent Mass Shootings through Domestic Violence Firearm Restrictions."
[56] Zeoli and Paruk, 129.
[57] Zeoli and Paruk, 141.
[58] Zeoli and Paruk, 143.

thus seeks to fill this gap. Second, while Zeoli and Paruk's focus on firearm restrictions is also important, McDermott's previously discussed theoretical work underscores that the problem of patriarchal violence cannot be effectively tackled solely through gun control. Rather, gun control is simply one piece of a complex puzzle and thus must work in conjunction with other feminist and survivor-centered policy efforts.

My Approach and Theoretical Framework

My research seeks to account for gaps in existing literature by providing comprehensive intersectional gendered analysis. Specifically, my research seeks to build on Kivisto and Porter's; Geller, Booty, and Crifasi's; and Zeoli and Paruk's findings.[59] Given the exclusively statistical nature of this work, my research offers more in-depth qualitative insight to expand on existing literature. I situate this thesis in the context of McDermott's work, using her theoretical framing of the relationship between gender and political violence to guide my research.

[59] Kivisto and Porter, "Firearm Use Increases Risk of Multiple Victims in Domestic Homicides," 6; Geller, Booty, and Crifasi, "The Role of Domestic Violence in Fatal Mass Shootings in the United States, 2014–2019," 1; Zeoli and Paruk, "Potential to Prevent Mass Shootings through Domestic Violence Firearm Restrictions," 129.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I use a mixed methods approach to answer my research question. First, I conduct a comparative analysis of public mass shootings from 1966-2022 in which the perpetrator had a known history of perpetrating domestic violence. I code data from The Violence Project's Database on Mass Shootings, which includes information on mass shootings and their perpetrators from 1966-2022, to conduct this research.[60] This database is publicly available via The Violence Project's website. It is also recognized as the "most comprehensive repository of information on U.S. mass shootings" and thus lends critical support to this research.[61] The Violence Project, however, lacks data pertaining to a shooter's history of domestic violence and GBV. Thus, I supplement data from The Violence Project with data from news articles, published interviews, and legal documents to ensure the comprehensiveness of my research.

Quantitative Research

I include the following factors related to the mass shooting: the date of the shooting, the state in which the shooting took place, the shooting location, the shooter's previous relationship to the shooting location, applicable gun laws, gun type used, means of gun acquisition, the shooter's experience with firearms, the number of people killed, the number of people injured, and the shooter's relationship to victims of the mass shooting. I also include perpetrator characteristics and divide these characteristics into the following categories: general background, history of crime and violence, history of trauma and adverse childhood experiences, health and mental health, history of misogyny and GBV, grievance and motivation, and signs of a crisis displayed. Table 3.1 provides additional detail as to the specific characteristics included under each of these categories.

[60] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[61] The Violence Project.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of Mass Shooters Included in This Study

General Background	Age, Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Religious Affiliation, Level of Educational Attainment, School Performance, Relationship Status, Children, Employment Status, Military Service & Branch
History of Crime and Violence	Criminal Record, Known to Police/FBI, Interaction with Civil/Criminal Legal Systems for Non-Domestic Violence Offenses, History of Domestic Violence, Interaction with Civil/Criminal Legal Systems for Domestic Violence Offenses, History of Animal Abuse, History of Incarceration, Affiliation with Terrorist Organizations, Gang/Incel Involvement, History of Violent Video Games, Bully/Bullied
History of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences	Childhood Socioeconomic Status, Childhood Trauma, Adult Trauma, Experiences Witnessing Violent Treatment Towards Mother
Health and Mental Health	Mental Health Problems, Suicidality, Treatment for Mental Health Problems, Substance Use Issues, Other Health Issues
History of Misogyny and GBV	Specifics of Domestic Violence, History of Other GBV, Statements Made Reflecting Attitudes Towards Women and Girls
Grievance and Motivation	Public Statements Reflecting an Inclination Towards Violence, Motive(s) for the Attack, Communication to a Third Party of Intent to Do Harm, Relationship to Other Mass Shootings, Interest in Past Mass Violence, Political Leanings
Signs of a Crisis	Recent Stressor/Triggering Event, Displayed Signs of Being in Crisis, Timeframe of When Signs of Crisis Began, Social Media Usage, Isolation, Abusive Behavior

Comparative analysis of these factors and characteristics lends critical insight into other commonalities underlying cases of mass shootings where the perpetrator has a history of domestic violence. As previously mentioned, many mass shooters have a history of domestic violence, but not all perpetrators of domestic violence go on to commit a mass shooting. While research indicates the existence of a positive and statistically significant relationship between a

history of mass violence and the committing of a mass shooting, it does not attempt to explain what differentiates cases of domestic violence that lead to mass shootings from cases of domestic violence that do not. This comparative analysis seeks to understand commonalities underlying cases of mass shootings where the perpetrator has a history of domestic violence. It also seeks to conceptualize how a history of domestic violence, combined with other factors and characteristics, may render individuals who perpetrate domestic violence more likely to perpetrate acts of mass violence.

Qualitative Research

I conduct an in-depth analysis of three case studies in which the perpetrator of a public mass shooting had a history of domestic violence. First, I analyze the case of Omar Mateen, who perpetrated the Orlando Nightclub Shooting in 2016.[62] Second, I examine the case of Devin Patrick Kelley, who committed a mass shooting at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas in 2017.[63] Third, I explore the case of Nikolas Cruz, who carried out a mass shooting at a school in Parkland, Florida in a devastating mass shooting in 2018.[64] In each of these case studies, I provide information on the shooter's general background, history of crime and violence, mental health, history of misogyny and GBV, grievance and motivation, and signs of a crisis before exploring survivor testimonies. I include these categories at the expense of others to ensure a comprehensive but targeted overview of lethality factors in each case.

[62] Rachel Louise Snyder, "The Trial of Noor Salman and Its Shocking Disregard for Survivors of Domestic Violence," *The New Yorker*, April 1, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-trial-of-noor-salman-and-its-shocking-disregard-for-survivors-of-domestic-violence.
[63] Eli Rosenberg and Wesley Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate," *Washington Post*, November 6, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/devin-patrick-kelley-had-a-violent-past-records-indicate/2017/11/06/f7ee6222-c33d-11e7-84bc-5e285c7f4512_story.html.
[64] CNN, "Florida Shooter Showed Violence at Home, Police Reports Reveal," accessed June 27, 2023, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/16/us/florida-shooter-cruz-records-police-calls-to-home-invs/index.html.

I chose to conduct in-depth analyses of these mass shootings for three reasons. First, these cases are reflective of many of the broader tendencies present in the 67 cases included in the quantitative portion of this study. Second, these instances of mass violence were public and well-known; as such, there is an extensive public record. This record comprises legal documents such as court cases and criminal records, reports by governmental and non-governmental organizations, and media sources ranging from news articles to published interviews. Third, the intimate partners and family members of each of these men have either publicly shared their stories or had witnesses publicly testify to their experiences.

This expansive public record is integral to my research. It allows me to analyze cases dealing with sensitive information as comprehensively as possible. It also helps me to uplift the voices of survivors whose abusers later committed mass shootings and use these observations to answer my research question. Given the sensitivity of the topic and the robustness of available data, I did not conduct my own interviews. Analyzing existing data allows me to pursue research that spotlights the experiences and needs of survivors without forcing them to retell their stories, which would be needlessly re-traumatizing.

Through conducting these case studies, I seek to gain deeper insight into the motivations, tendencies, and patterns of Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz prior to their acts of mass violence. I also seek to better understand what could have helped to prevent these atrocities and these survivors' experiences of domestic violence. This insight will allow me to formulate suggestions for more survivor-centered and public-safety focused domestic violence policy interventions as well as gun violence prevention strategies. The goal of this approach is to identify risk factors that indicate the possibility of a mass shooting by strengthening domestic violence intervention policies.

CHAPTER FOUR: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

In this chapter, I detail the findings of my quantitative research. I present this information by organizing the data in the following categories: states, shooting and victim details, perpetrator characteristics, criminal history, history of trauma, health and mental health, history of misogyny and GBV, grievance and motivation, and signs of a crisis.

States

From 1966-2022, public mass shootings perpetrated by someone with a history of domestic violence took place in 22 states. Though all states are subject to the same federal firearms regulations, laws in each of these states vary widely, particularly as they pertain to gun ownership for perpetrators of domestic violence.[65] All states are subject to the Lautenberg Amendment, which was passed in 1996 and outlaws firearm possession for anyone convicted of simple assault or a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.[66] While some states have bolstered federal regulations through stricter state laws addressing gun ownership for individuals convicted of domestic violence, five states—Alaska, Georgia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Ohio—have no such laws.[67] As such, the legality of each sale and instance of possession differs in each state.

Shooting and Victim Details

Of all mass shootings involving a perpetrator with a history of domestic violence from 1966-2022 (n=67), 55% legally obtained and possessed at least one of the firearms used. Of

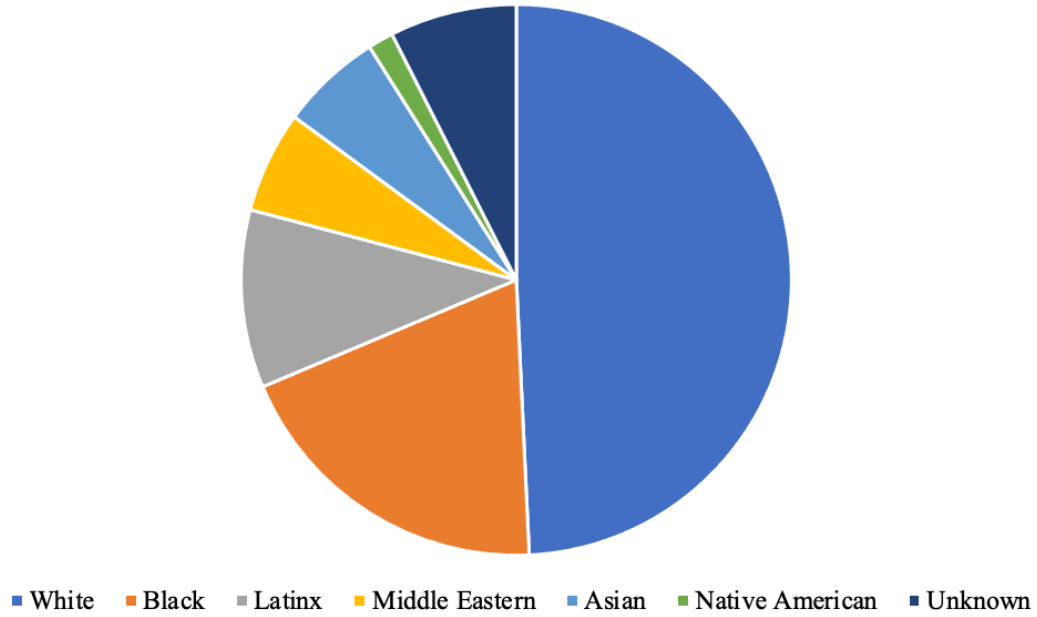
[65] Wendy J. Schiller and Kaitlin N. Sidorsky, "Federalism, Policy Diffusion, and Gender Equality: Explaining Variation in State Domestic Violence Firearm Laws 1990–2017," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (September 2022): 247, https://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2021.35.
[66] Schiller and Sidorsky, 248.
[67] Giffords, "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Alaska," accessed June 10, 2023, https://giffords.org/lawcenter/state-laws/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-alaska/; Giffords, "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Georgia," accessed June 10, 2023, https://giffords.org/lawcenter/state-laws/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-georgia/; Giffords, "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Kentucky," accessed June 10, 2023, https://giffords.org/state-laws/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-kentucky/; Giffords, "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Oklahoma," accessed June 10, 2023, https://giffords.org/state-laws/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-oklahoma/; Giffords, "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Ohio," accessed June 10, 2023, https://giffords.org/state-laws/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-ohio/.

these shooters, 57% acquired a firearm through a federally licensed firearms dealer, 11% through a private but legal sale, and 40% through a legal but unknown source. Some relied on multiple methods of legal purchase. Additionally, 84% of shooters had at least some experience with firearms. In 61% of cases, the perpetrator knew at least one of the individuals killed. In 24% of cases, one of the individuals killed was the current or past romantic partner of the perpetrator.

Perpetrator Characteristics

Of all perpetrators of mass shootings with a history of domestic violence, 99% were men and 1% identified as nonbinary. The youngest perpetrator was 15 years old and the oldest was 66 years old. Most shooters (81%) were adults between the ages of 25 and 64, 18% were youth between the ages of 15 and 24, and one shooter was above the age of 65. 93% identified as heterosexual. Nearly half (49%) were white (Figure 4.1) and 18% were immigrants. One quarter of shooters were Christian and only three (4%) were Muslim. Five (7%) had other religious affiliation and ten (15%) were not religious at all.

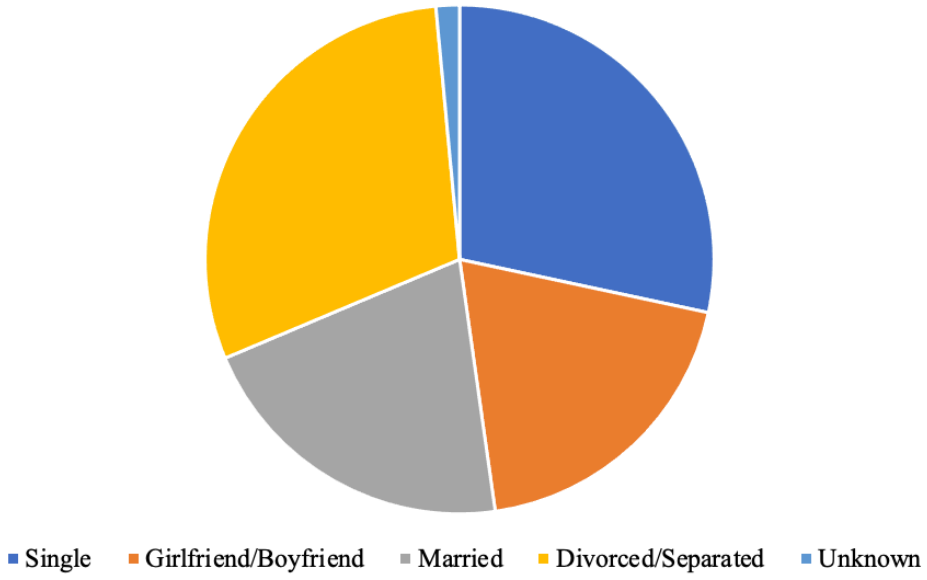
Figure 4.1: Perpetrator Race and Ethnicity



Levels of educational attainment varied widely. Nearly a third of shooters had completed some college or trade school, 16% had completed high school, and 12% did not finish high school. Meanwhile, 12% had completed some type of postsecondary education: 6% held a bachelor's degree and 6% held a graduate or professional degree.

Shooter relationship status similarly varied. Most shooters were either single (28%) or divorced or separated (30%) at the time of the shooting; the remainder either had a girlfriend (19%) or were married (21%) (Figure 4.2). Most shooters were unemployed. In fact, only 36% of perpetrators were working at the time of the shooting, and most in blue collar jobs. Over a quarter (28%) had served in the military.

Figure 4.2: Shooter Relationship Status



The fact that 99% of mass shooters in this study were men and 93% heterosexual speaks to the deeply interconnected nature of mass shootings, male violence, and heteronormative masculinity. The fact that nearly half of shooters were white adds depth to this understanding, suggesting that mass shootings are not only typically a masculine phenomenon but also a white

masculine phenomenon. Notably, most shooters were also single (58%), unemployed (64%), or both. In other words, an overwhelming number of these shooters could not maintain a job or a relationship, which may have contributed to a sense of anger or profound discouragement.

These numbers reinforce McDermott's conceptualization of political violence as an inherently gendered phenomenon and Madfis's conceptualization of mass violence as masculine performance.[68] It is impossible to address the histories and motivations of mass shooters with a history of perpetrating domestic violence without acknowledging the fact that 99% were men. Thus, these findings seemingly corroborate McDermott's argument that gendered social dominance hierarchies are a significant contributing factor to mass violence.[69] Numbers on race, relationship status, and employment status likely also support Madfis' argument that white privilege, male entitlement, and masculinity often intersect to shape violence as masculine performance.[70]

Criminal History

An overwhelming majority of mass shooters had a criminal history: 82% had previously interacted with the criminal legal system for non-domestic violence offenses; 78% had a criminal record prior to the shooting; and 30% were known to the police or Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Of the individuals who had interacted with the criminal legal system, 11 had spent time in jail or prison. Some shooters had other violent inclinations or affiliations: 16% were affiliated with a terrorist group, incels,[71] or gang; 30% had a history of bullying; 10% had a history of playing violent video games; and 7% had a history of animal abuse.

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[68] McDermott, "The Role of Gender in Political Violence," 1; Madfis, "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger," 67.
[69] McDermott, "The Role of Gender in Political Violence," 1.
[70] Madfis, "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger," 67.
[71] As defined by the Anti-Defamation League, incels, short for "involuntary celibates," are "heterosexual men who blame women and society for their lack of romantic success." They are "known for their deep-seated pessimism and

Theoretically, gun laws in the U.S. work to prevent individuals with criminal histories from accessing firearms. The fact that over three-fourths of the perpetrators of mass shootings included in this study had a criminal record, coupled with the fact that 55% of the shooters studied bought at least one firearm legally, reveals the lax nature of gun regulations in the U.S. These findings corroborate Reeping et al.'s suggestion that permissive gun laws and frequent mass shootings are inherently intertwined.[72] Altogether, these findings reinforce the idea that the ability of individuals with criminal histories to legally access guns is a significant policy failure that must urgently be addressed.

History of Trauma

Though data on trauma and adverse childhood experiences is not comprehensive, The Violence Project's database indicates that 43% of shooters experienced some type of childhood trauma, whether that trauma constituted physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, or the death or incarceration of a parent or family member. 18% had been bullied at some point in their lives. Surprisingly, few grew up in households where domestic violence was prevalent: Only 12% of shooters grew up in a home in which there were documented instances of domestic violence against their mothers. In addition to childhood trauma, nearly a quarter (24%) of shooters experienced trauma during adulthood. Such trauma ranged from the death of a parent to war-related trauma to a traumatic accident.

profound sense of grievance against women" and subscribe to an ideology "rooted in the belief that women have too much power in the sexual/romantic sphere and ruin incels' lives by rejecting them." ("Incels," *Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism*, Published July 29, 2020 https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/incels-involuntary-celibates.)

[72] Reeping et al., "State Gun Laws, Gun Ownership, and Mass Shootings in the US."

Health and Mental Health

An overwhelming number of shooters had histories of mental health and substance use problems. In fact, 82% struggled with mental health: 40% of shooters were suicidal prior to the shooting, 27% had a diagnosed thought disorder, 25% had a diagnosed mood disorder, and 7% were on the autism spectrum. Just over half of the perpetrators studied (51%) had difficulties with substance use and half of perpetrators experienced both mental health and substance use problems. Nearly half (49%) of the shooters had received some sort of treatment for their mental health problems. However, only nine shooters in total—or 27% of those who received treatment at some point in their life—received treatment within six months of the shooting. While these percentages reveal that mental health problems alone cannot be blamed for mass shootings, they also evidence a public health crisis.[73] Thus, increasing the availability and accessibility of effective and consistent mental health infrastructure must be integrated in any policy solution that comprehensively tackles the mass shooting epidemic.

History of Misogyny and Gender-Based Violence

Domestic Violence

Although all 67 shooters had a documented history of domestic violence, only 42 (63%) had interacted with law enforcement or the legal system for domestic violence-related offenses.[74]

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[73] "Gun Violence Is a Public Health Crisis," NIHCM, accessed June 10, 2023, https://nihcm.org/newsletter/gun-violence-is-a-public-health-problem.

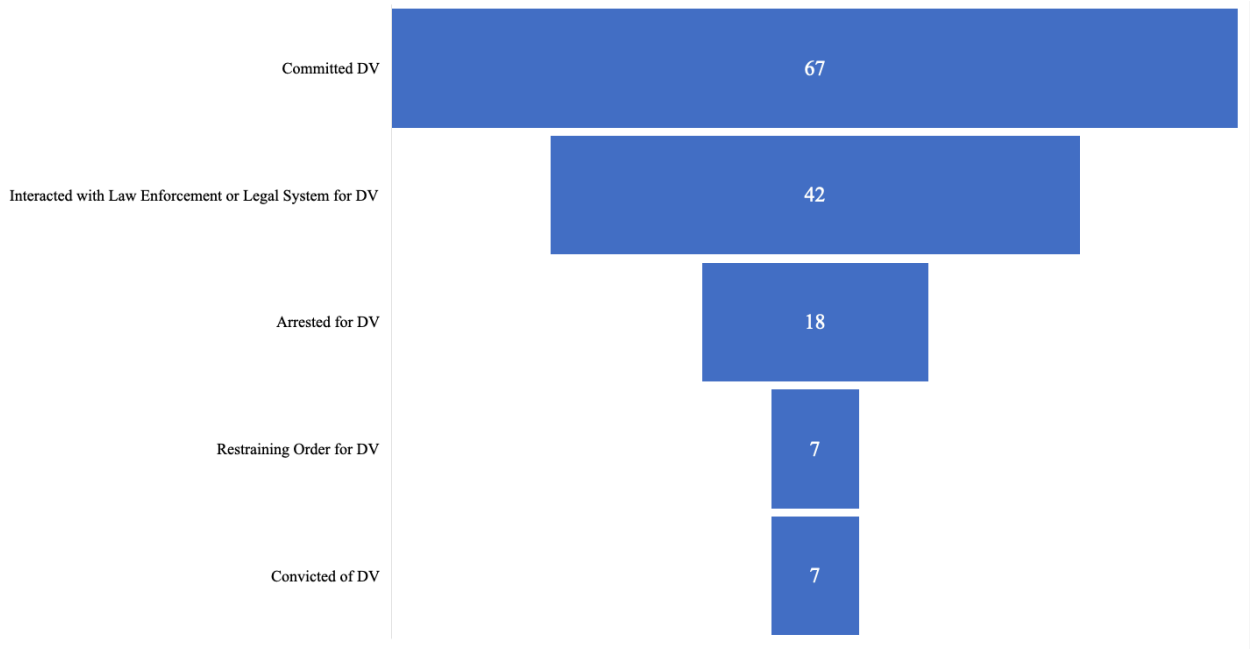
[74] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present," The Violence Project, accessed June 27, 2023, https://www.theviolenceproject.org/mass-shooter-database/; Laura Foreman, *Mass Murderers: True Crime* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1992); KatiraWrites, "The Stalking Case That Led to Mass Murder," *Medium* (blog), March 16, 2021, https://katira.medium.com/the-stalking-case-that-led-to-mass-murder-d15385ac8c49; Gillian Flaccus, "Details of California Shooting Suspect's Life Emerges," NBC News, October 15, 2011, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna44913588; Associated Press, "Northern California Gunman's Wife Found Dead," The Florida Times-Union, November 15, 2017, https://www.jacksonville.com/story/news/nation-world/2017/11/15/northern-california-gunman-s-wife-found-dead/16288314007/; Dave Philipps, "Coach Says California Gunman Assaulted Her in High School," The New York Times, November 9, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/09/us/ian-david-long-sexual-assault.html; David Debolt, "San Jose VTA Shooter's Dark Past Includes Violent, Aggressive Behavior," May 26, 2021,

Of these 42, only 18 had been arrested for domestic violence, and of these, only seven had been charged with and convicted of domestic violence. This means that only 10% of shooters with a history of domestic violence had been found guilty of abuse. Additionally, seven individuals had

https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/05/26/heavy-police-presence-at-home-of-vta-employee-which-caught-fire-wednesday-morning/; Mack Lamoureux and Lily Moss, "He Murdered 5 People. But Before Then, He Made a Movie About It.," *VICE News*, February 11, 2022, https://www.vice.com/en/article/3ab5gy/denver-shooter-lyndon-mcleod-movie; Carol McKinley, "Anderson Lee Aldrich: A History of Family Travail, Personal Violence," Denver Gazette, December 4, 2022, https://denvergazette.com/continuing-coverage/club-q-shooting/anderson-lee-aldrich-a-history-of-family-travail-personal-violence/article_f668d004-728d-11ed-8ae6-eb5e9062514f.html; Jennifer Mascia, "Domestic Abusers Often Graduate to Other Violent Crimes. They Also Often Get to Have Guns.," The Trace, December 1, 2015, https://www.thetrace.org/2015/12/domestic-abuse-gun-ownership-planned-parenthood-shooting/; Ruth Graham, "Like so Many Mass Shooters, the Fort Lauderdale Suspect Has a History of Domestic Violence.," Slate, January 11, 2017, https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/01/like-so-many-mass-shooters-the-fort-lauderdale-suspect-has-a-history-of-domestic-violence.html; Yasmine Issa, "'A Profoundly Masculine Act': Mass Shootings, Violence Against Women, and the Amendment That Could Forge a Path Forward," *California Law Review* 107 (April 2019), https://www.californialawreview.org/print/a-profoundly-masculine-act-mass-shootings-violence-against-women-and-the-amendment-that-could-forge-a-path-forward; "Man Fired Months Ago Kills 6 at Workplace," *Baltimore Sun*, August 28, 2003; "Aurora Shooter Gary Martin's Domestic Violence History Was Supposed to Keep Him From Owning a Gun," accessed July 26, 2023, https://www.thedailybeast.com/aurora-shooter-gary-martins-domestic-violence-history-was-supposed-to-keep-him-from-owning-a-gun; "Jason Nightengale, Man Police Say Killed 3 And Wounded 4 In Shooting Spree, Posted Disturbing Social Media Videos And Had Extensive Record - CBS Chicago," January 10, 2021, https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/jason-nightengale-shooting-spree-facebook-posts-extensive-record/; Johnny Lee, *Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace* (Amherst, MA: HRD Press, 2005); Billy Sothern, "Shon Miller: Portrait of a Mass Killer as a Human Being," June 10, 2022, https://www.thenation.com/article/society/shon-miller-mass-shootings/; "STATE OF LOUISIANA v. ANTHONY BELL (2010)," accessed July 26, 2023, https://caselaw.findlaw.com/court/la-supreme-court/1546275.html; Robert Kuznia and Majlie de Puy Kamp, "NJ Shooter's Ex-Wife Didn't See Signs of Violence," CNN, December 12, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/12/12/us/ex-wife-nj-shooter-david-anderson-invs/index.html; Robert D. McFadden, "A Tormented Life -- A Special Report; A Long Slide From Privilege Ends in Slaughter on a Train," *The New York Times*, December 12, 1993, sec. New York, https://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/12/nyregion/tormented-life-special-report-long-slide-privilege-ends-slaughter-train.html; Jo Ann Zuniga, "Gunman's Wife Accused Him of Assault in 1998," Chron, January 11, 2001, https://www.chron.com/news/article/Gunman-s-wife-accused-him-of-assault-in-1998-1997336.php; Silvia Foster-Frau, "Wife of Sutherland Springs Gunman Devin Kelley Speaks for First Time about Day of the Massacre," San Antonio Express-News, August 11, 2018, https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/texas-shooting/article/Wife-of-Sutherland-Springs-gunman-Devin-Kelley-13145534.php; "FBI: West Texas Gunman 'Was on a Long Spiral of Going Down,'" AP News, September 3, 2019, https://apnews.com/article/shootings-us-news-ap-top-news-odessa-tx-state-wire-42014c1117d24ec0a7ebbfb68c68ea67; Seattle Times, "A Path to Murder: The Story of Maurice Clemmons," The Seattle Times, December 6, 2009, https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/a-path-to-murder-the-story-of-maurice-clemmons/; "Gunman: A Life Full of Rage, a Shocking Final Act," The Seattle Times, May 31, 2012, https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/gunman-a-life-full-of-rage-a-shocking-final-act/; Chris Sullivan, "Federal Way Killer Had History of Violence," MyNorthwest.com, April 23, 2013, https://mynorthwest.com/29043/federal-way-killer-had-history-of-violence/; Amy Held, "Accused Washington State Mall Shooter Found Dead In Jail," *NPR*, April 18, 2017, sec. America, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/04/18/524501937/accused-washington-state-mall-shooter-found-dead-in-jail; "MPR: Who Is Chai Vang?," Minnesota Public Radio, November 4, 2004, http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2004/11/24_helmsm_vang/; Gina Barton, Rory Linnane, and Mary Spicuzza, "'We Are Shocked and Dismayed': Family of Molson Coors Shooter Expresses Sadness, Heartache," accessed July 26, 2023, https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2020/02/28/milwaukee-molson-coors-shooting-gwen-moore-says-victim-old-friend/4902693002/.

restraining orders issued against them by romantic partners or family members. Still, most perpetrators faced no legal repercussions for the abuse they inflicted (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Legal Repercussions for Domestic Violence for Perpetrators of Mass Shootings



The lack of legal repercussions these abusers faced is striking. The fact that less than half of those who had a legal interaction for domestic violence were arrested evidence the series of difficulties that survivors face in seeking help and escaping abuse. Similarly, the fact that only seven of 67 shooters who perpetrated domestic violence were convicted of domestic violence—and only an additional seven were the subject of a restraining order—reveals how little the system works in survivors' favor.

These numbers reveal the failure of existing laws to protect survivors of domestic violence. Not only were most survivors trapped in cycles of abuse, but over half of them watched their abusers legally obtain a firearm despite their violent histories. Most domestic violence-related gun laws in the U.S. require a restraining order, arrest, or conviction of domestic violence in order to prevent an individual from buying and owning a firearm. These percentages indicate

how difficult it is for survivors to successfully obtain a conviction—and by extension, how difficult it is for these laws to prevent firearms from getting into the hands of individuals with violent tendencies. The Fifth Circuit's recent decision in *United States v. Rahimi*, which held that "the federal prohibition on gun possession for people subject to domestic violence restraining orders is unconstitutional under the Second Amendment," only reinforces this point.[75] Ultimately, these findings evidence that while effective laws must prohibit those with domestic violence convictions from purchasing firearms, policy solutions must also address the barriers that survivors face in obtaining protection.

While all shooters included in this study had a history of perpetrating domestic violence, the type of abuse they inflicted on their intimate partners and family members varied. Most were abusive in multiple ways. The most common form of abuse involved threats and coercive control (64%). A smaller but still significant proportion of shooters threatened their victims with a deadly weapon (28%). While some (16%) were sexually violent towards their romantic partners or family members, most (62%) subjected their victims to non-sexual physical violence.

The tendency for perpetrators of mass shootings to subject their domestic violence victims to threats and coercive control is worrisome but unsurprising. Coercive control is a powerful form of psychological abuse that often leaves little physical evidence.[76] The pervasiveness of this form of abuse is made even more difficult to address by systemic misogyny that divests women of credibility and subjects women to bias in the legal system.[77] These policy failures are rooted in a patriarchal culture that discredits women's experiences, overlooks

[75] "United States v. Rahimi: The Fifth Circuit's Dangerous and Extreme Decision," Everytown, February 8, 2023, https://www.everytown.org/united-states-v-rahimi-the-fifth-circuits-dangerous-and-extreme-decision/.
[76] "Power and Control," The Hotline, accessed June 10, 2023, https://www.thehotline.org/identify-abuse/power-and-control/.
[77] Schiller and Sidorsky, "Federalism, Policy Diffusion, and Gender Equality"; Alana Bassin, "Why Packing a Pistol Perpetuates Patriarchy," *HASTINGS WOMEN'S LAW JOURNAL* 8 (September 1997).

survivors' voices, and privileges male control and power. In this sense, threats and coercive control can be more difficult to prove in a legal setting, often allowing abusers to circumvent legal repercussions for domestic violence.

Other Gender-Based Violence and Bias

Importantly, a significant percentage of shooters (37%) engaged in non-domestic GBV. Such violence included sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape.[78] This percentage might speak to the tendency of those who commit domestic violence against women to also be violent towards women who are not intimate partners or family members. It might also indicate that some shooters relied on violence as masculine performance to reinforce their sense of social dominance over women generally, as McDermott and Madfis suggest.[79]

Additionally, a third had made public statements reflecting misogynistic beliefs and inclinations, which might also underscore their hatred for women and girls or their sense of threatened masculinity. The fact that over half of shooters who were motivated by hatred towards a specific group were motivated by hatred towards women and girls is likely rooted in a similar explanation. Once again, McDermott and Madfis's respective conceptualizations of threatened masculinity apply.[80]

Grievance and Motivation

The motivations of mass shooters varied. Over half (52%) were motivated by some type of interpersonal conflict. For 30% of these shooters, this conflict was related to an intimate relationship. 18% of shooters were motivated by legal issues, 16% by employment issues, and

[78] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[79] McDermott, "The Role of Gender in Political Violence," 1; Madfis, "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger," 67.
[80] McDermott, "The Role of Gender in Political Violence," 1; Madfis, "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger," 67.

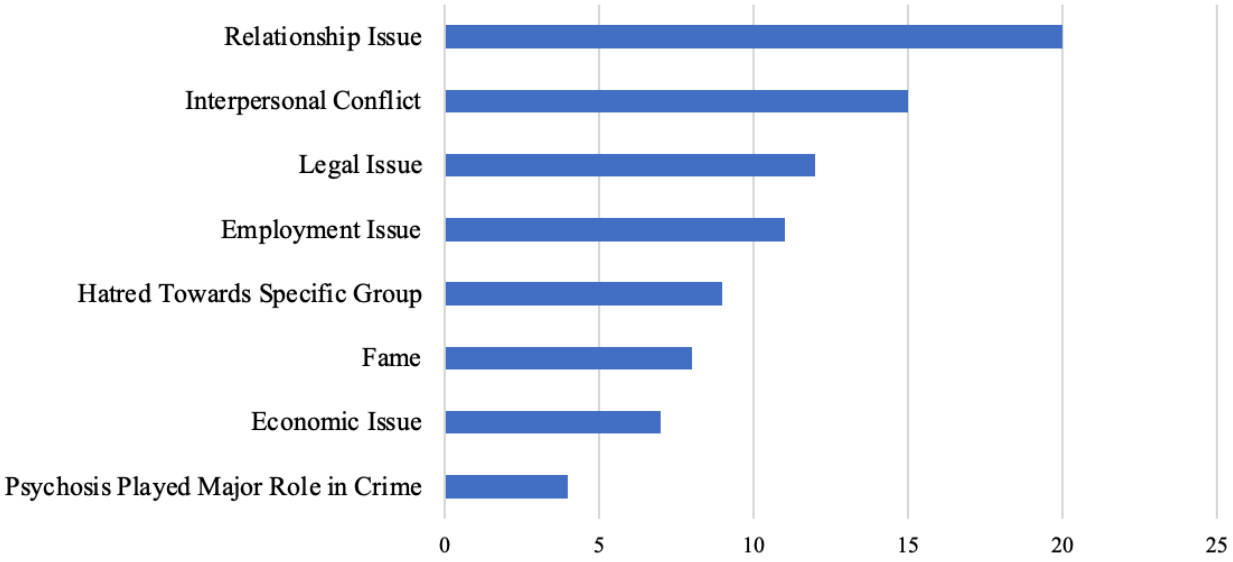
10% by economic issues. Meanwhile, 12% of shooters were motivated by a desire for fame. In 13% of cases, the shooters' main motivation was hatred towards a specific group. Of the nine individuals motivated by such hatred, over half (55%) were specifically motivated by misogyny. In some cases, the shooter was driven by multiple motives. However, there were only four shootings in which psychosis was identified as the major overriding factor contributing to the crime (Figure 4.4).

It is possible that some of these grievances threatened shooters' senses of masculinity. Thus, as Madfis suggests, these shootings may have been attempts to reclaim or establish a bolstered sense of power, control, or masculinity.[81] The weaponization of guns and violence as a response to these grievances reflects the interplay between patriarchy and gun violence.

Notably, 67% of the shooters made some sort of public statement reflecting an inclination towards violence at some point in their lives and nearly half (49%) communicated their intent to do harm to a third-party shortly before the shooting. Moreover, a quarter of shooters had demonstrated a specific interest in past mass shootings prior to committing a mass shooting themselves. These numbers perhaps reveal a tendency of existing intervention strategies to prioritize individuals' access to guns over public safety and human rights.

[81] Madfis, "Triple Entitlement and Homicidal Anger," 67.

Figure 4.4: Shooter Motivation



Signs of a Crisis

A significant percentage of shooters (82%) experienced recent stressors that likely contributed to their motivations. Employment issues and recent break-ups constituted the largest percentage of these stressors (47% and 40%, respectively). Some perpetrators experienced legal issues (22%), family issues (18%), and economic issues (16%) shortly prior to the shooting. Some perpetrators experienced multiple stressors simultaneously and many displayed multiple signs that they were in crisis. Most perpetrators (90%) revealed they were in crisis by behaving in uncharacteristic, troubling, or violent ways. In fact, 39% of shooters became increasingly antisocial prior to the shooting. A striking 66% became increasingly abusive in the months, weeks, and days before the attack. While 12% showed signs of being in crisis mere days before the shooting, 13% displayed signs weeks prior—and 28% months prior—to the shooting. Strikingly, nearly half (46%) showed signs of being in crisis years prior to the shooting.

Conclusion

These findings uncover two key themes. First, they reveal the interconnectedness of gun culture, masculinity, and violence in the US. Second, they suggest that the legal system is falling short in protecting survivors of domestic violence, instead allowing violent individuals with histories of misogyny and GBV to easily access firearms.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents case studies of three men who carried out mass shootings—Omar Mateen, David Patrick Kelley, and Nikolas Cruz and provides insight into their backgrounds, criminal histories, mental health, misogynistic tendencies, grievances and motivations, and signs of crisis. I focus on these categories to provide a comprehensive but targeted overview of the risks these men posed and the warning signs they revealed. This chapter also explores the narratives and experiences of the intimate partners and family members towards whom these men were abusive. It concludes with a discussion of two themes underlying these cases: 1) guns and violence and 2) misogyny and GBV.

Case Study 1: Omar Mateen

Shooting Details

In the early hours of June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen entered Pulse, an LGBTQ+ Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and carried out the deadliest mass shooting ever committed by a single person at the time.[82] Within 30 minutes, he used two guns kill 49 people and injure 53 more.[83] Mateen purchased both guns legally, completing a three-day waiting period upon purchasing a handgun and, in compliance with Florida law, bringing his AR-15 rifle home the day of the purchase.[84] Mateen passed background checks for both purchases despite two prior investigations by the FBI for suspected terrorist affiliations and a lengthy history of domestic violence.

[82] NPR, "Orlando Shooting: What Happened At The Pulse Nightclub Attack," June 26, 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/06/16/482322488/orlando-shooting-what-happened-update.
[83] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[84] Charlotte Alter, "Orlando Shooter Bought Gun Legally, Store Owner Says," Time, June 14, 2016, https://time.com/4367592/orlando-shooting-gun-store-owner/.

Shooter Profile

General Background

In many ways, Mateen does not fit the "straight white Christian male" archetype of a mass shooter: He was a Muslim, Middle Eastern, and likely homosexual man.[85] In this respect, analyzing his case is important because it lends insight into the extent to which the patterns identified in this study's quantitative findings apply to those who do not fit the typical perpetrator profile. Mateen was 29 years old at the time of the shooting, married to his second wife, and had children.[86] Though he committed several disciplinary infractions in elementary school, he graduated from high school early and in the top half of his class, and went on to complete an associate degree in criminal justice technology at a community college.[87] He never served in the military but worked in law enforcement as an employee for the Corrections Department and later as a security guard.[88]

Crime and Violence

Mateen had a criminal record prior to the shooting, having been arrested and charged with misdemeanor battery after physically assaulting a classmate in high school.[89] Mateen also had a lengthy documented history of domestic violence, directing physical violence, threats, and coercive control against both his first and second wives.[90] Though Mateen never faced domestic violence-related charges or interacted with law enforcement for domestic violence, he was known to the FBI and investigated twice for potential ties to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

[85] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[86] The Violence Project.
[87] The Violence Project; Dan Barry et al., "'Always Agitated. Always Mad': Omar Mateen, According to Those Who Knew Him," The New York Times, June 18, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/us/omar-mateen-gunman-orlando-shooting.html.
[88] Barry et al., "'Always Agitated. Always Mad': Omar Mateen, According to Those Who Knew Him."
[89] "Orlando Shooter Omar Mateen Had a Juvenile Arrest Record," Tampa Bay Times, accessed June 27, 2023, https://www.tampabay.com/news/orlando-shooter-omar-mateen-had-a-juvenile-arrest-record/2282020/.
[90] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."

(ISIS).[91] Both investigations concluded that while Mateen espoused radical Islamist propaganda, he was not in contact with terrorists overseas.

Mental Health

Mateen never received treatment for mental health problems, and though there were indications he likely had a psychiatric disorder, he was never formally diagnosed.[92] He was, however, emotionally and physically abused as a child. [93] He also struggled with alcohol and drug use, experimenting with marijuana in high school and becoming a heavy steroid user as an adult.[94] There is no documentation that Mateen was suicidal, but it is likely that he intended to die after the shooting.[95]

Misogyny and Gender-Based Violence

Mateen had long expressed violent misogynistic tendencies.[96] As a child, he often witnessed his father being violent towards his mother. [97] An elementary school assessment revealed that he would often engage in "much talk about violence & sex."[98] Such violent and misogynistic talk ultimately manifested in violent behaviors. In fact, Mateen abused his first and second wives, directing non-sexual physical violence, threats, and coercive control against both.[99] Nonetheless, Mateen never faced legal repercussions for domestic violence.[100] More

[91] The Violence Project.
[92] The Violence Project.
[93] The Violence Project.
[94] The Violence Project; Barry et al., "'Always Agitated. Always Mad': Omar Mateen, According to Those Who Knew Him."
[95] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[96] The Violence Project.
[97] Elliott Jones, "Domestic Battery Charge Dropped against Omar Mateen's Mother," TC Palm, June 14, 2016, https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/special-reports/orlando-shooting/2016/06/14/domestic-battery-charge-dropped-against-omar-mateens-mother/89413376/.
[98] Barry et al., "'Always Agitated. Always Mad': Omar Mateen, According to Those Who Knew Him."
[99] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[100] Soraya Chemaly, "In Orlando, as Usual, Domestic Violence Was Ignored Red Flag," *Rolling Stone*, June 13, 2016, http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/in-orlando-as-usual-domestic- violence-was-ignored-red-flag-20160613.

generally, Mateen regularly expressed contempt towards women and members of other groups of which he was not a part. A coworker recalled that Mateen "always referred to every other race, religion, gender in a derogatory way."[101] The coworker explained that "He did not like black people at all. That was mentioned once or twice, but more so was women. He did not like women at all. He did like women in a sexual way, but he did not respect them."[102]

Mateen may have been conflicted about his sexuality. Although he expressed homophobic sentiments, he had reportedly frequented the LGBTQ+ nightclub where he carried out his massacre, and he may have been using a gay dating app.[103] Some suggest "he may have been gay and closeted, potentially adding another dimension to his homophobia" and misogyny.[104]

Grievance and Motivation

Mateen exhibited misogynistic, homophobic, and racist prejudices. A coworker also believed that "he had anger management issues."[105] The coworker recalled: "Something would set him off, but the things that would set him off were always women, race or religion."[106] Mateen's motives have been disputed, with some suggesting that the shooting was intended to target the LGBTQ+ population and others believing the venue was chosen randomly.[107]

[101] Pete Williams et al., "Gunman Omar Mateen Described as Belligerent, Racist and 'Toxic,'" NBC News, June 12, 2016, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/orlando-nightclub-massacre/terror-hate-what-motivated-orlando-nightclub-shooter-n590496.
[102] Williams et al.
[103] CBS, "Orlando Shooting: Man Who Says He Was Omar Mateen's Gay Lover Speaks Out," June 21, 2016, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/orlando-shooting-man-who-says-he-was-omar-mateen-gay-lover-speaks-out-univision/.
[104] Chemaly, "In Orlando, as Usual, Domestic Violence Was Ignored Red Flag."
[105] Chemaly.
[106] Chemaly.
[107] Tim Fitzsimons, "What Really Happened That Night at Pulse," NBC News, June 13, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/what-really-happened-night-pulse-n882571.

Regardless of Mateen's intention, the attack has been considered a hate crime against the LGBTQ+ population rooted in misogyny, homophobia, and racism.[108]

Signs of a Crisis

Though Mateen had long displayed violent tendencies, he became increasingly abusive and reckless in the weeks prior to the shooting.[109] He spent thousands of dollars on armaments the week before and "left the house carrying a bag of guns two days before the shooting."[110] He also posted pro-ISIS messages on Facebook.[111] It does not appear as though a specific stressor or event triggered Mateen to perpetrate the shooting. Rather, the atrocity seems to be a culmination of Mateen's longstanding misogynistic and violent beliefs and inclinations.

Survivor Testimonies

Sitora Yusufiy

Mateen's first wife, Sitora Yusufiy, authored an opinion piece in Marie Claire in 2016 in which she described the abuse she endured during their marriage. The two had met on Myspace in 2008, connected quickly, and were married by 2009. Yusufiy recalled:

> The first month of marriage was actually quite nice. I moved to Orlando, and he took me around to see the sights…But soon I saw another side to him. We were shopping in a supermarket one day when I wandered into a different aisle. Suddenly, I heard him shouting my name. When I found him in the next aisle, he grabbed my arms and dug his fingernails into my veins, hard. He said it was a technique he had learned from his officer friends to make the opponent surrender. The look on his face was pure control and domination. I started crying, and we left the store. Outside, he yelled at me, saying my tears would get him in trouble.[112]

[108] Fitzsimons.
[109] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[110] The Violence Project.
[111] The Violence Project.
[112] Sitora Yusufiy, "The Orlando Shooter Was My Ex," Marie Claire, September 26, 2016, https://www.marieclaire.com/culture/news/a22733/the-orlando-shooter-was-my-ex/.

Yusufiy explained that this instance was the beginning of a marriage characterized by Mateen's verbal abuse, physical violence, death threats, and coercive control. On one occasion, Yusufiy was "asleep in front of the TV when he pulled [her] up by the hair and started slapping [her], and then choking [her] until [she] gasped for air. He claimed it was because [she] hadn't done the laundry."[113] Mateen isolated Yusufiy: "He didn't want me to call my family or go anywhere except the daycare center where I worked."[114] Once when Mateen heard Yusufiy calling her mother, "he slapped the phone from [her] hand, causing [her] to bang [her] head on the headboard of the bed.[115] When her parents finally realized how bad the abuse was, they met with Yusufiy, Mateen, and his parents to explain how miserable Yusufiy was. Mateen's father "started shouting insults," and Mateen "reached for the back pocket of his shorts" as if to pull out a gun."[116] Yusufiy recalls: "As he reached for his pocket, my mother screamed, and my dad pulled us free. We jumped in the car and drove off as Omar banged on the hood. That was the last time I saw him. I filed for divorce, and it was finalized in 2011."[117]

Yusufiy's story reveals patterns that are often present in abusive intimate relationships. Specifically, the fact that their marriage was pleasant before Mateen began directing threats and physical violence against her is unfortunately an all-too common experience shared by domestic violence survivors.[118] Similarly, Mateen's attempts to isolate Yusufiy from her family and community served his greater goal of power and domination, a tactic often employed by abusers to ensure their victims remain under their control.[119] The fact that Yusufiy struggled to reach out

[113] Yusufiy.
[114] Yusufiy.
[115] Yusufiy.
[116] Yusufiy.
[117] Yusufiy.
[118] "Power and Control."
[119] "Power and Control."

for help is also typical in abusive relationships where victims have few opportunities to successfully escape.[120]

Yusufiy expressed shock and devastation at Mateen's perpetration of such a horrific mass murder. She wrote: "Even after what I went through, I never would imagine he would do something so extreme…I had seen Omar raise his voice to his family, but I had not seen him be violent to anyone other than me."[121] Yusufiy's comment reflects the common tendency to conceptualize domestic violence as confined to the dynamics of an intimate relationship. However, as her ex-husband's story reveals—and as this study corroborates—domestic violence is not only often embedded in a history of violence but may also be indicative of the potential to commit mass violence.

Noor Salman

Shortly after his divorce with Yusufiy was finalized, Mateen met Noor Salman on a website called Arab Lounge.[122] Salman revealed the details of their relationship in a series of exclusive interviews with Vice News. As in Mateen's first marriage, the two were quickly wed.[123] The abuse did not start right away: "He was the sweetest when we first met. After I got pregnant, the script flipped."[124] Once the abuse began, Salman explained, "I made sure I never pissed him off. I was on eggshells every day."[125] Mateen was physically, verbally, and sexually violent, raping, kicking, punching, and directing threats and insults against her throughout their

[120] Virginia Physicians for Women, "Why It Takes Women 7 Attempts To Leave An Abusive Relationship - And How You Can Help," accessed June 27, 2023, https://vpfw.com/blog/why-it-takes-women-7-attempts-to-leave-an-abusive-relationship/.
[121] Yusufiy, "The Orlando Shooter Was My Ex."
[122] Rhana Natour, "Noor Salman, Wife of the Pulse Nightclub Gunman, Is Ready to Speak," Vice News, October 13, 2021, https://www.vice.com/en/article/3aqxpy/noor-salman-wife-of-pulse-nightclub-gunman-speaks.
[123] Natour.
[124] Natour, quoting Salman.
[125] Natour, quoting Salman.

five-year marriage.[126] One time, Mateen cut his two-year-old son's toy pig in half right in front of him.[127] Salman was "enraged": She remembers saying "It's one thing when you want to hurt me, but don't attack the child like that."[128] Mateen responded by slapping her, warning her to "never challenge him like that again," and threatening "to kill her if she ever left him."

Though she considered leaving, "after thinking through her options, she decided she had nowhere to go."[129] She had a tumultuous relationship with her mother and did not feel that she could reach out to her for help.[130] At one point in 2012, she did turn to her father-in-law, who claimed that he told Omar to treat her better.[131] But the violence did not stop, and Salman was left with nowhere to turn.

The night of the shooting, Salman was awoken by a call from the police, questioned by the FBI, and eventually arrested because she "admitted to seeing Mateen visiting jihadi websites, expressing anger at events unfolding in the Middle East, and buying a rifle."[132] After years of being prosecuted for allegedly knowing Mateen's plans to perpetrate the mass shooting, Salman was acquitted because the jurors concluded that while she may have known that Mateen was going to commit an act of violence, she was likely unaware of specifics.[133] They did not, however, consider the ways in which the domestic violence to which she was subjected rendered her another one of Mateen's victims. Rather than recognizing the severity of the abuse Salman endured and the numerous lethality factors present in her interactions with Mateen—which

[126] Natour.
[127] Natour.
[128] Natour, quoting Salman.
[129] Natour.
[130] Natour.
[131] Natour.
[132] Natour.
[133] Natour.

reveal the danger she had faced if she had attempted to leave him and report his abuse—the legal system wrongly criminalized Salman.

The criminalization of survivors of domestic violence is yet another unfortunate but uncommon trend. Instead of being offered protection and support, survivors are too often punished for attempting to defend themselves.[134] As a result of her abuse at the hands of Mateen, his devastating mass shooting, and her revictimization by local legal authorities, Salman is left struggling with severe psychological trauma: "Two years later, I cannot sleep without a pill, and I never want to leave my home. I've had to build a wall around myself for my own protection. I flinch if someone touches me, and I hate surprises, and that innocent, happy girl who used to wear colors dresses in black."[135]

Case Study 2: Devin Patrick Kelley

Shooting Details

On November 5, 2017, David Patrick Kelley strapped his wife, Danielle, to their bed, grabbed his Ruger AR-556 rifle and two handguns, and dressed in tactical gear.[136] Kelley then headed straight to a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, where he killed 25 people and injured 20 more.[137] Though Kelley did not know any of the victims, he had attended sermons at the church with Danielle. His mother-in-law, Michelle Shields, also belonged to the church. At the time of the shooting, Kelley was legally prohibited from purchasing a firearm because of domestic violence-related convictions he had received in the US Air Force (USAF). However,

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[134] Katherine Lorenz, Anne Kirkner, and Sarah E. Ullman, "Qualitative Study of Sexual Assault Survivors' Post-Assault Legal System Experiences," *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation: The Official Journal of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation (ISSD)* 20, no. 3 (2019): 263–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2019.1592643.
[135] Natour, "Noor Salman, Wife of the Pulse Nightclub Gunman, Is Ready to Speak."
[136] CBS News, "Gunman Devin Kelley's Wife Says He Cuffed Her to Bed, Said He'd Be 'Right Back' Before Deadly Rampage in Sutherland Springs," August 13, 2018, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sutherland-springs-texas-church-gunman-devin-kelley-wife-speaks-out/.
[137] CBS News.

the USAF failed to report Kelley's record to the FBI, so Kelley passed background checks on six separate purchases from federally licensed firearms dealers in the months leading up to the shooting.

Shooter Profile

General Background

Kelley was a heterosexual white man and 26 years old at the time of the shooting.[138] Though he grew up Christian, he began to shun Christianity as he got older and eventually became an atheist.[139] Kelley graduated from high school in 2009, though he was expelled and homeschooled for three months, during his sophomore year.[140] He was married twice and had two children with his second wife, Danielle.[141] At the time of the shooting, he worked as a security guard but had previously struggled to secure and maintain jobs.[142] Kelley had a history of military employment, having served in the USAF from 2010-2014.[143] While in the Air Force, Kelley received disciplinary infractions for sneaking weapons onto a military base and threatening his commanding officers.[144]

Crime and Violence

Kelley had a lengthy criminal history. He was not known to the police or FBI, but at the time of the mass shooting had a criminal record with convictions of aggravated assault, simple

[138] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[139] Silvia Foster-Frau, "Wife of Sutherland Springs Gunman Devin Kelley Speaks for First Time about Day of the Massacre," San Antonio Express-News, August 11, 2018, https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/texas-shooting/article/Wife-of-Sutherland-Springs-gunman-Devin-Kelley-13145534.php.
[140] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation" (U.S. Department of Defense, December 6, 2018), 5, https://media.defense.gov/2018/Dec/07/2002070069/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2019-030_REDACTED.PDF.
[141] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[142] Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."
[143] Foster-Frau, "Wife of Sutherland Springs Gunman Devin Kelley Speaks for First Time about Day of the Massacre."
[144] Foster-Frau.

assault, and animal cruelty.[145] Kelley was court-martialed and incarcerated in 2012 for two counts of assault on his then-wife, Tessa Brennaman, and her son.[146] Two years later, in August 2014, he was charged with a misdemeanor count of animal cruelty after he punched a husky.[147] Additionally, Kelley played violent video games, "launched personal attacks against friends on Facebook," and often posted about gun violence on Facebook, according to a former classmate and Facebook friend.[148] His neighbor, Robert Gonzalez, also reported hearing gunfire from Kelley's property every morning in the week prior to the shooting.[149]

Mental Health

Kelley struggled with a mood disorder and suicidality. He sought counseling at a mental health clinic on several occasions during 2011 and 2012, citing work-related, family, and legal stressors as motivations for seeking help.[150] The first psychologist identified that treatment for Kelley would focus on "anxiety/attention/occupational [issues]" and that they would work to "continue to develop relational and mood management coping skills."[151] Another psychologist indicated that while "Kelley had difficulty interacting with authority figures," he did not present a safety concern.[152] A few months later, the same psychologist noted that Kelley was "able to attend to and focus on pertinent material at home and work" and able to "control and direct his energy appropriately," though there were "no significant changes in [his] symptoms."[153] Over the course of 17 sessions at the clinic, Kelley was prescribed various antidepressants, an SSRI, and a

[145] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[146] The Violence Project.
[147] Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."
[148] Emanuella Grinberg and Eliott C. McLaughlin, "Texas Church Shooter Devin Patrick Kelley's Troubled Past Emerges," CNN, November 8, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/06/us/devin-kelley-texas-church-shooting-suspect/index.html.
[149] Grinberg and McLaughlin.
[150] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 11.
[151] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 11.
[152] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 11.
[153] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 11.

sedative hypnotic.[154] He did not receive treatment for mental health symptoms within six months prior to the shooting.[155]

Misogyny and Gender-Based Violence

Domestic Violence

Kelley had a lengthy history of domestic violence and non-domestic GBV. He was physically and verbally violent with his first wife and stepson, his second wife, and his mother-in-law.[156] His first wife, Tessa Brennaman, reported physical assaults to the Security Forces Squadron Patrol, which served as the USAF's police equivalent.[157] He was found guilty of striking, choking, and kicking Tessa and for fracturing his stepson's skull "with a force likely to produce death or grievous bodily harm."[158] These convictions not only led to a bad conduct discharge from the Air Force but also to a 12-month prison sentence.[159] Kelley initially denied the charges but eventually admitted to the assaults. In an affidavit, he stated: "I know I can be better, I just need a chance to prove it."[160]

Kelley was also abusive towards his second wife, Danielle Kelley, and her mother, Michelle Shields. Though Danielle never pursued legal action against Kelley, "court records indicate someone was granted a protection order against Kelley on Jan. 15, 2015…in El Paso

[154] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 11; The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[155] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[156] The Violence Project.
[157] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 1.
[158] Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."
[159] Colin Dwyer, "Texas Church Shooter May Have Been Motivated To Kill By 'Domestic Situation' : The Two-Way," *NPR*, November 6, 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/06/562299408/texas-church-shooter-may-have-been-motivated-to-kill-by-domestic-situation; Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."
[160] Paul J. Weber and Richard Lardner, "5 Years before Massacre, Gunman Promised Military Judge Not to Hurt Anyone," Air Force Times, April 27, 2018, https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/04/27/5-years-before-massacre-gunman-promised-military-judge-not-to-hurt-anyone/.

County."[161] It is unclear whether this order of protection was issued at the request of Danielle or her mother. The regional director of the Texas Department of Public Safety stated that it was known that Kelley "expressed anger towards his mother-in-law;" officials stated that Kelley had sent her a series of threatening texts shortly before the massacre.[162]

Other Gender-Based Violence and Bias

Kelley also had a history of non-domestic sexual offenses. His high school classmates called him "creepy" and claimed that he groped and harassed them.[163] He also allegedly sexually assaulted a 20-year-old woman while married to Tessa.[164] The woman reported the assault to Comal County Sheriff's Office deputies in June 2013, alleging that Kelley pinned her underneath him, attempted to put his hands down her pants, choked her, masturbated in front of her, and forced his penis into her mouth.[165] However, the woman did not follow up with the detectives for further investigation, and the case was deactivated.[166]

Grievance and Motivation

Investigators believe that "the [shooting] appeared to stem from a domestic dispute Kelley was having with his mother-in-law."[167] Though Kelley did not specifically threaten a mass shooting in his texts to Michelle, he threatened general violence.[168] It is unclear what the dispute was about, but Michelle had previously expressed concerns about Devin's controlling

[161] "Texas Church Shooting: Sutherland Springs Gunman Shot 3 Times -- Twice by Citizen," KSAT.com, accessed June 28, 2023, https://www.ksat.com/news/2017/11/08/texas-church-shooting-sutherland-springs-gunman-shot-3-times-twice-by-citizen/.
[162] CBS News, "Gunman Devin Kelley's Wife Says He Cuffed Her to Bed, Said He'd Be 'Right Back' Before Deadly Rampage in Sutherland Springs."
[163] CBS News.
[164] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 28.
[165] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 28.
[166] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 28.
[167] Weber and Lardner, "5 Years before Massacre, Gunman Promised Military Judge Not to Hurt Anyone."
[168] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."

and abusive behavior.[169] Reports indicate that during the shooting, Kelley seemed to be aiming for the corner of the church where Michelle typically sat.[170]

Signs of a Crisis

Kelley experienced employment stressors prior to the shooting. Though he was able to pass background checks for certain jobs, he usually quit or was fired after only a few months of work. A few months before the shooting, in July 2017, he was fired from his job as a security guard at a water park because he was "not a good fit."[171]

In the six months prior to the shooting, Kelley became increasingly isolated and abusive.[172] He threatened his mother-in-law on multiple occasions and continued to direct threats and coercive control against Danielle.[173] He also developed a "fatalistic attitude" and "questioned how much control people have in their lives."[174] For some acquaintances, signs of crisis were present for years before the shooting. A former classmate wrote on Facebook: "Over the years, we all saw him change into something he wasn't. To be completely honest, I'm not really surprised this happened, and I don't think anyone who knew him is very surprised either."[175]

[169] CBS News, "Gunman Devin Kelley's Wife Says He Cuffed Her to Bed, Said He'd Be 'Right Back' Before Deadly Rampage in Sutherland Springs."
[170] Foster-Frau, "Wife of Sutherland Springs Gunman Devin Kelley Speaks for First Time about Day of the Massacre."
[171] Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."
[172] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[173] Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."
[174] Foster-Frau, "Wife of Sutherland Springs Gunman Devin Kelley Speaks for First Time about Day of the Massacre."
[175] Rosenberg and Lowery, "Devin Patrick Kelley Had a Violent Past, Records Indicate."

Survivor Testimonies

Tessa Brennaman

Tessa Brennaman revealed the details of her abusive marriage with Devin Kelley in an exclusive interview with Inside Edition and through communication with the Security Forces Squadron to whom she reported the abuse. She recalled: "He would choke me, punch me, kick me. There would be times when I would be on the floor curled up and having to protect my organs because he would be violently kicking me on my side."[176] Several arguments escalated into extreme physical abuse. In one incident, he held her against the wall when she told him she did not want to visit his family and told her, "You better pack your bags, or I'll choke you to the ceiling and pass you out."[177] In another instance, the two argued because Tessa wanted to go for a walk. Kelley dragged her by her hair into the bathroom and stated, "I'm going to water-board you" before sticking "her head directly under the showerhead."[178] On another occasion, Tessa recalls, he told her: "I could just bury you somewhere here in the desert and nobody would ever find you."[179]

At one point, Tessa remembered asking him to slow down because he was speeding down the highway.[180] Tessa recalls: "He had a gun in his holster right here and he took that gun out and he put it to my temple, and he told me 'Do you want to die? Do you want to die?' And I knew better not to cry because if I cried, he was the type of person who would beat me until I

[176] Tessa Brennaman, Texas Gunman's Ex-Wife Reveals How He Bragged About Killing His Dog, November 13, 2017, https://www.insideedition.com/texas-gunmans-ex-wife-reveals-how-he-bragged-about-killing-his-dog-38056.
[177] Brennaman; Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 11.
[178] Brennaman, Texas Gunman's Ex-Wife Reveals How He Bragged About Killing His Dog; Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 12.
[179] Brennaman, Texas Gunman's Ex-Wife Reveals How He Bragged About Killing His Dog.
[180] Brennaman.

stopped crying." [181] Tessa responded by saying, "'Okay Devin, it's okay, you don't have to be upset, you're going to regret doing this' and finally got him to stop holding it to [her] head." [182]

In June 2011, Tessa reached out to her sister and reported the assault to the USAF Security Forces.[183] She recalled that Devin threatened her upon finding out she had told others about the abuse: "He told me, you know, if you do this, if you tell them, I'm going to kill you and your entire family."[184] He also told her, "My work is so lucky I do not have a shotgun because I would go in there and shoot everyone."[185] After Tessa reported the abuse, the Security Forces Squadron visited the Kelley residence. However, upon investigation, the Squadron reported that "no crime had been committed and there was no evidence of any injuries to either party."[186] In this sense, Tessa faced an uphill legal battle in seeking to protect herself and her son from Kelley's abuse.

It was only after Tessa told the Security Forces Squadron that Kelley's actions made her fear for her life that the Squadron granted Tessa a no-contact order.[187] This order prohibited Kelley from initiating communication with Tessa.[188] Eventually, Kelley was found guilty of assaulting Tessa and her son, but "prosecutors withdrew several other charges as part of their plea agreement with Mr. Kelley, including allegations that he repeatedly pointed a loaded gun at

[181] Brennaman.
[182] Brennaman.
[183] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 1.
[184] Brennaman, Texas Gunman's Ex-Wife Reveals How He Bragged About Killing His Dog.
[185] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 16.
[186] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 10.
[187] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 13.
[188] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, 13.

his wife."[189] Ultimately, Kelley was only sentenced to 12 months confinement.[190] Still, this legal victory for Tessa gave her the opportunity to file for divorce.[191]

Kelley's escalating physical violence and coercive control, threats to kill Tessa and her family, and act of holding a loaded gun to her temple reveal that Tessa was at acute risk of lethal domestic violence by Kelley, something that the investigating military authorities failed to recognize. Access to and use of guns is one of the most salient lethality factors in cases of domestic violence.[192] Kelley's death threats and gun usage thus indicate the severe and potentially lethal nature of his abuse. That Tessa reported this violence to law enforcement and that the initial investigation concluded that "no crime had been committed" exposes its lack of training and knowledge about the dynamics of domestic violence and risk factors for intimate partner homicide.[193]

Kelley was eventually convicted of domestic violence, a fact that sets this case apart from others. Kelley is one of seven mass shooters convicted of domestic violence out of a total of 67 shooters who had a documented history of domestic violence. This conviction, however, was not enough to stop Kelley from purchasing guns or to keep him from committing a devastating act of mass violence. His death threats and gun usage with Tessa constituted a significant red flag indicating his potential to kill her and others. However, like so many cases of domestic violence

[189] Alan Blinder, Dave Phillips, and Richard A. Oppel Jr., "In 2012 Assault, Texas Gunman Broke Skull of Infant Stepson," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2017, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/06/us/devin-patrick-kelley-texas.html.
[190] Blinder, Phillips, and Oppel Jr.
[191] Blinder, Phillips, and Oppel Jr.
[192] Stephanie E. F. Folkes, N. Zoe Hilton, and Grant T. Harris, "Weapon Use Increases the Severity of Domestic Violence but Neither Weapon Use nor Firearm Access Increases the Risk or Severity of Recidivism," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 28, no. 6 (April 2013): 1143–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260512468232.
[193] Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense, "Report of Investigation into the United States Air Force's Failure to Submit Devin Kelley's Criminal History Information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation," 13; ACLU, "Responses from the Field: Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, and Policing" (New York, NY: ACLU, 2015), https://www.aclu.org/report/sexual-assault-domestic-violence-and-policing.

that culminate in homicide or mass shootings, these acts were belittled and overlooked—likely because they occurred in the context of an intimate relationship.

Danielle Kelley

Danielle Kelley was less willing to publicly admit to the abuse she endured at the hands of her husband. Danielle admitted that their relationship was not healthy, but did not provide additional details, instead stating that their marriage "had its ups and downs like any other relationship."[194] However, her mother Michelle reported that Danielle would sometimes tell her about Kelley's abusive behavior, "but then the next minute, she'd pretend it never happened."[195]

Devin was controlling of Danielle, cutting her off from her family, friends, and community.[196] For example, he refused to allow Michelle to enter the hospital room after Danielle had given birth to their second child.[197] In fact, Devin sent Michelle a series of threatening texts when she asked to meet her grandchild, telling her: "I will personally make it my mission to destroy your entire life. I suggest you don't test my resolve." [198] The more Michelle confronted Devin about his abuse and expressed her concerns to Danielle, the further Danielle withdrew. [199] Danielle often defended Devin and in her recent interactions with the media has expressed how much she loves and misses him. [200] She believes Devin's mental health problems were to blame for the mass shooting and hopes that "others who need help will hear her story and not be afraid to seek counseling."[201] She states: "I wish people had more compassion and for people to take things seriously when somebody says they don't want to live

[194] Foster-Frau, "Wife of Sutherland Springs Gunman Devin Kelley Speaks for First Time about Day of the Massacre."
[195] Foster-Frau.
[196] Foster-Frau.
[197] Foster-Frau.
[198] Foster-Frau.
[199] Foster-Frau.
[200] Foster-Frau.
[201] Foster-Frau.

anymore. Or little factors that say 'you're not the same person.' Because it's okay to get help, it won't mean that you're different. It just means that you need a little extra love in life."[202]

While Danielle's interpretation differs dramatically from Tessa's, it similarly highlights dynamics often present in cases of domestic violence. Her defensiveness, denial, and inability to present a consistent story are indicative of a trauma response often shared by survivors.[203] Additionally, her increasing isolation from her family, friends, and community is an all-too-common occurrence among survivors in abusive relationships.[204] Clearly, Devin wielded power over Danielle to the extent that she was unable to recognize that their relationship was abusive.

Case Study 3: Nikolas Cruz

Shooting Details

On February 14, 2018, Nikolas Cruz entered Parkland, Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School with an AR-15 rifle and committed one of the most devastating mass shootings in Florida's history.[205] Cruz killed 17 people and injured 17 more.[206] Among the victims were six of his former classmates, a former teacher, the school's assistant football coach, and the school's athletic director.[207] Cruz had a disturbing history, having committed multiple acts of domestic violence and having often made statements reflecting an inclination towards violence.[208] Yet he successfully passed a background check and acquired his AR-15 through a

[202] Foster-Frau.
[203] Pat Wallace, "How Can She Still Love Him? Domestic Violence and the Stockholm Syndrome," *Community Practitioner* 80, no. 10 (October 1, 2007): 32–35.
[204] REACH Team Reach, "Survivor Voices: Isolation and Domestic Violence," REACH, December 1, 2016, https://reachma.org/blog/survivor-voices-isolation-and-domestic-violence/; Yusufiy, "The Orlando Shooter Was My Ex."
[205] Jose Pagliery and Curt Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal," CNN, February 17, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/16/us/florida-shooter-cruz-records-police-calls-to-home-invs/index.html.
[206] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[207] The Violence Project.
[208] The Violence Project.

federally licensed firearms dealer.[209] At the time, the background check involved a three-day waiting period and required that the purchaser be at least 18 years old.[210] Cruz had just turned 18 when he bought the gun.[211]

Shooter Profile

General Background

Nikolas Cruz is a heterosexual white man who committed the Parkland shooting at the age of 19.[212] Though he had previously attended Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, he was a poor student and was ultimately expelled for bringing a weapon to school.[213] After his expulsion, Cruz did not complete his degree but rather worked as a cashier at a local Dollar Tree.[214] Cruz was single at the time of the shooting.[215]

Crime and Violence

Like Kelley, Cruz had a lengthy history of crime and violence. He had a criminal record and was known to the police, who responded to calls about Nikolas on 18 occasions over the course of seven years.[216] His mother, Lynda, had allegedly made these calls when struggling to manage "his violent outbursts, threats, and self-destructive behavior."[217] Police characterized

[209] Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."
[210] "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Florida," *Giffords* (blog), accessed June 28, 2023, https://giffords.org/lawcenter/state-laws/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-florida/.
[211] Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."
[212] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[213] The Violence Project; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, "Unreported Information Showing Nikolas Cruz's Troubling Behavior" (MSD Public Safety Commission), accessed June 28, 2023, http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/Meetings/November-Meeting-Documents/Nov-13-145pm-Cruz-Behavior-Chris-Lyons.aspx.
[214] Florida Department of Law Enforcement, "Unreported Information Showing Nikolas Cruz's Troubling Behavior."
[215] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[216] Joel Rose and Brakkton Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect: A Story Of Red Flags, Ignored," *NPR*, March 1, 2018, sec. National, https://www.npr.org/2018/02/28/589502906/a-clearer-picture-of-parkland-shooting-suspect-comes-into-focus.
[217] Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."

these incidents as involving a "mentally ill person," "child/elderly abuse," and "domestic disturbance."[218] Cruz never faced legal repercussions for his actions in these cases. [219]

Cruz' violent tendencies extended beyond these incidents. Cruz had a lengthy history of animal abuse, played violent video games, and posted extensively on social media about gun violence and death.[220] He "posed with guns and knives in photos posted on Instagram and made a chilling online comment about a mass shooting carried out in New York [that] summer," writing: "Man I can do so much better."[221] He once left a comment on a YouTube video reading: "Im [sic] going to be a professional school shooter" and would sometimes introduce himself as a "school shooter."[222] These statements triggered two FBI alerts, but "protocols were not followed" and the information was not forwarded to the Miami field office.[223]

Mental Health

Cruz struggled with various mental health challenges, including depression, suicidality, ADHD, and anger management problems.[224] He was also allegedly raped and molested on multiple occasions by a neighbor when he was nine years-old, trauma for which he never received psychological treatment.[225] Cruz did receive treatment for other mental health problems, voluntarily subscribing to counseling and taking three different types of psychotropic medication.[226] He did not, however, receive treatment within six months prior to the shooting.[227]

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[218] Pagliery and Devine.
[219] Pagliery and Devine.
[220] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[221] Drew Griffin et al., "From 'Broken Child' to Mass Killer at Florida School," CNN, February 16, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/16/us/shooter-profile-invs/index.html.
[222] Rose and Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect"; Griffin et al., "From 'Broken Child' to Mass Killer at Florida School."
[223] Rose and Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect."
[224] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[225] Terry Spencer, "School Shooter Chose Valentine's Day to Ruin It Forever," AP News, October 6, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/shootings-education-florida-fort-lauderdale-parkland-school-shooting-045455fc875b7a91800468995c18dcf5.
[226] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[227] I The Violence Project.

Misogyny and Gender-Based Violence

Domestic Violence

Cruz was violent towards his family and his intimate partner. He physically and verbally abused his mother Lynda, exerted coercive control over her, and threatened family members with firearms on multiple occasions.[228] Many of these instances escalated to the point of police involvement. In one instance, Lynda called the police because Nikolas had allegedly hit her with a vacuum cleaner; in another, he threatened his brother with a gun.[229] On another occasion, he threw a chair, a dog bowl, and a glass across the room and called her "a useless bitch."[230] This incident resulted in Nikolas being handcuffed in the back of a police car until a counselor at a nearby behavioral health facility arrived and "gave Nikolas his prescribed medication."[231] Despite the violent nature of these incidents, none were deemed "arrestable under Florida law" and most of the police calls resulted in "no paperwork filed."[232] Thus, Cruz never faced legal repercussions for his actions.

In addition to being violent with his mother, Cruz was physically violent towards and directed threats and coercive control against his ex-girlfriend.[233] Even after they broke up, Cruz continued to stalk and harass her.[234] No order of protection was issued against him, nor was he convicted of domestic violence.[235]

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[228] The Violence Project; Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."
[229] Rose and Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect."
[230] Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."
[231] Pagliery and Devine.
[232] CNN, "Florida Shooter Showed Violence at Home, Police Reports Reveal"; Rose and Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect."
[233] Yasmine Issa, "'A Profoundly Masculine Act': Mass Shootings, Violence Against Women, and the Amendment That Could Forge a Path Forward," *California Law Review* 107 (April 2019), https://www.californialawreview.org/print/a-profoundly-masculine-act-mass-shootings-violence-against-women-and-the-amendment-that-could-forge-a-path-forward.
[234] Issa.
[235] Issa.

Other Gender-Based Violence and Bias

Cruz had misogynistic biases. His former peer tutor—a female classmate he had previously physically assaulted—recalled feeling uncomfortable when she was assigned as his tutor.[236] She later wrote in a New York Times article: "Despite my discomfort, I sat down with him, alone. I was forced to endure his cursing me out and ogling my chest until the hour-long session ended."[237] Cruz's internet search history in the months prior to the shooting lends additional insight into his violent misogyny. Searches included: "rape caught on video," "how to get into a relationship," "how to get a girlfriend," "hot middle school girl in dress," "porn uniform," and "womens [sic] viagra for sale."[238]

Grievance and Motivation

Cruz also had racist, homophobic, and religious prejudices. One of his former classmates recalls that Cruz wore pro-America paraphernalia, spoke of the term "White Power," and had Swastikas drawn on his backpack and on his left wrist.[239] He also made comments about Mateen, saying that "he was glad that they killed all those gay people."[240] Not only did Cruz openly espouse racist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic views, he also made public statements reflecting inclinations towards violence. His Instagram posts often included pictures of firearms and statements like "I wanna shoot people with my AR-15."[241]

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[236] Isabelle Robinson, "I Tried to Befriend Nikolas Cruz. He Still Killed My Friends," The New York Times, March 27, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/opinion/nikolas-cruz-shooting-florida.html.
[237] Robinson.
[238] Special Agent Randy Camp, Special Agent Chuck Massucci, and Special Agent John Suess, "Cruz's Cell Phone Content and Internet Searches" (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, November 8, 2018), https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/Meetings/November-Meeting-Documents/Nov-14-1045-am-Cruz-Cell-Phone-and-Internet-John-S.aspx.
[239] Gabrielle Fonrouge and Ruth Brown, "Alleged School Shooter Was Abusive to Ex-Girlfriend: Classmate," *NY Post*, February 15, 2018, https://nypost.com/2018/02/15/alleged-school-shooter-was-abusive-to-ex-girlfriend-classmate/; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, "Unreported Information Showing Nikolas Cruz's Troubling Behavior," 33.
[240] Florida Department of Law Enforcement, "Unreported Information Showing Nikolas Cruz's Troubling Behavior," 33.
[241] Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."

Cruz's motives were likely rooted in a complex combination of fame-seeking, his relationship difficulties, the recent death of his mother, his mental health problems, his anger at and hatred toward women, and his obsession with guns and violence. In 2022, he told a psychologist that he chose to commit the massacre on Valentine's Day "because no one loved him, he wanted to ruin the holiday forever for anyone associated with the school." Clearly, the attack was deliberate and planned.

Signs of a Crisis

Cruz displayed several signs of crisis. He was violent towards his mother, stalked and harassed his ex-girlfriend, abused animals, espoused violent and hateful rhetoric, and reflected inclinations towards violence and obsession with firearms in his social media posts.[242] His internet search history in the months prior to the shooting included phrases such as: "shooting people massacre," "is killing people easy," "crime scene cleaner," "best ar-15 sight," "school shooters," and "how long does it take for a cop to show up to a school shooting."[243] These searches reveal the interplay of Cruz's misogynistic tendencies and his obsession with guns, violence, and killing.

Survivor Testimonies

Lynda Cruz

Lynda did not come forward to speak about her abuse at the hands of Nikolas but prior to the shooting had recalled many instances of Nikolas' violence to the police. In November 2013, Lynda said she was "thrown against a wall because she took away an Xbox gaming system."[244] On two separate occasions in January 2014 and June 2014, she called the police to report verbal

[242] The Violence Project, "Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966-Present."
[243] Camp, Massucci, and Suess, "Cruz's Cell Phone Content and Internet Searches."
[244] Rose and Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect."

abuse.[245] In 2017, shortly after his eighteenth birthday, she called the police because Nikolas had hit her with a vacuum and called her a "useless bitch."[246] One witness to this abuse was a bank employee with whom Lynda had interacted on several occasions. Lynda disclosed to the employee that Nikolas was verbally and physically abusive to her, showing the employee bruises on her wrists after one of their physical altercations.[247]

The bank employee also reported overhearing conversations between Nikolas and Lynda in which Nikolas was verbally abusive and directed threats against Lynda. Specifically, the employee heard Nikolas repeatedly tell Lynda to kill herself.[248] He also threatened to kill her by burning the house down and watching her burn. On one occasion, Lynda told the banker: "If anything happens to me, you know it was Nick."[249] Such death threats reveal Cruz's potential for lethal violence.

Clearly, Lynda sought help by calling in law enforcement on multiple occasions and informing others of Nikolas' abuse. The fact that none of the incidents of abuse she reported "appeared arrestable under Florida law," coupled with the fact that most of the police calls resulted in "no paperwork filed," reveals a broader tendency to not treat domestic violence as a serious offense. [250] In this sense, Lynda's story is not dissimilar from other survivors, many of whom report multiple instances of domestic violence without ever having their abusers face legal repercussions.[251]

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[245] Florida Department of Law Enforcement, "Broward County Sheriff's Office Contact Summary with Nikolas Cruz" (Florida Department of Law Enforcement), accessed June 28, 2023, https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/Meetings/August-Meeting-Documents/Presentations/Broward-County-Sheriff-Summary-of-Cruz-Contacts.aspx.
[246] Pagliery and Devine, "School Shooter Showed Violence and Mental Instability at Home, Police Reports Reveal."
[247] Florida Department of Law Enforcement, "Unreported Information Showing Nikolas Cruz's Troubling Behavior," 23.
[248] Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 23.
[249] Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 25.
[250] CNN, "Florida Shooter Showed Violence at Home, Police Reports Reveal"; Rose and Booker, "Parkland Shooting Suspect."
[251] ACLU, "Responses from the Field: Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, and Policing."

Cruz's Ex-Girlfriend

Cruz's ex-girlfriend, Angie, has chosen not to speak with the media. However, testimonies from and interviews with her classmates, as well as text messages between her and Cruz that were submitted to Cruz's trial, similarly reveal Cruz's use of verbal abuse, threats, and coercive control. One of Angie's classmates, Connor Dietrich, stated: "He stalked her and threatened her. He was like, 'I'm going to kill you,' and he would say awful things to her and harass her to the point I would walk her to the bus just to make sure she was OK. We all made sure she was never alone."[252] Another classmate and friend, Ariana Lopez, who spoke with Inside Edition, recalled that "he started becoming violent and very obsessive and aggressive to the point where it was somewhat frightening." Lopez said that Angie "became terrified of him:" "Things got weird fast. He hit her and would send her very violent, accusing messages saying she was cheating on him with other friends, that she didn't deserve him, he was going to kill her. She had marks. She was scared of him." Lopez reports that Cruz similarly threatened Angie with gun violence, telling her "I'm going to be the next school shooter. I have all these guns. If you mess with me, I will kill you."[253] Angie broke up with Cruz at the request of her mother, A report who grew increasingly concerned for her safety.[254] These testimonies reveal the presence of multiple lethality factors, including Cruz's physical violence, threats to kill Angie, and threats to commit a mass shooting.

[252] Fonrouge and Brown, "Alleged School Shooter Was Abusive to Ex-Girlfriend: Classmate."
[253] Ariana Lopez, Parkland School Shooting: Student Says She Was Stalked by Nikolas Cruz Prior to Attack, accessed June 28, 2023, https://www.insideedition.com/parkland-school-shooting-student-says-she-was-stalked-nikolas-cruz-prior-attack-40890.
[254] Lopez.

Though Angie never called the police or sought a protective order against Cruz, their text messages on the day of the shooting reveal that he was obsessed with her and was stalking her.[255] This exchange is detailed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Cruz's Texts with his Ex-Girlfriend on February 14, 2018[256]

Cruz	Hey
Cruz	Do you want me to go away Angie?
Cruz	I need to know
Angie	You're scaring me and I want you to leave me alone
Cruz	…..like leave you alone for good
Cruz	Angie I need to know
Cruz	Hello
Cruz	Angie it's very important
Angie	I'm in class I can't just text you whenever you want me to stop
Angie	That annoying double texting and be respectful and let me answer when
Angie	I can
Cruz	I love you
Cruz	You will always know I love you
Cruz	:')
Cruz	Eat well, sleep well, and behave well my love
Cruz	^_^
Angie	You know I have a boyfriend right?
Cruz	No I don't
Cruz	Doesn't matter anymore
Cruz	I love you
Cruz	^_^^_^^_^^_^^_^^_^
Angie	I've told you that before, and so has Gigi
Cruz	Angie
Cruz	Your the love of my life
Cruz	Idc if you have a boyfriend

[255] "'Leave Me Alone': Nikolas Cruz Rejectedby Girl Repeatedly Mins before Shooting" (Fox News, n.d.), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfqrq7bbH2Y.
[256] "'Leave Me Alone': Nikolas Cruz Rejectedby Girl Repeatedly Mins before Shooting."

Cruz	You been the few, the only few
Cruz	Your the greatest person I have ever met
Cruz	I love you

Coupled with testimonies from her classmates and friends, these texts illustrate Cruz's manipulative, obsessive, and controlling tendencies. Angie's story reveals the acute and lethal nature of the domestic violence she endured. Fortunately, she was surrounded by family and friends who sought to protect her, a network not all survivors have or are able to access.

Discussion

Guns and Violence

The first theme that becomes clear in analyzing the cases of Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz is that of guns and violence. All three had criminal histories. Yet, despite these histories, all three passed background checks and acquired their guns legally through federally licensed firearms dealers. Their respective use of guns represented salient lethality factors.[257] In fact, existing research demonstrates that the presence of a gun in a household increases the risk of intimate partner homicide by 500%.[258] This statistic, coupled with each abusers' death threats, reveals the acute and potentially lethal violence to which the survivors included in this study were subjected.

The use of a weapon against an intimate partner not only poses lethal risks to survivors, but also reflects an inclination towards violence in other contexts. Threatening an intimate partner with a gun reveals a capacity to threaten others with weapons and death. Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz had all endangered their victims with guns and threatened to kill their romantic partners prior to committing mass shootings. Thus, one key connection underlies the domestic violence

[257] Folkes, Hilton, and Harris, "Weapon Use Increases the Severity of Domestic Violence but Neither Weapon Use nor Firearm Access Increases the Risk or Severity of Recidivism."
[258] Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From a Multisite Case Control Study," *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 7 (July 2003): 1089–97.

their partners experienced and the mass shootings they later committed: their use of guns. Such firearm use posed severe and lethal risks to both their domestic violence victims and to the general public—risks that could have been addressed earlier had gun regulations been stricter.

The ability of these three men to legally purchase guns reveals the crisis of firearm regulations in the US. While some policymakers have worked to tackle this crisis—and while the Lautenberg Amendment represented a step in the right direction by outlawing those with domestic violence convictions from purchasing guns—progress remains at a standstill, largely because of a deeply-rooted and longstanding desire to protect gun rights. The Republican Party—a party long hostile to women's rights—has capitalized on this desire to strengthen its political power. Moreover, it has deployed the National Rifle Association (NRA) to lobby Congress on behalf of the industry and to persuade Americans that gun regulation undermines constitutional rights and freedoms.[259] A small group of lawmakers, led by Democratic Congressman John Dingell Jr.—who simultaneously served in Congress and sat on the board of the NRA—played a powerful role in "influenc[ing] firearms policy as well as the private lobbying force responsible for shaping it."[260] The implications of such political lobbying have extended far and wide, into public spaces where people live in constant fear of an attack, and into the homes of abusers who can threaten their victims with death and easily follow through on such threats.

American gun culture "encompasses how both individuals and institutions consciously and unconsciously interact with firearms, through beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, social and legal

[259] Eric Lipton and Alexander Burns, "The True Source of the N.R.A.'s Clout: Mobilization, Not Donations," *The New York Times*, February 24, 2018, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/24/us/politics/nra-gun-control-florida.html.
[260] Mike McIntire, "The Secret History of Gun Rights: How Lawmakers Armed the N.R.A," The New York Times, July 30, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/30/us/politics/nra-congress-firearms.html.

norms, as well as the social structures they project onto them." It is both pervasive and powerful. For many, gun ownership is profoundly intertwined with identity, specifically for white Americans who consider their Second Amendment rights central to their nationality and citizenship rights. Gun ownership is also deeply rooted in white heteronormative patriarchy and intimately interconnected with misogyny and masculinity. This study's findings—specifically, Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz's histories of domestic violence and clearly misogynistic motivations—further evidence this interconnection.

These political and cultural roots and ties have broad implications. They bleed into gun policy, allowing men with violent histories to access guns with few to no barriers. They encourage violence, both in the domestic context and on a broader societal scale. They sustain laws that prioritize gun rights over human rights, especially those of domestic violence survivors. Above all, they ensure that guns remain a weapon of misogyny and patriarchal power.

Misogyny and Gender-Based Violence

Analyzing the cases of Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz also reveal the presence of misogyny among mass shooters with histories of domestic violence. Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz had all expressed misogynistic sentiments that manifested in violently misogynistic behavior. Each directed threats, coercive control, and physical violence against their intimate partners and family members. All their victims felt trapped. Some, like Sitora Yusufiy and Angie, were able to access family networks to escape the abuse. Others, like Danielle Kelley and Noor Salman were unable to rely on the legal system or their family members for help. Tessa Brennaman and Lynda Cruz involved law enforcement to varying degrees of success. Even Brennaman—the only survivor included in this study who brought a case against her abuser that resulted in a domestic violence conviction—was unable to stop Kelley from purchasing firearms after his conviction.

Clearly, these testimonies reveal how the legal system systematically and disproportionately fails to protect and support domestic violence survivors. This reinforces the previous chapter's findings, specifically as they pertain to the lack of legal repercussions most abusers face. This tendency reflects a broader trend in law enforcement and the criminal legal system to overlook the importance of identifying and addressing GBV. Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz had all committed crimes rooted in and driven by misogyny. Like other forms of GBV, these crimes meet the definition of a hate crime, or "a crime motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability."[261] Yet, they were not treated as such. The legal system should have recognized the grave danger these women were in. Had these survivors had access to better options and had these abusers' misogynistic motivations and actions been taken seriously, the outcome of these cases may have looked different.

Clearly, these systems do not take seriously crimes rooted in misogyny. They similarly fail to account for the established relationships between domestic violence, gun violence, and mass shootings. In this sense, these perpetrators' acts of domestic violence and mass violence can best be addressed by systematic overhaul of the ways in which legal systems and structures handle cases of domestic violence and protect victims and survivors.

Conclusion

Analyzing these case studies reveals the clear and significant role that misogynistic attitudes and GBV played in each mass shooting. Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz all had lengthy histories of violence and were still able to easily access firearms despite these histories. These histories, combined with their respective obsessions with guns and violence, indicate clear gaps

[261] Department of Justice, "Learn About Hate Crimes," September 5, 2019, https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes.

in policymaking that must be addressed. The concluding chapter of this thesis proposes suggestions for this legal overhaul.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fundamentally, legal overhaul to reduce mass violence must be rooted in the concept of human rights due diligence, a framework that is central to analysis and advocacy concerning government responses to domestic violence.[262] Though domestic violence has historically been overlooked as a human rights issue, a series of legal decisions and conferences in the late 1980s and early 1990s initiated a major paradigm shift. This shift established the due diligence approach to women's rights, which "underscores the government's responsibility to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons."[263] This standard not only holds states responsible for the actions of government agents but also requires that states "create and enforce laws that will reduce the risk of abusive behavior."[264] In this sense, failing to take basic steps to prevent human rights abuses renders states complicit in human rights violations. This due diligence standard—which has become the legal standard by which state action on women's rights is assessed—has the potential to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights for women, for survivors, and for the public writ large. Moving forward, it should guide legal reform on domestic violence and mass violence in the US.

The first and most painfully obvious step in this legal overhaul must be stricter gun regulations. Anyone with a history of GBV or domestic violence should be prohibited from buying a gun. As the case studies in the previous chapter indicate, anyone with a history of gun use, death threats, or other indicia of potential danger to an intimate partner or family member

[262] Stephanie Farrior, "The Due Diligence Standard, Private Actors, and Domestic Violence" (Ann Arbor, MI, 2011), https://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/human-rights-history/files/2012/10/Farrior.pdf.
[263] "Women's Rights: Due Diligence, Private Actors, and Domestic Violence," Human Rights Advocacy and the History of Human Rights Standards, accessed July 25, 2023, https://humanrightshistory.umich.edu/accountability/due-diligence/.
[264] "Women's Rights."

should similarly not be allowed to purchase a firearm. Threats with a deadly weapon against an intimate partner not only often precede injury and death to that victim but also acts of mass violence. As such, particular attention must be paid to these cases of severe and potentially lethal domestic violence when assessing broader threats to the public.

This study's findings clearly also illustrate the tendency for men with histories of domestic violence to circumvent accountability for their actions. Like many other abusers, Mateen, Kelley, and Cruz were all conferred impunity despite their gun use and despite the grave and serious nature of the domestic violence they committed. My findings thus reveal that requiring a conviction or civil finding of domestic violence to prevent a gun purchase does not do enough to prevent violent individuals from obtaining firearms. The outcome of *United States v. Rahimi* threatens to further hinder courts' ability to protect survivors and the public alike from gun violence.[265] That said, anyone who has been the subject of criminal or civil allegations of domestic or other forms of GBV, including stalking and sexual assault, should be barred from buying a gun. Additionally, states must implement and strengthen Red Flag Laws, also known as Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs), which seek to recognize early warning signs of gun-related violence and enable judges to "temporarily remove a person's access to guns when there is evidence that they pose a serious risk."[266] As of July 2023, only 21 states have ERPO laws despite research demonstrating their effectiveness in preventing mass violence.[267] Implementing

[265] "United States v. Rahimi: The Fifth Circuit's Dangerous and Extreme Decision," Everytown, February 8, 2023, https://www.everytown.org/united-states-v-rahimi-the-fifth-circuits-dangerous-and-extreme-decision/.
[266] "Extreme Risk Laws," Everytown, accessed July 18, 2023, https://www.everytown.org/solutions/extreme-risk-laws/; UC Davis Health, "What Are 'Red Flag' Laws and How Can They Prevent Gun Violence?," UC Davis Health, January 11, 2023, https://health.ucdavis.edu/news/headlines/what-are-red-flag-laws-and-how-can-they-prevent-gun-violence/2023/01.
[267] "Extreme Risk Laws"; "Extreme Risk Laws Save Lives," Everytown Research & Policy, accessed July 18, 2023, https://everytownresearch.org/report/extreme-risk-laws-save-lives/.

ERPOs in all states would address the systemic barriers survivors face in obtaining convictions against their abusers and prevent guns from ending up in violent hands.

Legal overhaul must also address the systemic misogyny of the criminal and civil legal systems, which too often disbelieve survivors and leave them without protection against GBV. Any act of GBV must be deemed and treated as a hate crime. Domestic violence must also be recognized as a crime that indicates the potential for lethal mass violence. Survivors should be able to report violence and seek help without fear of retaliation from their abusers or from the legal system. Law enforcement officers must be better trained to understand the dynamics of domestic violence and the barriers survivors face in seeking help. Judges adjudicating civil protective order cases must be more intensively trained in assessing danger and lethality, especially in relation to the role of gun possession in increased risk to domestic violence victims and to the public writ large. Law enforcement must also work in tandem with social workers, psychologists, and domestic violence victim advocates, and civil attorneys to ensure survivors' protection from the moment a survivor reports abuse. At every level, the legal system must work to ensure that survivors' voices, needs, and experiences are not only heard and respected but prioritized.

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