

Case Study: The Isla Vista Campus Community Mass Murder

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A case study is presented of a 22-year-old student mass murderer who stabbed or shot to death 6 college students and wounded 14 others. Because he left a lengthy autobiographical “manifesto” and social media posts, and an extensive law enforcement investigation ensued, a significant amount of information exists to examine the case. The assailant presents a complex diagnostic and psychodynamic picture, including likely features of autism spectrum disorder, narcissism, psychopathy, and depression. A predominant theme is the role of extreme social isolation and severe, pathological envy, fueling the eventual attacks. With the benefit of hindsight, prevention strategies are discussed, and the challenges in identifying and treating insidious, potentially destructive envy. Retrospective threat assessments of the subject on the WAVR-21 V3 (Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk, Version 3) are presented at 3 one-year intervals leading up to the mass murders as he traversed the pathway to predatory violence.

Keywords: campus mass murder, envy and violence, autism and violence, threat assessment, WAVR-21

This is a case of a mass murder committed by a student member of a small campus community in California. It is a tale of complex and interacting contributors to violence, gaining momentum over time: early neurodevelopmental problems, elements of psychopathy and sadism, isolation, and especially severe envy rooted in pathological, “shy” narcissism. The subject’s increasing torment, his sense of worthlessness and despair, fed his rage and eventual motive to commit the murders. He carried them out at different locations with three different weapons—hunting knives, a semiautomatic pistol, and his BMW

automobile. The individuals he killed symbolized the members of his community who possessed what he did not, and enjoyed what he was incapable of experiencing or achieving for himself. Risk factors for targeted violence are identifiable, some of which were reasonably knowable, and some that were likely not. With the benefit of hindsight, missed opportunities can be identified where violence may have been prevented.

The Incident

Isla Vista, California, is an unincorporated beachside community, predominantly serving the thousands of students who attend the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), and Santa Barbara City College. Dense with student apartments and dwellings, sororities and fraternities, Isla Vista is known for its good weather, outdoor activities, and lively social scene. Annual celebrations, especially at Halloween and an event known as Deltopia, are high points of the year, filling the streets with revelers (Goldman, 2016). Like many college towns, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Department has its share of calls and community issues arising from the local party scene.

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This is a modified and expanded version of a case study also appearing in the *WAVR-21: Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk* (3rd ed.). Permission granted by Stephen G. White and J. Reid Meloy, the copyright holders. Stephen G. White has a commercial interest in the WAVR-21 V3. The author would like to thank J. Reid Meloy for contributing helpful comments for this article, and Ann Zedginidze for assistance with research and manuscript preparation.

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On May 23, 2014, at 7:38¹ in the evening, 22-year-old Elliot Rodger, a City College student no longer attending classes, purchased a triple vanilla latte at the Isla Vista Starbucks. Earlier that same day in separate attacks, Elliot had surprised and brutally stabbed to death his two male roommates as they each returned to the apartment, and then an unknowing friend of theirs who later came to call on them. At 9:18 p.m. Elliot emailed a 137-page autobiographical manifesto entitled *My Twisted World* to his parents, his life coach, some acquaintances and professors, and several other of his medical and mental health providers. At the same time, he uploaded to the Internet a self-made video entitled *Retribution*. He then drove a short distance to the UCSB Alpha Phi sorority where he repeatedly pounded on the locked door, but no one answered. Unable to gain entry, he returned to his BMW. Driving in the same direction as three young women on the sidewalk, he shot them with one of his three semiautomatic pistols, killing two and severely wounding the third. The first 9–1–1 call came in at 9:27 p.m. and the Isla Vista Foot Patrol hurried to the scene. Elliot then drove around the Isla Vista neighborhood, changing magazines and firing over 50 rounds out the window, killing a young man who had fled with others into a deli store. He wounded seven others with gunfire, and an additional seven by intentionally hitting them with his vehicle. He rammed a bicyclist and skateboarder so hard that it broke the windshield on his car, crushed the cyclist's legs, and caused other serious injuries. Various witnesses described the driver as acting either "totally normal," having a "creepy laugh," or "a little grin" (Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office [SBCSO], 2015, pp. 16–17). Sheriff's deputies confronted Elliot at two locations and exchanged gunfire with him, wounding him in the hip on the second encounter. He then committed suicide, shooting himself in the head, his vehicle crashing into a parked car. At 9:35 p.m. a deputy broadcast that "the subject was down" (SBCSO, 2015, p. 27). Before taking his own life, Elliot Rodger had killed six people and wounded 14 others. The entire incident lasted approximately 15 min, and the community of Isla Vista was now on the map of American mass murder tragedies.

Source Material

The source material for the case study includes an extensive investigative report by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, some media accounts and interviews, the subject's YouTube posts, and especially his detailed and lengthy "manifesto." It is not uncommon for mass murderers to leave such declarations of their grievances and the felt justification for their violence. In his report, the Sheriff noted the "unusual . . . extent of the written and video-taped record of thoughts, feelings and intentions left by a suspect . . ." (SBCSO, 2015, p. 3). Elliot Rodger obviously spent a great deal of time preparing his manifesto. It is fair to presume it became one of his preoccupations on his pathway to predatory violence. He wrote clearly with few grammatical errors. He was intelligent, and one could say he explains himself well. His language and syntax does not suggest psychotic thought processes. The document is very detailed, and is of course his recollection, and especially his interpretation, of the cause-and-effect events in his life. From a threat assessment perspective, the manifesto is a revealing and instructive document—one mass murderer's presentation of his history, grievances, violent ideation, conscious motives and rationale, and planning and preparation that would climax, in Elliot's case, with his "Day of Retribution."

The Sheriff's report, published the following year, is described as a summary of a challenging and exhaustive investigation. It includes a narrative of the incident and law enforcement response, crime scene and autopsy findings, and events in Isla Vista leading up to the mass murder. Other sections describe aspects of the subject's background, family life and interpersonal issues, his mental health history, and Internet activity. The report states that via subpoenas, "some" of Elliot's mental health records were made available for the investigation, and that "the material is sometimes conflicting" (SBCSO, 2015, p. 52).

In reconstructing this case, there are no doubt some inaccuracies. Differing recollections of the events in the subject's life are evident. Cer-

¹ Times are approximate and based on witness accounts, according to the Sheriff's report.

tain known events considered less relevant to this review and analysis have been omitted. The case manuscript is structured to roughly represent the stages in the subject's life, and in particular each of the last three years of his life, once he moved to Isla Vista. Information from the different data domains are incorporated chronologically within these stages in an effort to present an integrated narrative. An analysis follows, and perspectives on prevention that the case suggests. A final section offers retrospective threat assessments.

Retrospective Threat Assessments

The last section of the case study consists of periodic retrospective threat assessments with a structured professional judgment guide (SPJ), the *Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk, Third Edition* (WAVR-21 V3; White & Meloy, 2016). The WAVR-21 is designed for the assessment of workplace or campus targeted violence risk, and is applicable to adult subjects 18 years of age or older. It consists of a detailed coding Worksheet, and a summary Grid. The manual describes the empirical and clinical basis for the risk and protective factors. The items are coded as either "absent," "present," or "prominent," and for "recent change." Three retrospective Grids for Elliot Rodger are postulated at roughly two years before, one year before, and in the final days shortly before the attacks.

It is essentially unfair to code a true positive case after the fact, given the known information at the present time and the lack of such information just prior to the homicides. Postincident exercises, however, are valuable for learning. They should not mask the inherent difficulties in assessing and managing cases in real time. SPJ's such as the WAVR-21 are increasingly the standard for violence risk assessments. In dynamic contexts especially, they provide evidence-based formats that organize investigators' and evaluators' data, toward more systematic assessments (Hart & Logan, 2011).

Subject's Life Prior to Time in Isla Vista

Early History

Elliot Rodger² was born in London in 1991 and moved with his parents to Southern Cali-

fornia when he was five years old. His father, Peter Rodger, was a freelance photographer and film director, mostly of commercials, but who also directed some scenes from *The Hunger Games*. His mother, Chin Rodger, of Chinese descent, had worked as a nurse on film sets, eventually staying home to raise Elliot and his younger sister (SBCSO, 2015). His parents divorced when Elliot was seven but both remained devoted to him. Early on they were very concerned about their extremely shy, withdrawn son of small stature, and provided him continuous kinds of professional help and other support throughout his childhood and adolescence (SBCSO, 2015). "His parents loved him and they never pushed him away," according to Philip Bloeser, an early and continuing friend of Elliot (Payne & Alleyne, 2014, para 12).

As recounted in the Sheriff's report and reflected by many others who knew him, the pervasive problem throughout Elliot's youth was his extreme difficulty with social interaction, and making or maintaining friendships (SBCSO, 2015). He was first noticed as "quiet" in the first grade, and variously described as unresponsive in class, sitting by himself, and at times staring off into space (SBCSO, 2015, p. 51). He would alternatively engage in repetitive behaviors such as making noises, tapping his feet or leg, and repeating words. He had a tendency to be perfectionistic, needing all items on his desk in just the right place, and very picky about what he ate. He was very sensitive to being overstimulated. At the age of five or six he cried on a trip to Disneyland, overwhelmed by all the people and noise. He had difficulty with eye contact and spoke in a whisper, preferring to write things down on paper rather than speak. When he was seven he received speech therapy for a lisp, which improved. He was "believed to display characteristics of high functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome . . . but no formal diagnosis was found among the material reviewed by detectives" (SBCSO, 2015, p. 52). At various times he was provided special education resources, and at age 16 was diagnosed with Pervasive Development Disorder.

²The author is among those professionals who resist naming perpetrators as often as possible. In presenting this case for publication, however, and given the presumed audience, I have elected to identify him by name rather than to continually refer to him as "the subject."

der—Not Otherwise Specified (SBCSO, 2015). Elliot had no known history of violence prior to the series of incidents at Isla Vista, and no criminal record, according to both his parents and the Sheriff's report (SBCSO, 2015).

Describing his own childhood, Elliot's manifesto begins positively enough: "I started out as a happy and blissful child, living my life to the fullest in a world I thought was good and pure . . ." (Manifesto, 2014, p. 1). He frequently used the word "innocent" in talking about his early years. He acknowledged he had some friends, and that his childhood, until he entered middle school, included some enjoyable experiences. His parents tried to help by arranging playdates for him. Elliot refers to Philip Bloeser as his first friend when they met at Topanga Elementary School, and someone with whom he had many playdates. But Elliot's get-togethers with friends were not always successful. Other adults who knew the family, and who were interviewed after his death, stated that at times Elliot would just hide (Nagourney, Cieply, Feuer, & Lovett, 2014). An apparently bright note in his life, according to Elliot, was his long friendship with a boy named James Ellis, whom he met at school when they were six. Their relationship lasted through thick and thin until James ended it when Elliot was 20, because of James' growing discomfort with Elliot's recitations of his misery and grievances (Manifesto, 2014).

At age nine, by his own account, Elliot realized his "first feelings of inferiority" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 15). This was due to his small stature, and that other boys were physically stronger. He was known as "the shy boy" who didn't know how to act with girls (Manifesto, 2014, p. 17). At maturity, he would be 5 feet, 9 inches tall and weigh 135 pounds. A central, continuing theme expressed throughout his discourse is his frequent and intense feelings of jealousy and envy, and how these emotions turned to rage and hate. For instance, he was upset with James when his friend invited other boys over for a playdate along with Elliot: "Jealousy and envy . . . those are two feelings that would dominate my entire life and bring immense pain" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 16).

Elliot describes how desperately he wanted to be "cool" like the boys who were popular, and became obsessed with copying "everything the supposed 'cool kids' were doing" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 18). He took up skateboarding, at

which he became fairly competent, bringing him some satisfaction and recognition, including from girls: ". . . surprisingly they treated me quite well" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 28). He described his fifth and sixth grade years as his best years overall, in spite of his frustrations in trying to fit in and that he had no core group of friends.

Middle School Years

As he continued with middle school, Elliot's experience grew more difficult. He claims he was often teased for his social awkwardness, and he increasingly withdrew. His discovery of the Internet at age 11 facilitated this pattern. In chatrooms, he was presented with pictures of "beautiful naked girls" which initially confused and "traumatized" him, as he claims he knew nothing about sex (Manifesto, 2014, pp. 30–31). However, he was slowly starting to develop sexual feelings for "hot girls" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 38):

Finding out about sex is one of the things that truly destroyed my entire life. Sex . . . the very word fills me with hate. Once I hit puberty I would always want it . . . hunger for it . . . fantasize about it. But . . . never get it. Finding out about sex was just the beginning of my horrific downfall. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 39)

At age 13 he became immersed in video games, especially World of Warcraft where he "felt safe" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 42). He also lost contact with some friends he had made at a cyber café. He gave up skateboarding when he observed younger boys who could do more tricks than he could, eventually developing a hatred for the sport. He recounted that he became bored with school, was very unpopular, and "no longer cared what people thought" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 41). To gain attention he started to "act weird" and annoy people, offering a rationale for this change in his behavior: "I was tired of being the invisible shy kid. Infamy is better than total obscurity" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 42).

As Elliot approached puberty, he was increasingly intrigued with girls and his desire for their attention. The continuing drum beat in his manifesto is how he obsessively desired girls and was deeply envious of the boys who had the attention and affection of "beautiful" girls:

The feelings of jealousy I felt at 9-years-old were frustrating, but they were nothing compared to how I

would feel once I hit puberty and have to watch girls choosing other boys over me. Any problem I had at 9-years-old was nirvana compared to what I was doomed to face. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 16)

In an interview a few days after the murders, Philip Bloeser acknowledged his friendship with Elliot, but said they were not as close as Elliot portrayed in the manifesto. According to Bloeser, “In reality I was just trying to be nice to Elliot. He was incredibly hard work to talk to. . . . He liked computer games and skateboarding when he was younger, but that was it.” (Payne & Alleyne, 2014, para 25–26). Bloeser saw Elliot as painfully awkward and having “a boring personality” (Payne & Alleyne, 2014, intro).

High School Years

Elliot attended three different high schools where his problems persisted in spite of receiving help. He begged his parents to remove him from the first two where he was bullied for being small, shy, and lacking in social skills. He noted that he “still looked and sounded like a ten-year-old” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 48). In one of the high schools he “needed reassurance from the teacher about five to ten times per day”, according to the Sheriff’s report (SBCSO, 2015, p. 51). He mentions some positive experiences with boys who befriended him; yet he recounts repetitively how he felt extremely envious and hateful toward the boys who were popular and hateful toward the girls who were attracted to them (Manifesto, 2014).

During his sophomore, junior, and senior years he attended Independence Continuation High School, a small public school structured to provide intensive individual attention to students, in session for just three to four hours a day. Elliot liked the setup because he felt the work was easy and he could go home and indulge himself “in my addiction to WoW. My only social interaction was with my online friends and with James . . .” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 49). According to the Sheriff’s report he received weekly therapy at the school and his grades improved significantly. Although he graduated from Independence, he did not attend the graduation ceremonies (SBCSO, 2015). In the aftermath of the murders, the principal stated that Elliot, although socially awkward, was bright, presented as very innocent and soft-

spoken, and was liked. At times, he was invited by other students to join them at lunch and he occasionally did, but “would just kind of be present. . . . He had this push and pull between his desire to engage socially and his fear of rejection” (Nagourney et al., 2014, para 24 & 26). In contrast to this account, Elliot characterized his experience at the school as “boring”, and that he “disliked all of the degenerate, low-class students there. They repulsed me” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 55).

Philip Bloeser recounted how he readily saw that Elliot’s problem did not start with girls ignoring Elliot. “He would never dream of approaching a girl, he just expected them to come to him, which they didn’t. Even if any of them ever had, it wouldn’t have lasted long, because he wouldn’t chat to them” (Payne & Alleyne, 2014, para 16). Bloeser often encouraged and coached Elliot to initiate with girls, but to no avail.

Puberty, sexual feelings, and the wish and expectation to interact with girls created great anxiety for Elliot. He was very upset to hear any boy talking about actually having sex:

I developed a very high sex drive and it would always remain like this. This was the start of hell for me . . . I felt depressed because I wanted sex yet I felt unworthy of it. I didn’t think I was ever going to experience sex in reality and I was right. I never did. I finally was interested in girls but there was no way I could ever get them. *And so my starvation began* [emphasis original]. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 47)

His routine became schoolwork, playing World of Warcraft, and daily masturbation, giving “no thought to my future” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 52).

At age 15 Elliot was prescribed the anti-anxiety medication Xanax, and the antidepressant Prozac, which he took for approximately a year. He was reported to have been depressed and having suicidal thoughts, but the medications apparently had little effect (SBCSO, 2015). He was also prescribed Paxil, another antidepressant, which he only took occasionally. Elliot himself does not say much about his mental health providers in his manifesto. When he does it is usually matter of fact or to criticize them as not being very helpful, or prescribing medications which he thought didn’t help or had undesirable side effects. Nor does he ever mention any clinical diagnosis or terms. “I don’t know why my parents wasted money on therapy, as it

will never help me in my struggle against such a cruel and unjust world” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 125).

Elliot’s parents stated that when angry, “he would tense his entire body while clenching his teeth and pursing his lips . . . [he] did not physically act out, get into fights, hurt animals, damage property or otherwise react violently due to his anger” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 49). They were unaware of Elliot engaging in any known incidents of violence. His father was vehemently against firearms and stated Elliot never showed any signs of an interest in guns during adolescence or later. His parents were “incredulous” that he had purchased so many firearms and denied they had any idea of what was in store (SBCSO, 2015, p. 49), which seems entirely true. Elliot himself stated in his manifesto that, prior to his aggressive acts in Isla Vista and the murders, “I had never been a violent person in nature” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 87). There is no mention in the Sheriff’s report, nor in this author’s search of online sources, of any provider inquiring or being concerned about Elliot’s risk of harm to others. To reiterate, however, the report stated that investigators did not have access to all of Elliot’s mental health records.

Elliot described his relationship with his parents during his adolescence as strained and conflictual. He was upset with them, for example, that they had not provided him with “cool” clothes. He described his father as mostly absent from his life, but the evidence suggests that his father also tried hard to help his very difficult son, who lied to him about many things (Manifesto, 2014). His mother was devoted to his needs but tension between them mounted. Elliot, who was just seven at the time, was saddened by his parents’ divorce. Then, about two months later, his father’s new girlfriend moved in with him. She would eventually become Elliot’s stepmother, and the two would not get along. He greatly resented her disciplining him when he stayed with them, and her trying to restrict his time with video games. He felt angry when his father would side with his stepmother. According to Elliot, she grew increasingly impatient with his withdrawal into his room. There were periods of estrangement when he did not visit or speak to his father and stepmother, the manifesto suggesting the preference to distance was mutually desired (Manifesto, 2014).

Peter Rodger had had some success as a film director, but he created and invested in a documentary film that failed, precipitating a financial crisis for the family. Elliot, 15 years old at the time, was especially angry at him for this misfortune (Manifesto, 2014). The hardship then led him to feel very envious of and hateful toward the well-dressed children of much more wealthy Hollywood families whom he would encounter at film premiers. Elliot had always been very conscious of his appearance. His preoccupation with looking “cool” continued throughout his life to the end (SBCSO, 2015). He appears to have privately felt more anger at his father than he expressed. He was disappointed that his father did not recognize how miserable he was, and for not teaching him how to be successful with girls. Being a “gentleman” as his father counseled him, didn’t work (Manifesto, 2014, p. 28). Still, an underlying attachment to his father seems evident in his writing.

When Elliot was 17, his outlook, emotions, and ideas began to change. Violent ideation emerged in his thinking. Among other occurrences, his video game friends and acquaintances were leaving him out of their activities, and his loneliness and bitterness increased. “The more lonely I felt, the more angry I became” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 56). His depression deepened the summer before his senior year in high school. Playing World of Warcraft did not alleviate his loneliness as it had in the past. But he states that instead of feeling inferior and undesirable about his “lonely celibacy” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 56) that this time, things would be different:

I couldn’t just stand by and accept such an injustice anymore. I refused to continue hiding away from the world and forgetting about all the insults it dealt to me. I began to have fantasies of becoming very powerful and stopping everyone from having sex. . . . I saw sex as an evil and barbaric act, all because I was unable to have it. This was a major turning point. My anger made me stronger inside. This is when I formed my ideas that sex should be outlawed. It is the only way to make the world a fair and just place. If I cannot have it, I will destroy it. That’s the conclusion I came to, right then and there . . . I must be destined to change the world, to shape it into an image that suits me! (Manifesto, 2014, p. 56)

He goes on to describe that he became a new person, with an “ideology” that would lead him to rise to power, abolish sex for everyone else, and exact revenge on all those he envied and

hated—admittedly, as pointed out to him by James, because he felt he could never have it himself (Manifesto, 2014, p. 57). Elliot wrote that driven by this new vision and transparently dark goal, he “felt empowered” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 57). On his own he began to study philosophy, psychology, history, and biographies of powerful leaders, at times spending all day at Barnes and Noble.

When Elliot was 18 another important event occurred in his life. He discovered the lottery, and saw it as the solution to becoming wealthy and popular. Later, in his personal journal, he would write that winning millions was to be the way he would finally lose his virginity. “I will drive a Maserati and a Lamborghini, and when girls see me in those cars they will all want to date me. They will finally see me as the supreme man that I’m meant to be” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 44).

As time progressed in his late teens, however, it seems his grandiose ideas of being powerful receded, as he returned to feeling hopeless about his life. His despair and hatreds grew. Many times he would express that seeing happy couples made him go home or into a public restroom and cry for extended periods of time. He would go for walks in his mother’s neighborhood, “in the desperate hope that someone would befriend me or a girl would talk to me. Nothing of the sort ever happened” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 62). After sinking further into despair over the summer following his graduation from high school, he decided to give himself “a new chance at life” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 59). He approached college with a new sense of hope, where he could have new opportunities for social success and getting a girlfriend. These upward swings would occur at times, bringing him out of his anger and sadness, but they never lasted.

Initial Experience in Community Colleges

Elliot attended two local community colleges, Pierce College and Moorpark College, each for one year, but without success or engagement. His attendance dropped off at both schools as the year progressed. His problems continued and his anger and isolation intensified. At Pierce, “No one wanted to be my friend. It just wasn’t worth the trouble” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 65). He dropped his one class there,

making his mother very angry. She pressured him to get a job and he tried, but it appears to have been somewhat half-hearted. He decided to use his free time “self-educating” at Barnes and Nobel, “reading books that ranged from biographies of powerful leaders, histories of significant periods, self-help books, philosophy and psychology texts, and historical fiction novels” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 65). In spite of feeling angry when seeing attractive girls and couples at the store, he stayed there because he felt the studying was beneficial. This eventuated in his becoming “even more radical than I ever was before,” about his political and philosophical “ideals” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 65):

It was all fueled by my wish to punish everyone who is sexually active, because I concluded that it was not fair that other people were able to experience sex while I have been denied it all my life. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 65)

Elliot and his mother frequently argued, as she was frustrated with his not getting a job. She found a “life coach” to help him:

This life coach’s name was Tony, a boisterous 40-year-old man who came to meet with me every other week. I was open to going along with this. I had plenty of free time, and I was so lonely. . . . Tony usually took me out to lunch somewhere in the [San Fernando] Valley, where he gave me advice on socializing and self-improvement. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 67)

Tony suggested various jobs but Elliot felt they were beneath him. He had a short stint helping a carpenter friend of his father (Manifesto, 2014).

In the summer Elliot enrolled in Moorpark College, seeing it as a better fit than Pierce and having noticed attractive girls on his exploratory visit:

A new college provided a new start, and this college looked perfect in every way. I had the hope that I could make it there; that I could make friends, meet some girls, and eventually find a pretty girl to be my girlfriend. I pictured her in my mind all the time; her cascading blonde hair, her beautiful face, her sensual body . . . I imagined us walking hand in hand through the college. . . . That would be heaven. *That* was what I wanted in life. Every single hate-fueled ideal, worldview, and philosophy I created in the past was the result of not being able to do *that* [emphases original]. (Manifesto, 2014, pp. 68–69)

However, Elliot had the same experience as previously, feeling diminished and angry at see-

ing attractive girls and happy couples (Manifesto, 2014).

At about the same time, Elliot's mother suggested he become a writer, perceiving he had some talent for it. This surprised him. "For my whole life I was never talented at anything I tried. . . . Deep down, I've always known that I had no talents, and I've always tried not to think about it" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 69). But he liked the idea and began to write some stories, thinking about an epic fantasy that would become a movie and make him rich, and thus attractive to girls. However, as he explored the idea he realized how difficult it would be to become a successful screenwriter and his brief confidence and enthusiasm waned. As school was also increasingly unbearable he dropped his spring class, in spite of knowing his mother would be disappointed. He got a job through his social skills counselor but it was custodial and he felt it degrading, so he quit after the first day (Manifesto, 2014).

Elliot felt anxious and guilty about these decisions and hid them from his parents. He had conflicts with his few friends. Tensions mounted between Elliot and his father and step-mother, and especially between him and his mother. He considered that on his 19th birthday he had nothing to show for his life and felt anxious and depressed about his direction. He did return to Moorpark in the fall and finished his class, but derived no pleasure there.

Elliot's mother wanted him out of the house. He and his parents met and came up with a plan. The previous year Elliot had seen a movie, *Alpha Dog*, which he states had a profound effect on him, "because it depicted lots of good looking young people enjoying pleasurable sex lives" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 77). Obsessed with the story, he learned that it had taken place in Santa Barbara, leading him to investigate college life there, and his discovery of Isla Vista with its lively social scene. According to him, he proposed to his parents that he attend school in Santa Barbara. They agreed, investing their own hopes in the plan that hopefully would provide Elliot with a fresh start. He wrote about his impression that in Isla Vista there should be plenty of opportunity for sex. "If I can't get laid there then there is no hope for me at all" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 82). He also privately asserted, "In truth, the move to Santa Barbara was actually a chance that I was giving to the world, not the other way around! . . . to give me the life

that I know I'm entitled to. If I still have to suffer the same rejection and injustice. . . . I will have my vengeance" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 83).

The Isla Vista Years: Age 19–22

Year One (Age 19 and 20)

In June, 2011, at the age of 19, Elliot moved to Isla Vista and his third college, driving off in his 2008 BMW that his mother had bought him for this new era in his life. She had also given him some Nordstrom's gift cards for some new "cool" clothes. His father met him at school and helped him move in. Yet his anguish continued. From the first night he could hear the couple upstairs from his apartment having sex. When he enthusiastically went off to a summer class in his new clothes, he was ignored by any girls (Manifesto, 2014). His father returned in July to help Elliot change apartments. At lunch Elliot saw a couple at another table enjoying themselves. He felt a strong urge to pour his soda over them, but resisted because his father was with him. The next day while in line at Starbucks he saw a couple "kissing passionately" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 87). Describing himself as "livid with envious hatred," he followed them to their car and splashed coffee all over them. The boy then yelled at Elliot, who quickly ran away in fear and drove off, "shaking with rage-fueled excitement . . ." (Manifesto, 2014, p. 87).

I had never struck back at my enemies before, and I felt a small sense of spiteful gratification for doing so . . . I wanted to do horrible things to that couple. I wanted to inflict pain on all young couples. It was around this point in my life that I realized I was capable of doing such things. I would happily do such things. I was capable of killing them, and I wanted to. I wanted to kill them slowly, to strip the skins off their flesh. . . . They deserve it. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 87)

In the following paragraph he wrote:

Ever since I was 17, I often fantasized about becoming powerful and inflicting suffering upon everyone who has wronged me in the past, but I never thought I would actually do it. At this point, after going through so much suffering and injustice, all of my innocence had been swept away. The world had been cruel to me, and it molded me to become strong enough to actually have the capability of returning the cruelty to the world. I had never been a violent person in nature, but after building up so much hatred over the years, I realized that I wouldn't hesitate to kill or even torture my hated enemies if I was given the opportunity. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 87)

Elliot would oscillate between these angry, violent thoughts and his more despairing outlook:

I spent the next five days in my room, trying to forget about the horrific experiences I had to go through. But even in my room, I couldn't escape from being reminded of my worthlessness. Every time I looked out my window I saw young people socializing. (Manifesto, 2014, pp. 87–88)

Elliot wrote of an early incident in Isla Vista where he did approach a group of girls. He began to talk to them, and they responded. But he was unable to sustain the conversation and it became awkward and embarrassing for him (Manifesto, 2014).

Something else significant happened to Elliot in August of that year. His friendship with James Ellis took a serious turn for the worse. On a visit home the two went to lunch where Elliot nearly poured his drink on a boy who was sitting with two girls and had a “cocky smirk” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 91). James, knowing Elliot very well, dissuaded him, and the two packed their lunch and hurriedly departed. But as Elliot wrote, “A dark and ominous aura clouded over our friendship that day” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 91):

I was so angry that I told James of all of the acts of revenge I wanted to exact on those popular boys. I told him my desire to flay them alive, to strip the skins off their flesh and make them scream in agony as punishment for living a better life than me. James became deeply disturbed by my anger. I wished that he was not disturbed. I wished he could be a friend that felt the same way about the world that I did. But he was not that kind of person. He was a weakling. Once I had calmed down, the two of us had a long conversation in his room, and I ended up crying in front of him as I explained how hopeless I felt about life. Soon after that, I left his house, never to return there again. He will never invite me over after that incident, and our friendship will slowly fade to dust. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 87)

Elliot reached out to James a few more times, but the following February, during Elliot's first year in Isla Vista, James told him directly he didn't want to be friends anymore. Elliot took this as a betrayal (Manifesto, 2014).

Elliot described his first semester at Santa Barbara City College as an “absolute, brutal failure” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 95). He had not gotten “one girl's phone number,” and felt like his “life was over” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 95). Knowing Halloween in Isla Vista was a “renowned event” with many parties, he eagerly

went out, “trying to bolster up the courage to talk to a girl or walk into a party, but I just couldn't. I knew they would all reject me” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 94.). He concluded the weekend was a “miserable disaster” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 94).

Elliot also had conflicts with his apartment housemates during his first year. They were Hispanic, outgoing and social, and he claimed they teased him for being a virgin. He considered them “low-class scum” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 94). He changed apartments and roommates several times while living there. Although Elliot was half-Asian, he wrote numerous negative comments in the manifesto about any Asian males, as well as Latino males. He was annoyed with their accents and especially enraged if they had the attention of Caucasian girls (Manifesto, 2014).

One day in February Elliot smiled at two girls at a bus stop as he drove by. Enraged when they did not respond, he made a U-turn, pulled up and splashed his latte all over them. He then sped away, feeling “spiteful satisfaction” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 100).

In the spring, he began to drop classes, again because of his extreme discomfort over seeing attractive girls. He recognized that dropping classes was a serious matter for him and his hopes for a positive future—as well as his relationship with his parents. When at home he kept up the pretense that he was still attending lectures, lying to his father about what he was learning (Manifesto, 2014).

Increasingly his manifesto was becoming peppered with descriptors of the young men and women he detested as “depraved,” “degenerate,” and “repulsive.” The boys are “barbaric” and the girls are “slutty bitches” and “wicked.”

Year Two (Age 21)

Elliot described the summer after his first year as one of depression, stagnation, and growing anger. He had fantasies of surprising couples in the midst of sex and slashing them to death. In July, while at a park, Elliot observed a group of young people playing kickball, the girls “dressed scantily” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 106). Enraged, he drove to a K-Mart and bought a supersoaker. He filled it with orange juice and returned to the park, screaming as he sprayed the group. The boys chased him but he managed

to escape in his car. Later that summer he nearly got into a fight with one of his “cocky” roommates, but wrote that he would “get revenge in a more efficient way in the future . . . I remember every insult, and I wait until the time is right to strike” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 90). In the fall Elliot had a new roommate, someone he liked. But he soon realized how uncomfortable he felt just having someone constantly around who would see that he had “a lonely, celibate life” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 93).

Obsessed with what course his life would take, Elliot stated that he still didn’t want “to resort to having to exact ultimate vengeance . . . I didn’t want to die. I wanted something to live for” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 106). He returned to his thoughts about winning the lottery, as “a way for me to become wealthy,” and clung to his belief that he would win soon (Manifesto, 2014, p. 106).

On September 11th, he threw a tantrum when he didn’t win one of the big jackpots. He thrashed at his bed with a “wooden practice sword” and slashed at the air with his pocket knife (Manifesto, 2014, p. 108). He then got drunk, and accidentally spilled wine on his laptop. He convinced his mother to buy him a new one, but he had to drive to the Best Buy in Oxnard the next day to get it replaced. While waiting for the store to prepare his computer, “I decided to go to the shooting range in Oxnard” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 108). He rented a gun and wrote that after firing a few rounds, he felt sick to his stomach:

I questioned my whole life, and I looked at the gun in front of me and asked myself, “*What am I doing here? How could things have led to this?*” [emphasis original] I couldn’t believe my life was actually turning out this way. There I was, practicing shooting with real guns because I had a plan to carry out a massacre. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 109)

Elliot considered his “Retribution” as increasingly possible. He bought his first gun at a local gun store, a Glock 34 semiautomatic pistol, on December 4, 2012, a year and five months before the murders. He felt “a new sense of power,” writing to himself, “*Who’s the alpha male now, bitches?*” [emphasis original] (Manifesto, 2014, p. 113).

In the first months of 2013 Elliot drove to Arizona four times where he could play Powerball lottery. Never winning, his grandiose plans for wealth were dashed, and planning for

his “Day of Retribution” became his increasing focus. He had few other obligations in Santa Barbara and spent the vast majority of his time in his room, brooding. On March 12, 2013, he bought his second handgun, a Sig Sauer P226, more expensive but “higher quality than the Glock, and a lot more efficient” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 115). He had been saving his money for this possibility since he arrived in Santa Barbara, (the price being of no concern to him). Between the date he purchased the Sig Sauer and April 23, 2014, just a month before the attacks, there were a total of 12 recorded tactical expenditures, either for weapons-related purchases or practicing at shooting ranges (SBCSO, 2015). He also spent time on websites for sex-starved young men, finding support in a virtual community. “Reading the posts on that website only confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are” (Manifesto, 2014, pp. 117–118).

His grand “ideology” was that if women’s wickedness is not contained, “the whole of humanity will be held back from a more advanced state of civilization” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 117). Women are like a plague. Because they are subject to “depraved emotions,” they are attracted to “barbaric men” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 117).

Year Three (Age 22)

In the summer before his third year in Isla Vista, Elliot’s parents and psychiatrist arranged for him to see his first social skills counselor when Elliot was at home (Manifesto, 2014). He described the young counselor, Gavin, as “a good-looking guy with a chiseled jaw and bright blond hair” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 119). When the two would go out to “practice socializing” at dinner, Gavin would easily converse with others, and naturally draw the attention of girls to just himself, according to Elliot at least (Manifesto, 2014, p. 120). This was difficult for Elliot, as he was so deficient in this manner, but he continued to meet with Gavin.

On July 20, 2013 (10 months before the murders), he decided to exercise more and make a “final effort to appear as attractive as possible” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 121). This led to what was likely a critical event. He decided to put his “whole life on the line,” and give “women and humanity one more chance to accept [him]”

(Manifesto, 2014, p. 121). His plan was to go out one night with the conscious intention of losing his virginity before his 22nd birthday. To calm his nerves, he drank some vodka, too much as it turned out, and proceeded to a very crowded and boisterous party. He soon felt ignored and frustrated, and then enraged, as he saw all the scenes that tortured him. Having climbed up on a crowded 10-foot ledge where others gathered, he started to hurl insults at everyone, which quickly escalated things. Drunk and rageful, he tried to push people off the ledge, especially girls, but was unsuccessful. He was then pushed off the ledge by some boys, fracturing his ankle in the fall. He fled but then returned, looking for his Gucci sunglasses. However, he went into the wrong party, where he angrily demanded his glasses. This led, according to him, to his being called a “faggot” and a “pussy,” and being pushed, kicked, dragged and punched, sustaining further injuries (Manifesto, 2014, p. 122). No one helped him, further enraging him, and he staggered back to his room. His neighbor later quoted Elliot as saying, “I’m going to kill them. I’m going to kill them. I’m going to kill myself!” (Nagourney et al., 2014, para 14).

Elliot reported the matter to the Sheriff’s Office the next day while a patient in the Goleta Valley Cottage Hospital emergency room. He wrote that he “had to concoct a fairly altered story to explain to the police, who would inevitably have to interview me once I got to the hospital and reported my injury” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 123). According to the Sheriff’s Investigative Report, Elliot did not tell the reporting deputy that he started the fight, and “downplayed his involvement as a primary aggressor” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 46). The case was suspended and eventually dismissed. Elliot later wrote that this desperate “last ditch effort” to have an enjoyable social life in Isla Vista had come to a “devastating culmination” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 121). He then went home for surgery on his ankle.

Early in the fall of 2013, while recuperating at home, Elliot had a conversation with Addison Altendorf, a friend of his and Philip Bloeser’s from elementary school. Elliot had come to the familiar place of eventually hating Addison as another socially successful adolescent. However, he liked his intelligence, and that he allegedly shared some of Elliot’s growing “fas-

cist” views (Manifesto, 2014, p. 62). On this occasion, Elliot states that he shared with Addison some of his “newfound philosophical views regarding women, and how I believe they are mentally flawed and need to be contained” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 127):

Addison told me that I was a person of high intelligence, and that I shouldn’t waste it by doing something “rash.” I believe he had a suspicion that I was indeed planning on massacring my enemies and then killing myself. . . . In a way I think he knew me better than anyone else. . . . I tactfully told Addison that I had no intentions of “doing anything stupid.” That was my last conversation with him. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 127)

While recuperating, Elliot accompanied his parents and stepmother to see his psychiatrist, Dr. Charles Sophy. According to Elliot, the first half of the meeting was spent with Dr. Sophy trying to settle an argument between Elliot’s mother and stepmother (Manifesto, 2014). Sophy gave Elliot a prescription for the atypical antipsychotic medication Risperidone. One of its uses is to treat irritability in autistic individuals, although it is not known if this was the psychiatrist’s reasoning. After researching it, Elliot refused to take the medication. He never saw Sophy again, writing that he gave him “the same useless advice” he had gotten from other mental health professionals (Manifesto, 2014, p. 125). Sophy is board certified in Adult Psychiatry, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Family Practice (drsophy.com). He is the Medical Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services, and has an independent practice in Beverly Hills. He is known to treat celebrities and is a frequent guest on numerous talk shows (drsophy.com). It is not stated in any official documents how often Elliot met with Dr. Sophy.

Elliot also had two long conversations that summer with Gavin, his counselor, about his humiliating assault and its aftermath. Gavin advised him to leave Isla Vista and its rowdy, unsafe atmosphere, but Elliot considered that unjust and a defeat. Privately, his position was, “Since I failed to thrive there, I had no choice but to plan my retribution [there]” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 125).

Elliot wrote that in the summer prior to his third and last year at Isla Vista, he thought a great deal about his violent feelings toward women: “I imagined how sweet it would be to slaughter all of those evil, slutty bitches who

rejected me, along with the fraternity jocks they threw themselves at” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 110). He considered whether to carry out the mass murder at his school or in Isla Vista. He decided on Halloween, in Isla Vista—because there would be so many couples—as the time and place for his *Day of Retribution*. But he then changed his mind because of the anticipated high police presence. Waiting was no issue. He was relieved, as it gave him more time to plan and to recover from his broken ankle (Manifesto, 2014). Yet he was still experiencing ambivalent feelings and anxiety, at least about ending his own life:

A feeling of overwhelming dizziness and anxiety swept over me. I was actually going to die. I couldn't believe it. Then I realized that my life was over anyway. I was never going to lose my virginity. . . . This final act of Retribution was the only thing I could do. It was very hard to come to terms with this fact. I felt very trapped and lost. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 119)

His earlier expressed hatreds toward women had crystalized into his “philosophy” about an “ideal world” where women were kept in concentration camps (Manifesto, 2014, p. 136). Since they represent everything that is unfair, they must be eradicated in order to make the world a fair place. A few would be spared for the sake of artificial insemination (Manifesto, 2014). “In the midst of my suffering I have been able to see the world much clearer than others”, he ultimately stated in the Epilogue (Manifesto, 2014, p. 135).

Toward the end of his manifesto he wrote the following:

Future generations of men would be oblivious to these remaining women's existence. . . . If a man grows up without knowing of the existence of women, there will be no desire for sex. Sexuality will completely cease to exist. Love will cease to exist. There will no longer be any imprint of such concepts in the human psyche. It is the only way to purify the world. . . . It is such a shameful pity that my ideal world cannot be created. (Manifesto, 2014, pp. 136–137)

Gavin and Elliot's parents arranged for two other skills counselors during the fall of Elliot's third year in Isla Vista, but it is unclear when these meetings began and when they ended. Elliot did not resist this help but wrote that he did not benefit from it. The first counselor was a young man whom Elliot quickly rejected, essentially explaining that he felt envious and diminished when the counselor acknowledged

that he himself was sexually active. The third counselor was a young lady close to Elliot's age whose company he appreciated. But she moved away and he further concluded that it was like paying a prostitute to spend time with him, “pathetic” when other men can be with a girl “for free” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 120). Elliot used the word “pathetic” numerous times when describing himself during his Isla Vista years and struggles. A fourth counselor was a UCSB student whom Elliot found pleasant and who provided him an “outlet to express myself”, but that it led to no change in his situation (Manifesto, 2014, p. 129).

An incident occurred in January 2014, perhaps somewhat odd. Elliot had two new apartment housemates who had moved in in the fall—the ones he would eventually murder. They were UCSB students from Asia. He described them as “the biggest nerds I had ever seen . . . both very ugly with annoying voices” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 128). In January he made a citizen's arrest of one of them, Cheng Hong. The alleged crime was stealing \$22 worth of candles. Hong was found to have them and was booked for petty theft. But Hong accused Elliot of stealing his rice bowls and moving his furniture around, which Elliot denied. The foot patrol officer suggested the two “come to an agreement on their issues, but Hong refused to cooperate” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 46).

Also in January, Philip Bloeser called Elliot's mother, worried about him because of a Facebook post³ by Elliot expressing his loneliness and that no girls would talk to him. According to Bloeser, Elliot's mother was worried too, but told Bloeser they were doing all they could and that Elliot was seeing a psychiatrist (Payne & Alleyne, 2014, para 28–29).

Elliot's self-defined *Day of Retribution* was growing increasingly near in the first months of 2014. Having decided to die, he made a point of enjoying his last days in the out-of-doors, in places that had brought him peace. He spent his time taking hikes, watching sunsets, strolling through parks and walking along beaches, and trying to avoid couples spoiling his time with their presence. He decided that the *Day of Retribution* would be Saturday,

³ The post is no longer available.

April 26th, when Isla Vista would be alive with partying and festivities.

As documented in considerable detail in his manifesto, Elliot described three phases of his plan, but actually there were four. On the first day, while his father was on a business trip, he would go home and kill his 8-year-old half-brother, a boy he had loved and played with in earlier days. Elliot's expressed reason was that because the boy was attractive, he would "surpass" Elliot in life—he would become a successful, popular male (Manifesto, 2014, p. 133). Elliot had come to feel the same envy of his half-brother that he had for other males. This feeling toward the boy was reinforced by Elliot's contempt for his stepmother, who he claimed made negative comparisons between Elliot and his brother. He would kill her as well, but he "wouldn't be mentally prepared" to kill his father (Manifesto, 2014, p. 133). He would then drive back to Santa Barbara, and the next day, in the "First Phase," he would kill his housemates (Manifesto, 2014, p. 132). Then, under some pretense, he would lure people one at a time into his apartment, and torture, kill, and behead them. It was necessary to kill his housemates as a strategic move, so they would be out of the way on the day of the attacks. Since he also found them "repulsive," he would have no regrets, and would "even enjoy stabbing them both to death while they slept" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 128). In the "Second Phase" he would drive a short distance to what he considered the "hottest sorority at UCSB" and kill as many girls as he could (Manifesto, 2014, p. 132). In the "Final Phase" he would drive through Isla Vista, killing as many people as he could with his pistols and by running them down with his car. He would also dump out the heads of the people he had killed earlier to show everyone what he had done to punish their friends. When the police caught up with him he would swallow large amounts of tranquilizers and pain killers, drink hard liquor, and shoot himself in the head. If the bullets didn't kill him, the substances would (Manifesto, 2014). Elliot went to shooting ranges at least six times between February and late April, 2014, and on several occasions purchased large amounts of ammunition, online and in stores (SBCSO, 2015).

During the weeks leading up to his planned attacks he decided to post several videos on

YouTube expressing his views. One, titled, *Why Do girls Hate Me So Much*, was posted sometime in mid-April. He video-taped himself in one of his quiet, outdoor settings. His statements were familiar:

I deserve girls much more than all those slobs I see at my college who are somehow able to walk around with beautiful girls . . . I see these obnoxious guy is walking with beautiful girls and that pisses me off because I should be the one with the girls. I mean look at me. I'm gorgeous. What you girls do not see it I do not understand, why you you're so repulsed by me . . . I mean this world is so beautiful but it's so sad and depressing when I have to experience it all alone . . . such an injustice. (Rodger, 2014b)

One person responded to his post, telling him that, "the creepy vibe that you give off in those videos is likely the major reason that you can't get girls," according to a report in *The New York Times* (Nagourney et al., 2014). Elliot was saving his "ultimate video"—the one announcing his plan—to post minutes before he launched his attacks (Manifesto, 2014, p. 133). During the week leading up to the day of the attacks he states he posted other videos, mostly of him taking drives while he listened to his favorite music, or admiring beautiful local scenery. He notes these expressed his "views and feelings to the world," but he was careful not to tip his hand (Manifesto, 2014, p. 133). There is no direct violent intent expressed in this and other videos he posted during these last days. But some of the videos recount his usual monologue of grievances and hopelessness, and his contempt at seeing couples being affectionate. According to the Sheriff's report, investigators discovered later that he was also playing back videos of couples he had recorded on his cell phone, becoming infuriated when he viewed them (SBCSO, 2015). He had also purchased a third handgun on February 22nd, another 9 mm Sig Sauer, as a backup in case one of the others jammed. He continued to practice at shooting ranges. He went about finishing up his manifesto and presumably other tasks, as he was preparing to go operational.

However, he encountered a glitch. On the 24th of April he woke up with a terrible cold, which led him to delay the date to May 24th so he would be at his best. In addition, his father cancelled his business trip, creating another problem for him. Changing his plan, Elliot decided to go home for the weekend of April 26th,

saw his doctor for his cold, and described the weekend as one of “deep, peaceful contemplation” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 134). He then returned to Isla Vista, set on Saturday, May 24th, as the *Day of Retribution*, during the last weekend of the semester.

But the delay led to the most significant event in the case from a prevention standpoint. It started with Elliot making a strategic mistake that threatened his plan. On April 30th his mother had seen his YouTube posts, perhaps the *Why Do Girls Hate Me So Much* video, and called Santa Barbara County Mental Health (SBCSO, 2015). Six police and foot patrol officers showed up at Elliot’s apartment. According to their report, he did not show any signs or make any statements indicating that he was a danger to himself or others. He was calm, shy, and polite. He told the deputies that, “his mother was ‘a worry wart’ and explained that he made the videos as a way to express himself because he was lonely and did not have any friends” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 9). One of the officers spoke to Elliot’s mother who stated the videos made her concerned he was lonely and having a difficult time, which the officers saw as consistent with what Elliot told them. When asked, she denied that there was anything of a suicidal or homicidal nature in them. Elliot spoke to his mother in the deputies’ presence, and managed to reassure her that all was well. The deputies concluded that the legal criteria in California for an involuntary hospitalization, as a danger to self or others, did not exist, nor were there grounds to investigate further (SBCSO, 2015). They did not review his social media posts, nor attempt to enter his apartment, then, or later with a search warrant (SBCSO, 2015).

Elliot entered the following in his manifesto:

I tactfully told them it was a misunderstanding, and they finally left . . . I must have expressed too much anger in [the videos]. I immediately took most of them off of YouTube, and planned to reupload them a few days before the Day of Retribution. For a few horrible seconds I thought it was all over. For the next few days . . . I kept one of my handguns with a few loaded magazines near me just in case such a thing did happen. If they did show up, I would have to try to quickly shoot them all and escape out the back window. I would then have to perform a hasty mockery of my plans, with the police on my tail. That will ruin everything. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 134)

There is little in the manifesto about Elliot’s final days. “During the last few weeks of my

life, I continued my daily adventures around town, trying to experience as much of the world as I could before I die” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 134). According to the Sheriff’s records and report, on May 6th he saw a couple at Goleta Beach and deliberately parked laterally behind the male’s car. The young man could not back out, sparking an argument with Elliot. The man’s girlfriend later reported to dispatch that Elliot yelled out to her boyfriend, “You’re lucky to be an Asian guy dating a white girl. Too bad she is such a horse-faced slut!” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 52). He then sped throughout the parking lot, almost hitting other vehicles. There was no law enforcement response to this incident (SBCSO, 2015).

The actual day of the attacks was Friday, May 23rd, a day earlier than planned. Perhaps Elliot feared being apprehended and did not want to wait any longer. Perhaps he wanted to attack before the students started leaving for the summer. After committing the first three murders in his apartment, he then went for his triple vanilla latte. He returned to the scene, posted his manifesto and final YouTube post, *Retribution*, and headed out to continue his attacks in the streets of Isla Vista. In his YouTube post, taped while he sat in his BMW, he went through his familiar litany of grievances, but now explicitly stated his intent, and the outline of his plan to “slaughter” girls and the boys to whom they were attracted (Rodger, 2014a). “My orchestration of the Day of Retribution is my attempt to do everything, in my power, to destroy everything I cannot have” (Rodger, 2014a). He repeated his rationale and intentions a number of times, in a calm, smug, contemptuous manner, appearing to savor the thought of what he was about to do.

Among the evidence found in Elliot’s apartment after the mass murders were a number of knives, a machete, empty ammunition boxes, video games, a printed copy of the manifesto, and his hand-written journal (SBCSO, 2015). A sledgehammer retrieved had presumably been intended to attack people when they came into his apartment, as he had referred to in the first phase of his plan. The search history on his laptop included various torture themes, and such entries as: *quick silent kill with a knife, how to kill someone with a knife, Adolph Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, and George Sodini*—the latter a mass murderer of

women who was also motivated by his lack of sexual relationships (SBCSO, 2015). Elliot's bed had some slashes on it and the pillows had numerous stab marks, suggesting, according to the Sheriff's report, that he was practicing his movements for the coming knife attacks. His journal was open to the last entry: "This is it. In one hour I will have my revenge on this cruel world. I HATE YOU ALLLL! DIE" (SBCSO, 2015, p. 41).

Philip Bloeser, among others, was totally shocked by Elliot evolving into a mass murderer, stating he never saw any signs suggesting violence.

The person described in that manifesto and the person on the YouTube recording [that is, "Retribution"] is not the person I knew. In the video, he even sounds different, he puts on a different voice. It's almost demonic. And I was amazed to hear him talk so much and so articulately, usually all you would get were one word, monosyllabic answers from him. (Payne & Al-leyne, 2014, para 28–29)

Elliot Rodger entered these final sentences in his manifesto:

I didn't want this. I didn't start this war . . . I was not the one who struck first. . . . But I will finish it by striking back. I will punish *everyone*. And it will be beautiful. Finally, at long last, I can show the world my true worth. (Manifesto, 2014, p. 137)

Having received his manifesto, Elliot's parents raced up to Santa Barbara, only to be told of the horrors now ended on that day, in the fun-loving college community of Isla Vista.

Analysis

Retrospective Diagnoses and Psychodynamics

The descriptive diagnoses in this case, and their interactions, are complex and should be treated as retrospective hypotheses. Yet diagnoses only go so far in threat assessment. It is more useful to focus upon the psychodynamics—the interplay between thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and impulses—and their relationship, if any, with the risk factors for targeted violence.

It appears that Elliot met the criteria for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as a young boy—deficits in social emotional reciprocity, deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors, socially anxious and awkward, inflexible adherence to

routines (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*; 5th ed.; *DSM–5*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Cognitive deficits may vary widely, from mild to severe. Elliot did not have an intellectual disability. Unfortunately, "a small proportion of [autistic] individuals deteriorate behaviorally during adolescence" (*DSM–5*, p. 56). Of interest, and somewhat puzzling, is that Elliot never refers to what would typically be considered ASD-related behaviors or issues during his first nine years. In contrast, the Sheriff's report described a boy who fit the diagnosis of ASD and experienced, early on, a number of the typical problems associated with this condition.

Anxiety, depression, and isolation can be natural consequences of the interpersonal challenges that individuals with ASD face. Self-esteem is a continuing issue. Elliot may in fact have had a diagnosable depressive disorder. He certainly described himself as depressed, lonely and miserable in his manifesto, including spells of solitary crying. He chronicles key losses of friendships. At times, he was prescribed antidepressants, but he stopped taking them and their effectiveness is unknown. Adults with ASD may "still struggle in novel or unsupported situations and suffer from the effort and anxiety of consciously calculating what is socially intuitive for most individuals" (*DSM–5*, 2013, p. 53). It could well be that ASD formed the psychobiological foundation for the development of Elliot's defensive personality traits that eventually facilitated his extreme violence.

There is no direct link between ASD and violence in adults (Im, 2016; Wachtel & Shorter, 2013). Deficits in "emotional regulation," the ability to appropriately inhibit the expression of strong emotions, is a feature of ASD that may contribute to outbursts, and to eventual criminal behavior. In persons with ASD this may manifest in poor impulse control, aggression, and negative peer interactions (Lerner, Haque, Northrup, Lawer, & Bursztajn, 2012, p. 181). ASD-related deficits in "moral reasoning"—a social-cognitive process by which one judges an action to be worthy of praise or blame—may also contribute (Lerner et al., 2012, p. 182). However, when adults with autism commit serious acts of violence, research and case studies show convincing evidence that there is usually a comorbid contributing condition such as psychosis, mood

disorders, or psychopathy (Im, 2016; Wachtel & Shorter, 2013).

As a child, Elliot does not appear to have shown psychopathic traits. He states he felt guilty when he first started to cut his college classes (Manifesto, 2014). But his eventual psychopathic (callousness and remorselessness) and accompanying sadistic (enjoyment of the suffering of others) traits are suggested by the complete absence of any ambivalence, remorse, or embarrassment concerning his eventual horrific acts of violence. He viciously stabbed one of his roommates 15 times, the other 25 times, and their friend 94 times (SBCSO, 2015). All had multiple incision wounds as well. Ronningstam's (2005) Psychopathic Narcissistic Personality Disorder includes the most callous, sadistic, and violent end of the range of narcissism. It is a matter of degree, and envy is still a core issue.

Over time, Elliot developed narcissistic defenses in childhood—a sense of entitlement and grandiosity—as a means of compensating for his social deficits and related negative feelings about himself. These defenses crystallized as he grew older. He became a severe narcissistic personality disorder by late adolescence and young adulthood.

Psychodynamically, the central and determinant emotion in this case was pathological, insidious envy—a painful state of unworthiness related to shame that leads to the wish to destroy goodness in others. This was evidently present through most of Elliot's conscious life, and stemmed from his narcissism. He was in a constant state of making negative comparisons with others, resulting in continuing feelings of inferiority and hostility, his life ultimately “a living hell” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 131).

In threat assessment, we are typically confronted with the arrogant and outwardly hostile narcissist, but this is largely inconsistent with Elliot's extremely introverted nature. Relevant to this case is a distinction between two types of narcissism. One is the more familiar arrogant, grandiose presentation. The other style is self-effacing, and clearly observable as vulnerable and anxious (Gabbard, 1989). Ronningstam (2005, p. 32) points out that in the range of narcissism from healthy self-regard (“normal entitlement”) to pathological, malicious narcissism, there exists the “shy” narcissist, who is inhibited by shame from stretching himself,

from striving. Referred to also as the “closet narcissist,” he appears humble and is often quiet; but he is hypersensitive to criticism and social slights, and significantly—suffers from strong feelings of envy. If he tries to step out of his narrow comfort zone in social situations, his feelings of humiliation and underlying shame are easily triggered. This seems to describe Elliot fairly well. The grandiosity and exaggerated entitlement exist, but mostly behind the curtain, in compensatory fantasies—until the *Day of Retribution*, when his weakness and “pathetic” inferiority is transformed into a dominant, omnipotent self. Recall how Philip Bloeser, frustrated with his friend's extreme withdrawal, was amazed at Elliot's ultimate “demonic” presentation on YouTube. Elliot's developing grandiose ideas of being an “ideal, magnificent gentleman” in fact may have intermittently risen to the level of definable delusions during the last year or so of his life (Manifesto, 2014, p. 109). “I will be a god, and they will all be animals that I can slaughter” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 118).

Envy is developmentally a young feeling state, with a wide range of eventual behavioral manifestations, some benign. Admiration for another fellow's naturally engaging social manner may encourage the envier to try and take on his style of interacting, and see what he may accomplish. But he knows, without significant pain, that he could never be as “cool” as the boy he models. An awkward young man can feel diminished by how much more “charming” another fellow is, but not want to literally attack him, or play some trick on him to embarrass him. Severe envy stimulates impulses to hurt, damage, or injure those who possess positive qualities that the envious person does not have (Klein, 1975). Through these acts, targeted others' positive qualities are diminished, and there is less there to envy in the other.⁴ Elliot, between failed attempts to achieve what others had (positive social and sexual relations), became increasingly saddled with envy which he could not surmount. Eventually he no longer resisted his envy, and it became the emotional fuel for his aggressive and failed attempts to

⁴ Literature is rife with characters whose envy destroyed more fair or privileged others. Many of Shakespeare's plays entail treacherous envy. Iago is often mentioned as a prime example, whose manipulations brought about the destruction of Othello.

dominate and control others. Over time it became an emotional source for his homicidal fantasies and wish to literally destroy others. He hated men for their success with women, and hated women for not meeting his sexual needs, for dismissing him. The pathological, murderous power of Elliot's envy is particularly striking and callous with his plan to kill his younger half-brother—an innocent 8-year-old boy—because his brother was “attractive” and perceived by Elliot as a male who would eventually have a better life than Elliot.

What was the relationship of Elliot's envy to his eventual aggression and violence? [Ronningstam \(2005\)](#) notes that “Aggression and its variations—irritability, resentment, anger, vindictiveness, rage, and hatred—have historically been one of the most significant features in pathological narcissism” (p. 85). But the relationship between negative aggressive affects and aggressive actions in narcissistic people can be complex. In response to a narcissistic injury, narcissistic rage can range from a deep chronic grudge to violent fury, and is the response to severe envy ([Kohut, 1972](#)). A rage-driven attack serves the purpose of transforming a passive experience of victimization into an active infliction of injury or death to others ([Ronningstam, 2005](#)). The act protects self-esteem, and restores a sense of internal power and control. It may be difficult to understand or accept this. It is essential, however, for threat assessment, as well as the for the treatment of those who may possibly be retrieved from the precipice of a homicide-suicide.

Elliot was not an aggressive, acting-out child. He could get angry, but is described as holding it in ([SBCSO, 2015](#)). His envy-based aggression evolved, from resentment to mass murder. There were turning points along the way. In middle school, at age 13, he started to “act weird” and annoy people, offering this rationale: “I was tired of being the invisible shy kid” ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 42](#)). The inhibited, “pathetic” boy was striving to restore his self-esteem, and wanted attention: “Infamy is better than total obscurity”—a common theme expressed by young, marginalized attackers ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 42](#)). Felt anger, as an attitude, can be empowering; turned cold and transformed, it can be among the motives for an individual's targeted violence. This was the case with Elliot.

The onset of puberty and his “starvation” for girls amplified Elliot's distress, contempt, and anger: “The more lonely I felt, the more angry I became” ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 56](#)). At age 17, his “ideology” emerged more clearly to create a world where sex is abolished and women kept in concentration camps. He had a destiny to change the world. This gave him “something to live for” ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 57](#)), and his anger “made me stronger inside” ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 56](#)).

He felt increasingly empowered by these ideas, but for a long time they would oscillate with his hope and desire to overcome his virginity and isolation.

Once in Isla Vista, he began to act out physically when envy would trigger his anger. There were the intermittent incidents of throwing coffee on couples and girls, and after his first year, the super soaker incident in the park. These actions enlivened him, with reactions such as, “rage-fueled excitement . . .” ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 87](#)). He nearly got into a fight with a roommate, and was taking risks with his safety. Most significantly was his alcohol-fueled attempt to push partiers off a ledge the summer before his last year in Isla Vista, resulting in his being assaulted and injured. This incident humiliated and infuriated him and hardened his motivation to both kill others and commit suicide. About two and half weeks before the attacks he harassed a couple at the beach, yelling at them and speeding out of the parking lot.

From a threat assessment viewpoint, were these aggressive and violent actions testing his ability to carry out a more serious act? Misconduct problems in themselves, were these examples of the warning behavior, “*novel aggression* . . . —an act of violence which appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway warning behavior which is committed for the first time” ([Meloy, Hoffmann, Roshdi, Glaz-Ocik, & Guldinann, 2014, p. 40](#))? Ego-syntonic violent ideation was also taking a firmer hold early in the Isla Vista years. “It was around this point in my life that I realized I was capable of doing such things. I would happily do such things. I was capable of killing [young couples], and I wanted to” ([Manifesto, 2014, p. 87](#)).

Yet Elliot's ambivalence was still evident. For instance, after his first year in Isla Vista he noted that he still didn't want “to resort to having to exact ultimate vengeance . . . I didn't

want to die. I wanted something to live for” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 106). As with a number of mass murderers, he was weighing his options and their pros and cons—the life forces for personal survival in battle with the dark, with the forces of destruction.

Psychologically, Elliot was trapped. He said as much as he approached his tipping point, finally choosing murder and suicide over continuing to live a life he found humiliating and hopeless. “I hated the feeling of being trapped and lost. I wanted a way out, but I saw none” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 119). Feeling trapped is an element in the warning behavior of *Last Resort*: “evidence of a violent imperative . . . increasing desperation . . . no alternative other than violence . . . the subject feels trapped (Meloy et al., 2014).

But once Elliot committed himself to a pathway to violence (research, planning, preparation), he would have been expected to feel increasingly better. It is likely that as he became more engaged in these operational behaviors, it reduced his anxiety, supported his sense of grandiosity and entitlement, and buttressed his sense of dominance over others—his manifesto clearly attests to this. And now he not only had a purpose, but a secret as well—a powerful one—which would have likely added to his excitement and anticipation. Earlier in his manifesto he offered a comment about himself, perhaps relevant to his later planning. When he had quit attending classes at Moorpark College, he instead spent the day at Barnes and Noble. He would be sure to stay late enough, so his mother would not be suspicious. “I have always ever been meticulously careful at everything I’ve done” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 81).

The pathway behavior, moreover, meant that Elliot spent more time in fantasy, and past research has shown that such withdrawal into fantasy compensates for a life of misery and boredom among adolescent and adult mass murderers (Hempel, Meloy, & Richards, 1999; Meloy, Hempel, Gray, Mohandie, Shiva, & Richards, 2004). No doubt his biggest concern as the end neared was being detected and stopped. Another mood state revealed in his final days is the peacefulness he said he felt as he visited for the last times his favorite outdoor venues. His decision being final, he could in a sense relax.

Returning to the role of Elliot’s ASD, it is plausible to consider, whether he recognized it or not, that given his personality structure, deeply felt shame played a major role in shaping his self-concept. Shame, like envy, is closely related to self-esteem regulation (Ronningstam, 2005).

Shame is intense embarrassment, a powerful form of “social pain,” humiliation, and inferiority (Elison, Garofalo, & Velotti, 2014). These negative feelings are all social in context. One cannot easily control or change their magnitude, as their source lies with others—a denigrating audience, either in reality or in the mind of the individual. Imagine the boy Elliot, in a classroom, observing other youngsters engaging in activities and developing their personal and interpersonal competencies. He is confused and overwhelmed by all the fast-moving, noisy goings-on. He has trouble understanding other children’s social behaviors, and does not respond as spontaneously as they do. He is small and he is shy. He feels very badly about himself, however much held within. Children with ASD will have self-esteem challenges. With Elliot, who would be especially vulnerable to narcissistic injury, the experience would be more severe. The development of his narcissistic defenses helped him cope with a world he found increasingly difficult.

By nature, shame, like envy, is linked to aggression, as a defensive action to protect the self. The individual may deal with shame inwardly, attacking himself, or withdraw socially to dampen the impact of shame (Velotti, Elison, & Garofalo, 2014). He may deploy denial, consciously or unconsciously, keeping painful awareness of inadequacy and self-hatred at bay in the service of living a positive enough internal and external existence (Velotti et al., 2014). But shame may be managed by attacking others. Blame and self-hatred is projected onto others. The individual’s dignity is maintained and his mastery demonstrated. Suicide, as the last act in a mass murder, is not contradictory. Not only does it end pain and humiliation, but can serve to destroy an “imperfect, failing, intolerable self . . . so that my perfect soul can survive” (Ronningstam, 2005, p. 161). Elliot’s psychodynamic of his purification and glorification fantasies—his “ideal world”, seems consistent with this notion. Such “purity” is often coupled with sexual and affectional failures in actual

day-to-day life, that are also apparent in lone actor terrorists (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014). With suicide, the murderer has the last word, and controls the aftermath by eluding capture.

As a number of researchers studying the psychology of mass murder and other forms of targeted violence have noted—the violent act serves the purpose of “restoring the self” (Gilligan, 2003; Kohut, 1972; Menninger, 2007). A final, self-affirming purpose is embraced, and through violence—shame is overcome, and is replaced with pride (Gilligan, 2003). As stated by James Gilligan, the experience of overwhelming humiliation has already led, psychologically, to the “death of the self” (2003, p. 4). Apocalyptic violence is more than worth the sacrifice of one’s body. With death, the individual is “born again” (Gilligan, 2003, p. 4).

Elliot’s final words in his manifesto, *My Twisted World*, is an affirmation of self: “Finally, at long last, I can show the world my true worth” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 137).

One other note about envy and shame: Both have “the urge to hide,” to be either unconscious or disguised (Ronningstam, 2005, p. 89). To admit them openly is to expose oneself as inferior. Their assessment may be challenging and vexing, especially in the shy narcissist, a point to be taken up in the next section (Ronningstam, 2005).

Prevention and Threat Management: General Comments

It is not difficult to see where Elliot was headed, once so much information became available in the aftermath. But we are better to view threat management failures as opportunities to learn, rather than to criticize others in the distorted light of hindsight. Threat assessment and management is humbling work. Much has been learned since the 1980s about those who pose a threat among those who make a threat or otherwise raise concern. No doubt many lives have been saved, including those of potential perpetrators. The number of thwarted attacks is unknown, but anecdotally it is fair to say it is probably in the hundreds.

Who among us cannot recall our “close calls,” or the times we fretted with the knowledge our information was insufficient but the stakes were high? Resources are stretched on campuses and the “haystack” of troubled and

troubling individuals is constantly abuzz with background noise. How many times does a campus police department receive calls about intoxicated, rowdy students, or individuals who are posturing and throw beverages on others? How petty is having your roommate arrested for stealing your candles? Count the number of lonely students struggling in school who pose no risk to themselves or others. Our most difficult problem is not knowing what we do not know. In the case of Elliot Rodger, a visible and troubling behavioral pattern was emerging in Isla Vista.

Reviewing the entire case, a point stands out: Elliot, who was very isolative by nature, was also very secretive. Further, he was allowed to be, to an extent, which may seem paradoxical given the concern his parents and his few friends had for him. He was increasingly “out there,” with his posts and vlogs about his frustrated entitlement, grievances, and contempt. Just how dark and destructive his internal world had become, he did not reveal to anyone, until the end. It was not understood for the implications it foretold. Others were concerned about suicide, but everyone close to him was shocked.

Mental Health Interventions

Elliot came from a relatively privileged family. His parents recognized his problems and sought help for him from a very early age. As stated in the Sheriff’s report, all the providers who worked with Elliot, and especially as he reached adolescence and beyond, were keenly aware of his severe social problems (SBCSO, 2015). The report stated that “some” (SBCSO, 2015, p. 52) of his mental health records were made available for their investigation, and that “those mental health professionals who saw and treated him did not see anything that would have predicted his future behavior” (p. 5). The report states he “previously thought about suicide,” apparently around 2007 (age 16) when diagnosed with a Pervasive Development Disorder (SBCSO, 2015, p. 52). It cannot be determined from this information how much any of his providers probed for risk to others.

At various points in time he began to act out, to harass others and engage in menacing and physically violent acts. All of these were opportunities to intervene more directly and to reeval-

uate the appropriateness and effectiveness of whatever help he was receiving.

Elliot's psychological problems were both serious and complex. Notwithstanding the limits of mental health care, the earlier the interventions, especially with autistic disorders and developing personality disorders, the better. Beebe and Risi (2003) note the challenges in treating adolescents with high functioning autism: "The client may take a self-absorbed stance toward therapy, not out of narcissism, but rather due to social incompetence" (p. 372). Perhaps in Elliot's case, both of these factors interfered with treatment effectiveness. More to the point—treating Elliot would require a very thorough evaluation process, and mature, sufficiently trained and experienced clinicians. Treating him with antipsychotic medications and seeing him on an intermittent basis would not be effective.

Psychoanalytic scholars note both the potential destructiveness of severe envy and the difficulty and patience needed in treating it (Polledri, 2003). Patients with Elliot's issues can be very frustrating for a psychotherapist. Envy can interfere with the patient's capacity to take in and benefit from the therapist's positive offerings—it triggers his feelings of inferiority. In a sense this is what happened with Elliot and his male social skills counselor in Santa Barbara, whom he rejected for being successful at what Elliot yearned for—sex. Elliot appreciated the female counselor, but then denigrated the experience, likening it to prostitution. In a therapy setting, the patient with severe envy may complain that the therapist is ineffective, projecting incompetence in an effort to protect his own fragile self-esteem. Elliot was quick to blame all others for his problems, and in the shy narcissist, envy and shame are particularly hidden. The patient's resistance may be manifest in indifference, expressed boredom or passive aggression. The risk in treatment is giving up on him, consciously or unconsciously, on the part of the therapist. Such complex difficulties are not the domain for "life coaches" or "social skills counselors," however well-intentioned. These are serious problems which should not be underestimated by treatment or help providers.

When it came to violent intentions, Elliot, as far as can be surmised, was very conscious of keeping his secret. He must have withheld any hints of his eventual plan from his different

treaters or counselors. It does not appear he *wanted* help for his violent and self-destructive inclinations. He wanted to keep that option.

Mental health providers and psychotherapists are increasingly eager to understand violence risk in the context of our contemporary social climate and "cultural script" for notoriety-seeking dramatic violence (Meloy, Mohandie, Knoll, & Hoffmann, 2015). However, they often have little training in targeted violence per se, let alone the complexities of pathological envy, and may mistakenly assume, as law enforcement officers may do, that if there is no uttered threat, anger or impulsivity, there is no risk. It must be acknowledged that helping Elliot Rodger acquire a better life and more optimistic outlook would be a very challenging undertaking. With the combination of severe envy, narcissism and psychopathic traits if not psychopathy per se, Elliot's problems from a mental health perspective were probably insurmountable. But if he could have been identified and "on the radar" as a risk, there would be options.

Institutions of Higher Learning

Many colleges and universities now have threat assessment and management (TAM) teams. Especially since the mass murder at Virginia Tech in 2007, all are aware of the potential for violent tragedies on campus. Ideally, TAM teams monitor ongoing cases of concern on a regular basis, working collaboratively with other agencies, professionals, and the anguished parents of disturbed young people (White, 2014). Multiple reporting options need to be available and well understood, promoting a culture of "see something, say something."

Leakage did occur in this case: the communication of intent to third parties to commit an act of violence (Meloy et al., 2014). Elliot eventually divulged to several of his friends his fantasies, hatreds and temptations to act on his violent fantasies. The summer before his first full year at Santa Barbara City College, Elliot shared with James Ellis his fantasies about exacting revenge against popular boys. This alarmed James, who eventually withdrew from Elliot. About eight months before the attacks, Addison Altendorf caught on and advised Elliot not to be "rash" (Manifesto, 2014, p. 127). Elliot reassured him he wouldn't. Philip Bloeser

saw one of Elliot's YouTube posts about four months before the attacks. He was concerned about his friend being suicidal and called Elliot's mother. The communication stopped there. Elliot was leaking his misogynistic attitudes on YouTube vlogs. Collateral information is crucial, and someone with the skills, curiosity—and authorized to take the time—should screen the significant number of incoming cases on any campus, looking for the “dots” that may connect with each other.

Leakage does not have to be overt. In the campus attacks study conducted jointly by the US Secret Service, FBI, and US Department of Education, “pre-incident behaviors” were identified in 31% of the 272 incidents analyzed (Drysedale, Modzeleski, & Simons, 2010, p. 21). Verbal and/or written threats, veiled or direct, to cause harm to the victim or victims were found in 13% of the cases (Drysedale et al., 2010). In their comparative study of adult and adolescent mass murders, Meloy et al. (2004) found that 58% of the adolescent mass murderers made verbal or written threats, usually to third parties. There were no direct threats communicated to the targets in 42% of the adolescent cases. This is the other side of the leakage coin. Elliot is a prime example.

Community colleges, like the one Elliot attended, generously provide an educational opportunity for a large population of enrollees who may enter with less distinguished or incomplete academic backgrounds. Many of these institutions, however, are underresourced and especially in need of more training and the establishment of TAM teams (Bolante & Dykeman, 2015). Elliot, in his isolation, had long since dropped all his classes, about which he lied to his parents. He was expert at keeping his own secrets. He had no other meaningful prosocial pursuits. Engaging with students who isolate, especially those who increasingly isolate, may identify the few who could pose an eventual risk to self or others. Those who can benefit from assistance can be directed to professional resources.

In the aftermath of the Isla Vista tragedy, the UC Santa Barbara TAM team (all the victims were UCSB students) received a distinct uptick in reports of incidents of concern, which continued into the following academic year (personal communication, D. Olson, August 4, 2016). Does this create bigger “hay-

stacks” of false positives for officials and TAM teams? Yes—but it is preferred to information remaining in silos. Screening efficiencies can be established.

Law Enforcement

The welfare check a month before the attack provided an opportunity to ultimately interrupt Elliot's trajectory. Much criticism and commentary focused on the Sheriff's Department in the aftermath.

One lesson in this case is the reminder that not all who are suspected of lethality risk are either psychotic or overtly despondent. Elliot could pull himself together in the presence of law enforcement officers, and did so articulately. Many subjects anticipate and mentally rehearse for such inquiries. The emotional presentation of a subject who is on a pathway to violence can absolutely be calm and civil. This should not be misperceived as a measure of safety by law enforcement, especially if there is contradictory evidence for concern. When asked by one of the detectives, Elliot's mother denied she had any concerns about her son being either suicidal or homicidal. Elliot obviously concurred, although it is not stated in the Sheriff's report to what degree the detectives probed for his intent.

Social media has changed the world, including the practice of threat assessment. The social media of an individual of concern must be monitored regularly. Millennials especially are quite active, as is well-known. Posts should be viewed first hand, and not considered just from the perspective of a relative or a friend, although they are crucial “feeders” to professional resources. Social media posts may provide the basis for probable cause to seek a search warrant to enter an individual's home or apartment and seize weapons and other evidence of planning and preparation. Law enforcement has options but they need information.

Driven by the Isla Vista mass murder, California passed a Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) law providing for concerned family members or law enforcement to petition a court to prohibit a subject from purchasing or possessing firearms or ammunition for 21 days (State of California, 2014). The evidence supporting a GVRO can include acts

of violence and other overt transgressions, but may consist of no more than a “recent threat of violence” to others or to oneself (State of California, 2014, p. 87). This is a broader criterion than violence itself, which would be applicable in a case similar to Elliot’s. Laws that are lowering the bar for evidence sufficient to take protective actions are saving lives, and individual rights can be protected in doing so.

WAVR-21 V3 Retrospective Threat Assessments

This addendum, for interested readers, consists of retrospective threat assessments with the WAVR-21 V3. The coding for three Grids for Elliot Rodger are postulated, at roughly two years before, one year before, and in the final days shortly before the attacks. These are not intended to indicate a specific date, but rather the pattern of risk factors unfolding and revealed over each of the 1-year periods in a dynamic context. A summary of “findings” for the items is indicated, with the assumption that *all* of the information learned after the attacks would have been available. This of course is not the case in real time, but gives assessors an idea of what the relevant data would be in a case such as this, and how an SPJ like the WAVR can guide inquiries. Comments on threat management implications at each point are offered. Readers are referred to the WAVR-21 V3 manual for a fuller description of the risk and protective factors comprising the instrument (White & Meloy, 2016).

Retrospective WAVR-21 V3: End of Year One in Isla Vista, Age 20 (see Figure 1)

Elliot’s envy and hatreds of couples is growing (#10).⁵ His empowering violent fantasies are increasing and he sees violence as justified (#2). He tells James of his wish to act on his fantasies of “flaying” boys, revealing signs of intent (#3). He is increasingly angry (#12) about his lack of sexual contact and is conscious of restraining himself; but he acted out, throwing coffee on a couple (#6). He is not doing well in school and is dropping classes (#7). His key friendship with James was ending, a loss (#9). He feels depressed

and has crying spells (#13) and his isolation is growing (#16). He may have been bullied or teased by other males, as he claims, for being a virgin (#19). Although he has support from his parents and counselors, these are not addressing his underlying psychological issues related to violence risk, nor does James report Elliot’s violent fantasies and thoughts to act on them (#20). His unsuccessful attempts to engage with girls, and his expectations for them may be seen as poor coping (#9), as well as his very unrealistic expectations to win the lottery (#9), which actually predated his time in Isla Vista. His violent, self-esteem boosting fantasies are becoming a motive for violence, rage-driven desire to kill those who symbolize what he cannot attain (#1). He will later reveal that he had been saving money for a weapon prior to arriving in Isla Vista, a step in preattack planning (#5).

Threat management implications: Year One. Elliot enters Santa Barbara City College at the least at a moderate level of concern for violence. The risk is not imminent. The interventions suggested during this period of time are acknowledged as ideal. Potentially knowable WAVR-21 V3 factors during his first year would be his depression and serious isolation. He should enter the school identified as a new student with serious needs, with a proper local treatment plan prearranged by his parents and previous providers. A competent, skilled therapist would take a thorough history, assess for lethality risk, recognize the seriousness of Elliot’s psychopathology, and the patience needed to work with his envy. Granted, Elliot would hide his dangerous thoughts, but in competent hands much could be inferred, addressed, and monitored. Elliot does not respond to “advice.” He needs understanding and a steady human connection. His relationship problems are explored, with no expectation for immediate “success.” Elliot did show some capacity to maintain relationships with caring people, but the risk of his rejecting help and withdrawing is ever present. The task is daunting. Antidepressants

⁵ Numbers refer to the WAVR-21 V3 Items, as shown on the Grids in the Figures 1–3, and further defined and explained in the instrument manual. The coding of items is a means to an end and not the end in itself. Readers may have differing opinions as to whether some items are “present” or “prominent” in this case.

Retrospective Assessment: End of Year One

	Risk Factor Items	Absent	Present	Prominent	Recent Change (>, o, <)*
1.	Motives for Violence	X			>
2.	Homicidal Fantasies, Violent Preoccupations or Identifications		X		
3.	Threatening Communications or Expressed Intent		X		
4.	Weapons Skill and/or Access	X			
5.	Pre-Attack Planning and Preparation		X		>
6.	Stalking or Menacing Behavior		X		
7.	Current Job or Academic Problems		X		
8.	Extreme Job or Academic Attachment	X			
9.	Loss, Personal Stressors and Negative Coping		X		
10.	Entitlement and Other Negative Traits		X		
11.	Lack of Conscience and Irresponsibility		X		
12.	Anger Problems		X		
13.	Suicidality and/or Depressive Mood		X		
14.	Irrationally Suspicious or Bizarre Beliefs	X			
15.	Substance Abuse and/or Dependence	X			
16.	Increasing Isolation		X		
17.	History of Violence, Criminality, and/or Conflict	X			
18.	Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence	(n.a.)			
19.	Situational and Organizational Contributors to Violence	X			>
20.	Stabilizers and Buffers Against Violence	prominent	present	absent X	
Additional Item: Organizational Impact					
21.	Organizational Impact of Real or Perceived Threats	X			

* > worsening or escalation
 o no change
 < improvement

Figure 1. Retrospective WAVR-21 V3 Assessment: End of Year One.

sants might be appropriate, but only in the context of ongoing psychotherapy.

School officials, knowledgeable in threat assessment fundamentals, and law enforcement would be informed of Elliot as a new student “at-risk.” His participation in school is monitored, as well as his social media activity. If any of his friends come forward with their knowledge of Elliot’s sadistic fantasies of revenge, then more inquiry and actions would follow. He would be taken even more seriously. The issue of risk to self and others is directly confronted. If any of his incidents of throwing coffee on

people are revealed by him or discovered, they are a window into his issues. His parents, providers, school officials, and law enforcement confer and are all on the same page with an understanding of the case and their role in monitoring and intervention. Questions are asked and inquiries made about his engaging in operational steps, such as weapons acquisition. His funds are managed. His apartment is checked, and his relationship with his housemates is monitored. His resistance at any point to such actions is possible if not probable. It is actually likely that he would be removed from school until his issues were

under control, assuming they could be. Isla Vista, in fact, as properly pointed out to him by Gavin, his counselor, was not a good fit for Elliot. His easily triggered envy is enflamed by the party culture.

Retrospective WAVR-21 V3: End of Year Two in Isla Vista, Age 21 (see Figure 2)

Elliot's motive to kill is becoming more defined, to punish symbolic targets (#1). His intent is conscious and there is waning ambivalence (#3). His envy and hatreds are growing. He is

collecting insults and blaming others for his social problems (#10), feeding his increasingly violent, sadistic fantasies and "philosophy" that justify violence against women (#2), and raising the question of whether he is psychopathic (#11). He purchases two handguns during the year and practices at a range for the first time (#s 4 and 5). He is depressed underneath; suicidal intent is likely present but remains unknown (#13). More serious acting out occurs against couples (#6). His coping is negative, having a grandiose fantasy of becoming rich

Retrospective Assessment: End of Year Two

	Risk Factor Items	Absent	Present	Prominent	Recent Change (>, o, <)*
1.	Motives for Violence		X		
2.	Homicidal Fantasies, Violent Preoccupations or Identifications		X		>
3.	Threatening Communications or Expressed Intent		X		
4.	Weapons Skill and/or Access		X		
5.	Pre-Attack Planning and Preparation		X		>
6.	Stalking or Menacing Behavior		X		
7.	Current Job or Academic Problems			X	
8.	Extreme Job or Academic Attachment	X			
9.	Loss, Personal Stressors and Negative Coping		X		
10.	Entitlement and Other Negative Traits		X		
11.	Lack of Conscience and Irresponsibility		X		
12.	Anger Problems		X		
13.	Suicidality and/or Depressive Mood		X		
14.	Irrationally Suspicious or Bizarre Beliefs	X			
15.	Substance Abuse and/or Dependence		X		
16.	Increasing Isolation		X		
17.	History of Violence, Criminality, and/or Conflict		X		
18.	Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence	(n.a.)			
19.	Situational and Organizational Contributors to Violence		X		>
20.	Stabilizers and Buffers Against Violence	prominent	present	absent X	
Additional Item: Organizational Impact					
21.	Organizational Impact of Real or Perceived Threats		X		

* > worsening or escalation
o no change
< improvement

Figure 2. Retrospective WAVR-21 V3 Assessment: End of Year Two.

with the lottery, and feeling entitled to what he is incapable of attaining (#10). Substance abuse is now present, drinking during a tantrum (#15). He has conflicts with roommates (#17). Is he being teased and provoked by them? (#19). His resilience is poor, there is no prosocial involvement, and he is not seeking or receiving appropriate help for his serious issues (#20). His isolation is increasing to an alarming degree (#16). Elliot is an individual of high concern for violence.

Threat management implications: Year two. Assume Elliot is first brought to attention at this time, perhaps due to his increasing acting out, or his dropping classes. Similarly, as in the previous year, but now with more urgency, multidisciplinary investigations and interventions, and monitoring are put in place. He is in serious need of help. Ideally his fantasies and underlying issues are brought to the fore and lethality risk is thoroughly investigated, with collateral information from different sources. His social media activity reveals significant issues, anger, contempt, and isolation, and interest in violent media. His few close friends are interviewed. Firearms purchases and access are discovered. Local gun ranges are checked for his appearance. His apartment is searched. He is on everyone's radar. He would very likely be placed on an administrative leave of absence and returned home. This would protect the residents of Isla Vista, but admittedly transfer the problem to another locale. In that case, local law enforcement is briefed. Hopefully he is getting competent psychotherapy, but the focus now is on monitoring, regular check-ins, and direct continuing inquiries into his intentions.

Retrospective WAVR-21 V3: End of Year Three in Isla Vista, Age 22, Approximately One Week Before the Mass Murder (See Figure 3)

By the month or so prior to the attacks, all of the first five "red flag" items on the WAVR are now prominent. Elliot has his firm motive—for revenge, notoriety, to end his own pain, and in death to affirm his "true worth" (#1). Evidence for item #2 is abundant, but mostly discovered in the aftermath: Preoccupation with his compensatory fantasies has evolved into a grandiose philosophy of abolishing sex and love, and

eradicating women; all of this contributing to his justification for violence. Later revealed was that he had identified with previous mass murderers and Nazis. His intent becomes prominent but he leaked only some of it (and his fantasies) to a friend (#3). He purchased his third firearm, acquired large amounts of ammo and hunting knives (#s4 & 5); researched how to kill people, elucidated a secret, elaborate plan for the mass murders, and escalated his practice at firing ranges (#5). Earlier in the year, his menacing behavior at a party (#6)—a violent act itself (#17)—while intoxicated (#15), demonstrated very poor coping with his interpersonal issues (#9), and led to a disastrous, publicly humiliating setback and loss of dignity (#9). This event reinforced his envy-stimulated hatreds (#10) and anger (#12), and decision to commit suicide (#13) as well as the murders. After the incident, he expressly stated to a neighbor his intent to kill the partiers and himself (#3). His isolation (#16) remained prominent throughout his last year, and he had long since dropped out of school (#7). His ambivalence about killing diminished below a threshold for restraint, and he shows no remorse shown for any of his menacing actions, let alone the murders; his callousness and sadism are in full bloom (#11). Others who could have discovered the extent of his violent planning missed several opportunities to more thoroughly investigate and intervene, and his "skills" counseling was inappropriate and unprobing, and possibly contributed to his negative feelings about himself (#19). Buffers against violence are not present. He lacks resilience and his psychiatric treatment is clearly off-mark (#20). He poses an imminent risk, but how imminent is not known to anyone.

Threat management implications: Year Three. Assume the sheriff's deputies had gone inside Elliot's apartment, roughly a month before the attacks. As Elliot himself said, his plan would have been prevented. Or because of the welfare check, maybe his parents would come to see him, up close. Perhaps they would have discovered his operational preparations, his weapons and other paraphernalia. If law enforcement had discovered the extent of his intent and preparations, he might have been directed to the courts, subjected to a forensic evaluation, and required to attend a court-mandated treatment program. This could help, or not, but he is not a risk if he is not at large.

Retrospective Assessment: End of Year Three

	Risk Factor Items	Absent	Present	Prominent	Recent Change (>, o, <)*
1.	Motives for Violence			X	>
2.	Homicidal Fantasies, Violent Preoccupations or Identifications			X	>
3.	Threatening Communications or Expressed Intent			X	>
4.	Weapons Skill and/or Access			X	>
5.	Pre-Attack Planning and Preparation			X	>
6.	Stalking or Menacing Behavior			X	
7.	Current Job or Academic Problems			X	
8.	Extreme Job or Academic Attachment	X			
9.	Loss, Personal Stressors and Negative Coping			X	
10.	Entitlement and Other Negative Traits			X	>
11.	Lack of Conscience and Irresponsibility			X	>
12.	Anger Problems			X	>
13.	Suicidality and/or Depressive Mood			X	>
14.	Irrationally Suspicious or Bizarre Beliefs		X(i)		
15.	Substance Abuse and/or Dependence		X		
16.	Increasing Isolation			X	
17.	History of Violence, Criminality, and/or Conflict		X		
18.	Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence	(n.a.)			
19.	Situational and Organizational Contributors to Violence			X	>
20.	Stabilizers and Buffers Against Violence	prominent	present	absent X	
	Additional Item: Organizational Impact				
21.	Organizational Impact of Real or Perceived Threats		X		

* **>** worsening or escalation
o no change
< improvement

Figure 3. Retrospective WAVR-21 V3 Assessment: End of Year Three.

This is a short-term solution that allows for maximum ongoing assessment and intervention remedies. The long-term prognosis and safety implications, however, are in the balance.

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Received September 30, 2016

Revision received February 13, 2017

Accepted February 14, 2017 ■

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