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“They Turn to Violence”

Active Shootings and the Convergence of Hegemonic Masculinity, Race, and Perceived Injustice

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Sociology

May, 2023

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Linda M. Fogg

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my academic supports, Dr. Karen T. Van Gundy for taking on my project mid-research and providing constant encouragement and Dr. Cesar J. Rebellon for inspiring me and supporting my initial ideas.

Endless thanks to my mentors, Dr. Catherine Moran and Dr. Cliff Brown, for teaching me about higher education: the good, the bad, and the ugly. If I have ever been or ever will be considered a good teacher by any student, it will be because of you.

To my parents, Janet and Gary Fogg, for fostering curiosity and supporting me through every stubborn and “feisty” moment.

To Dr. Beka Bryer for being my Zoom coworker, cheerleader, and friend for countless years and for many more to come.

To Elise Robichaud for helping me take breaks and remember there is life outside of graduate school.

And to my husband and partner, Luke Stauder, for supporting me from dissertation proposal to dissertation defense and making me laugh even when I didn’t think I could. And to Pablo, Dune, and Meeka for always bringing a happy moment to our lives.

In remembrance of Code Red (2021), the grumpiest of cats, whose voice made it into my transcripts and brought joy to our home. You will always be loved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
LIST OF TABLES
LIST OF FIGURES
ABSTRACT

Chapter	Page
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Study Organization</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>I. LITERATURE REVIEW</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Defining Mass Shooters</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Active Shootings</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Shooter Demographics</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Race and Whiteness</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>White Habitus</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Racial Blindness</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Race and Criminal Offending</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Masculinity and Gender Performance</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Masculinity, Violence, and Criminal Offending</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Whiteness, Masculinity, and Strain</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>White Men, Rights, and Entitlements</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>II. THE REALITY OF ACTIVE SHOOTINGS</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Sample</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Analytic Strategy</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Strengths and Limitations</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Active Shooters: Race, Gender, and Harm</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Race</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Narratives about Shootings and Shooters</i>	<i>68</i>

<i>Media and Race</i>	69
<i>Conclusion</i>	77
III. <i>WHITE MEN ON GENDER: MASCULINITY, PRIVILEGE, AND PRESSURE</i>	78
<i>Methodology</i>	78
<i>Sample and Recruitment Strategy</i>	80
<i>Interview Process</i>	80
<i>Analytic Strategy</i>	82
<i>Study Limitations and Recruitment Challenges</i>	84
<i>Being Men: Pressures, Expectations, and Violence</i>	86
<i>Fatherhood</i>	89
<i>Heterosexuality and Anti-other</i>	96
<i>Protection</i>	102
<i>Physical Competition and Dominance</i>	110
<i>Emotional Control and Suppression</i>	120
<i>Women’s Perspectives on Men’s Emotions</i>	125
<i>Shifting Masculinity</i>	129
<i>Discussion</i>	137
IV. <i>THE WHITE MALE UNDER FIRE: TOXIC MASCULINITY AND RACE</i>	147
<i>Hegemonic & Toxic Masculinity</i>	147
<i>Problematic Masculinity</i>	149
<i>Being White and Recognizing Race</i>	155
<i>Recognizing Their White Identity</i>	155
<i>White Privilege</i>	160
<i>White Habitus</i>	170
<i>Targeted White Men</i>	175
<i>Discussion</i>	183
V. <i>ACTIVE SHOOTERS: IDENTITY AND PERCEIVED CAUSES</i>	191
<i>Introduction</i>	191
<i>Perceived Motivations for Active Shootings</i>	195
<i>Mental Illness</i>	196
<i>Gun Access</i>	203
<i>Gun Culture</i>	205
<i>“Bet It’s a White Man”</i>	209
<i>Facing Injustice: “This Is My Last Resort”</i>	214
<i>White Women on White Men Shooters</i>	218
<i>Aggrieved White Men</i>	223
<i>Discussion</i>	232

VI. CONCLUSION.....	237
<i>Active Shooting Incidents and Offenders</i>	237
<i>White Men and Masculinity</i>	239
<i>Hegemonic Norms</i>	239
<i>White Masculinity</i>	240
<i>Active Shootings, White Strain, and Aggrieved Masculinity</i>	244
<i>Policy Implications and Author’s Note</i>	248
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	i
APPENDICES.....	xix
Appendix A <i>IRB Documentation</i>	xix
APPENDIX B <i>Interview Script – Men</i>	xxii
APPENDIX C <i>Interview Script – Women</i>	xxiv
APPENDIX D <i>Participant List</i>	xxvi
APPENDIX C <i>Interview Codes</i>	xxvii

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.....	58
Table 2	61
Table 3	71
Table 4	73
Table 7	xxvii

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	60
Figure 2	66
Figure 3	67

ABSTRACT

Public rampage shootings like Parkland, FL, the Las Vegas concert shooting, and Sandy Hook are a type of crime that captures national attention. As media covers these incidents and the perpetrators of them, they seek to explain why someone would commit such violence. Using active shooter data for incidents that occurred between 2000 and 2019, I examine shooter identity with particular focus on the shooter's race, an often-unreported statistic. Finding 55.4% of active shooters are white men, interviews with 20 white men and 10 white women are analyzed for explanations for white men's violence. These men and women describe active shootings as resulting from the combination of white men's race and gender expectations that produce strain and encourage violence. These combine with fears of lost privilege and status causing what they describe as attempts to rectify perceived injustices that threaten the hegemony of white masculinity. White masculinity is defined by historical violence and social status. Feeling threats to that social status and to white masculinity generally, white men's last resort in the face of a society that they perceive as unjustly discriminating against them is violence. Violence restores masculinity and is the ultimate form of dominance over others. When society itself is perceived to have harmed them, all members of that society are their enemy.

INTRODUCTION

When a mass shooting occurs, it often becomes media fodder for days, if not weeks. The media storm follows the incident as soon as it occurs up to the arrest or death of the individual. When live updates are no longer available, the speculation begins. Why did they do it? Who are they? Were they bullied? Did they use an AR-15? Who are their parents? Do they have a mental illness? Because they must be “crazy” to commit such an act of violence.

The media whirlwind around these crimes leads the public to the erroneous conclusion that we know a lot about these incidents. While there certainly is a lot of information available about shootings and the perpetrators of shootings, we know very little about what drives some individuals to engage in mass homicide and not others. When shootings occur in schools, bullying is a frequent media boogey-man. School shooters and those who engage in shootings in other public spaces are often also assumed to have a mental illness, though rarely is one provided.

Mental health diagnoses and bullying are extremely common. Common of course does not mean that mental health issues and bullying should not be taken seriously. However, what it does mean is that most people who are bullied or have been diagnosed with a mental illness do not go on to commit mass homicide. In 2020, 21.0% of adults in the United States had had experienced a mental health issue, representing approximately 52.9 million people and 5.6% (14.2 million) adults experienced a serious mental illness (SAHMSA 2021). Clearly, not all 52.9 million people also took a gun to a public place, school, or workplace intending to harm others as there were only 40 active shootings in 2020 (ALERRT 2021). Similarly, approximately 20% of teens in the United States experience bullying, typically in school (DHHS 2021). This is an additional 6.1 million youths who, according to common media narratives of shooters, are potentially going to engage in this type of crime. There are then, by a conservative estimate, over

59 million people in the United States that are potentially mass killers, or 16.1% of the population. According to the mental health and bullying explanations, almost one in every six Americans will carry out a mass homicide at some point.

Logically, we should be seeing far more horrific events than we are if mental illness and bullying are indeed the predictive aspects of mass shootings that they are often treated as. Academic research of mass shootings has come to different conclusions about shootings than the mass media. To understand the literature on mass shootings one must first grapple with the definition of mass shooting. It is tempting to study shootings that fit into the official, government designated definition of mass murder – incidents where four or more people are killed in a single incident (FBI 2008) – and many researchers use this “four or more” criteria when exploring mass murder, and mass shootings in particular by requiring the incidents of study to be carried out using a firearm (Follman, Aronsen, and Pan 2020; Peterson and Densley 2019; Duxbury, Frizzel, and Lindsay 2018; Lankford 2016;). However, there is also disagreement among scholars about what does and should count as a mass killing or shooting. Some scholars have chosen to define mass shooters as those who kill three or more people in single incident (Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001) while others only use the most extreme incidents to examine mass shooting effects and predictors (Leander et al. 2019). One issue of using four or more deaths as the criteria for a mass shooting is that such events include a variety of crimes that we already know emerge from different predictive factors.

For example, Duxbury et al. (2018) use the definition of four or more victims killed in a public area excluding the shooter. This definition resulted in a large dataset of mass shootings which is useful for analysis and interpretation, but also distorts the concept of a mass shooter as commonly understood. Duxbury et al. (2018) report that 22.63% of the incidents in their study

are a result of gang violence. Gang violence is understood as a collective form of violence, often initiated in retaliation for violence towards the gang by another group or in response to a perceived or real threat (Decker 1996). The collective aspect of this violence, as well as the intended targets being members of other gangs, not whoever happens to be in a classroom or mall at the time the shooter arrives, makes these incidents different in motivation and intent from what is commonly understood as a mass shooting: random victims in a public place. While worthy of study, some shooting crimes, like gang violence, are conceptually different from shootings understood by the public as mass shootings.

Recently, scholars have been expanding the definition of shooters in their studies to include those who do not meet the four or more killed definition while also limiting the scope of the offense. Silva (2021a) has gone as far as to expand his analysis of shooting incidents to include failed, attempted, and completed mass shootings while removing incidents like gang violence by requiring at least some of the victims to have been chosen at random. Doing so has allowed Silva (2021a; 2021b) and colleagues (Silva and Greene-Colozzi 2021) to examine all incidents that are similar to the mass shootings that typically come to mind, like the Las Vegas concert massacre that killed 58 and wounded hundreds, and the Virginia Tech shooting where 32 people died.

These horrific events, which are seared into the public memory, are what can be considered “completed” mass shootings, having reached the four-victim deaths definitional threshold for a mass shooting (Silva 2021a; Silva 2021b). Las Vegas and Virginia Tech are, terribly, extremely successful mass shootings when considering the damage the shooters planned and accomplished. Shooters who are less successful at completed mass killings are not necessarily motivated differently. If the gun did not jam, if they picked a different target, or were

a better shot, they could have been similarly deadly. Given the variety of definitions and the huge variability in scope of the shootings, this study focuses on *active shooters*, defined by the FBI as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (ALERRT 2020: 3). The active shooter definition does not include shootings that were stopped prior to the gunman initiating the plan, gang shootings, nor does the definition used for this study include shootings that resulted from self-defense, domestic violence, hostage situations, or shootings that occurred during the commission of other criminal offenses. The shooting had to occur for the sake of causing random harm, and not, for example, to prevent police capture following a robbery.

The FBI’s active shooter reports contain the following: mass shooters, who killed 4 or more individuals; attempted mass shooters, those who fired guns in public but did not meet the 4 or more threshold of killed victims; and individuals who fired or attempted to fire a weapon in a public space with the intent to kill but did not succeed. Therefore, the active shooter definition combines incidents of the most extreme violence and incidents that have the potential for extreme violence. This definition addresses the root issue of concern to the public when the term mass shooter is used: an individual shooting in a public space, like a mall or a school. These individuals are just as frightening whether they kill one person or 30. The potential for widespread death and injury is the same.

These are the types of incidents that are the focus of this study. This study seeks to explain why certain people are more likely to engage in such violence. Specifically, why white men are most likely to engage in active and mass shootings. Prior research finds that men are responsible for anywhere between 85% and 100% of mass shootings, depending on the definition (Silva 2021a; Silva 2021b; Follman et al. 2020; Silva and Capellan 2018; ALERRT 2018;

Lankford 2016b; Lankford 2015a; Lankford 2013; Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001). Race, while less often the focus of research into these incidents, emerges in unusual patterns when it is included in study. Whites are responsible for less than 30% of homicides each year in the United States (FBI 2021) but are consistently found to be between 60% and 79% of public, mass-defined shootings (Silva 2021b; Silva and Capellan 2018; Rocque 2012; Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001). This pattern of white men's mass violence needs to be explored and better understood if there is any chance to reduce or eliminate this type of shooting. The current study explores patterns in active shooter data and across media reports to clarify what we know about active shootings. Then, understanding these data, engages in a dialogue with 20 white men and 10 white women about their lived experience, the expectations they believe result from their racial identity, masculinity, and their perspectives on public, rampage style gun violence. Examining white masculinity through the eyes of white men and their gender opposite will expand the literature and public understanding of the race and gender patterns of active shootings.

Study Organization

This study begins in Chapter 1 with a review of prior research on mass and active shooters and literature associated with key gender and race concepts that emerge in the interviews examined in Chapters III through V. In this first chapter, I lay the foundation for investigating white men's identity and the issues the participants of the interview portion of the study communicate. General Strain Theory is used as a general framework for understanding the pressures men today face, the aggrieved entitlement of white men (Kimmel 2014), and how those pressures may contribute to violence.

Following the literature, Chapter II describes quantitative analyses of active shooter data, compiled from multiple sources into a single dataset to answer the following questions, based on a lack of racial data in shooter statistics and media narratives around shootings:

- What do the media communicate to the public about the race of shooters?
- Do the demographics of the shooter (race, gender, age) affect whether the media communicates the shooter's race to the public?
- To what extent are whites more likely to be active shooters compared to other racial groups?
- To what extent are there differences in the racial representation of active shooters and homicide offenders?

These questions are answered using the dataset compiled and interpreted through additional context of specific shootings gathered from media articles. Chapters III through V use qualitative data gathered from white men and women to answer the following questions based on the findings of Chapter II:

- What does it mean to be a man to white men and women today?
- How do white men and women understand their race within today's society?
- How do white men and women explain men's violence?

And finally,

- How do white men and women explain white men's proclivity to commit active shootings?

Chapter III focuses on the first two of these questions, analyzing white men and women's perspectives on masculinity and what being a man today means. Throughout the following pages, the men and women in this study explain the way hegemonic masculinity norms continue to affect their lives and perspectives, though there are attempts to resist these values they largely perceive as outdated and unrealistic. Further, I will show how violence is deeply intertwined with masculinity for many of these participants, describing norms of masculinity as both directly encouraging violence and restricting more peaceful methods of grievance management.

Chapter IV diverges from hegemonic masculinity norms and expands on the idea of toxic masculinity, as set forth by the participants. Toxic masculinity can be generally considered extreme versions of hegemonic norms. Ultimately, these are norms only white men can fully embody as a socially privileged group above people of color. As such, the chapter also investigates the white participants perspectives on race and white privilege and what they believe is an attack on white men's identity and position within society.

These issues the participants explain are integral to understanding the race and gender patterns of active shootings reported in Chapter II and leads the interviews back to violence and the participant's perspectives on active shootings. Chapter V explores common media narratives discussed in Chapter II about gun use and mental health that were brought up by the participants. This chapter expands on explanations of white men's violence, explaining why, from the perspective of regular, non-violent white men and women, white men commit most active shootings in the United States.

Based on these data, I argue in Chapter VI that white men are conditioned by hegemonic masculine expectations to avoid help-seeking, to engage in displays of dominance and aggression, and that their racial identity has normalized the use of violence against others to resolve perceived problems and grievances. In the face of strain, white men are less equipped to seek healthy, peaceful coping mechanisms than their women opposites. They have been taught by society that they are entitled to the use of violence against others and, in the face of a shifting society, can resort to guns and mass violence as a means of reassert white men's hegemony when they feel they are losing control of their lives and their identities.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Mass Shooters

The term mass shooter is ambiguous. What is mass? How many people does it take to be considered a mass shooting instead of a multiple homicide? In the 1970s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) classified mass homicide as a single incident in which four or more individuals, not including the offender, are killed (FBI n.d.). As such, one of the most common definitions of a mass shooting since the Columbine High School incident in 1999 is an incident in which four or more people are killed using a firearm, not including the offender (Schildkraut and Elsass 2016). Depending on the researcher, their goals, and the scope of their study, this definition shifts relatively frequently in the literature on mass shootings.

In the early 2000s, Maloy and colleagues used the definition of three or more killed in a single incident to investigate the rise of adolescent mass murder. The reasoning for this choice is unclear (Maloy et al. 2001; Maloy et al. 2004). Some years later, the US Congress defined mass killing as a single event in which three or more people are killed (Pub. L. 112-265, 2013).

However, many researchers have defined a mass killing as a single incident in which four or more people are killed using a firearm, following the FBI's definition of mass murder where four or more people must be killed in a single incident using any kind of weapon (Peterson and Densley 2019; Duxbury et al. 2018; Lankford 2016a; Lankford 2016b; FBI 2008) or adjusted to follow President Obama's three or more criteria for federal involvement (Yelderman, Joseph, and West 2019; Follman, Aronsen, and Pan 2021). Clearly, there is no standard definition of mass shooting, not in literature or at the government level. Even the FBI does not technically

collect data on mass shootings or even active shooters¹, which one might expect to be part of their expanded homicide reports, publishing reports on active shootings with ALERRT.

MotherJones, an online political magazine, has kept a running record of mass shootings in the United States starting in 2012 after the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting which killed 12 people and injured 70. MotherJones uses the definition of three or more killed in a public place using a firearm, following President Obama's mandate for federal investigations to assist in shootings with a baseline of three deaths in a single incident. A valuable public asset, I respectfully disagree with Follman et al. (2021) who argue that larger datasets with lower baselines address gun violence generally, but fail to address public, rampage style or mass shootings. Definitions of mass shootings with lower baselines may not fit technically definitions of "mass" in that fewer, if any, people die during the incident. However, I argue that the fear and fascination that surrounds mass shootings is not the death count alone, but the potential for harm when a shooter opens fire in a public space. Shootings that do not result in deaths but where the shooters intended to kill as many as possible are just as important to understanding the type of shootings called mass shootings as incidents where far more than three or four people were killed.

Intent is difficult to measure, particularly when many of the offenders are deceased.

Discussing their own definitions, Silva and Capellan (2018) argue astutely that

a death-toll criterion ignores random and systemic factors (e.g., firearm malfunction, EMT responses) that may impact whether or not a perpetrator seeking to become a mass public shooter actually becomes one... It is important to include anyone attempting to become a mass public shooter, and not just those who succeed. (6)

¹ Active shootings are defined by the Texas State University's Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center using FBI data and published in conjunction with the FBI. ALERRT identified incidents and develops the reports independently.

While it can be difficult to think of the “success” of a shooting, as success in this situation means the death of at least four people, it is necessary to consider both the successful shooters and those shooters who fail to meet the thresholds previously imposed on mass shootings.

It is clear to anyone that incidents like Las Vegas, the Aurora theater massacre, and Parkland, where 58, 12, and 17 people respectively were killed and many more injured, are incidents of mass casualties and cause widespread harm. However, when a man opened fire at a store in Macomb, Illinois failing to kill or wound anyone before committing suicide as police arrived, he is not considered as dangerous or study worthy as these other shooters. Clearly, this man, Jonathan Joseph Labbe, had the potential to kill four or more people and he and his attack are just as important to understanding these incidents as studying Stephen Paddock in Las Vegas.

Active Shootings

To address these definitional issues of mass shootings, the FBI does not collect data on mass shootings under any definition, instead publishing reports on active shooters. The data is produced by the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center at Texas State University using the FBI Uniform Crime Report and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), then published in conjunction with the FBI. During correspondence with this researcher, the FBI made clear they “do not collect ‘active shooter’” (personal correspondence 2020). Regardless, there is a published, government sponsored report detailing incidents of active shooters each year in the United States. Active shooters are defined as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (ALERRT 2020: 3). Using the term active shooter to describe these types of public shooting incidents as opposed to mass shootings has become more common since its inception in 2008 by

the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI's adoption of the term in 2014. Particularly as the media has begun using the term more frequently, it has been working its way into the national vernacular (Schildkraut and Elsass 2016). Active shooter is therefore a generally accepted term for the types of shootings that occur in public spaces with random victims.

The active shooter definition is not only becoming more widely used but covers a wide range of shooter types related to mass shootings. Active shooter covers all potential mass shooters who took the steps to carry out their plan by initiating violence in a public space, even if they failed to take someone's life. Not covered by the term 'active shooter' is shootings committed during the act of another crime, gang related shootings, domestic violence incidents that occurred within private residences, and terrorist-group sponsored killings (ALERT 2020). These types of shootings are important but prior research presents compelling evidence that they have different causes and/or different tactics that make active shootings a distinct form of violence. Gang and terrorist-group killings in particular are both acts of collective violence as opposed to individual acts. Gang violence often occurs as revenge on the part of the group for actual or perceived threats by another gang (Decker 1996). Terrorism is similarly a collective form of violence against another collective, with the difference of political motivation; violence against a group considered oppressive or seen in opposition politically to the goals of the violent group (Senechal de la Roche 1996).

Separating domestic violence within private residences and in public places is important for understanding what is defined as public mass shootings. Several shootings in public spaces that fall under active shooter appear to be connected or triggered by domestic incidents (Geller, Booty, and Crifasi 2021) where the first individual or one of the shooters targets is a romantic partner or ex-spouse. Still, it remains unclear how exactly the incidents are connected or when a

domestic argument will spill over into public violence. Therefore, it is important to continue to include active shootings driven or occurring simultaneously with domestic violence.

Active shooter, as I have shown, is the most accurate definition for understanding shootings commonly referred to as mass shootings. Broad enough to include typologies that do not meet “mass” definitions, though are indicative of greater violence, active shooter is also limited enough in scope to include only actual attempted shootings. Therefore, this study will utilize the active shooter definition and data published by ALERRT and the FBI to examine shooting incidents and shooter identity.

Shooter Demographics

Differing definitions across research, while frustrating for replication and cohesion, has provided broad understanding of various kinds of shootings and the perpetrators of them. The most consistent finding is that shooters tend to be white men using handguns, although this is definitionally dependent. One myth of mass shooters circulating the public is that they all use assault style rifles. In reality, handguns are used in 68% to 79% of shootings involving four or more killed or wounded (Silva and Greene-Colozzi 2021; Silva 2021b) and 81.4% of mass shootings involving three or more deaths (Yelderman et al. 2019). Clearly, the conversations that erupt on gun control are motivated by a mythology of shooters, assumptions about the use of semi-automatic rifles, and likely also differences in political ideology and a desire to “score points” against the opposing side. The type of weapon used in active shootings will be examined in this study to explore this narrative and prior findings.

One important issue of definitional changes is that offender demographics change when definitions change, revealing how a clear operationalization of the type of shooting in question is

important. To illustrate this, Duxbury et al. (2018) uses the four or more definition but importantly does not exclude gang violence or private residence limited domestic violence. They find that whites are responsible for 24.48% of mass murders which is very similar white offenders who commit singular, or not mass, homicide. However, 22.63% of the overall incidents are a result of gang violence, of which minorities are more likely to be a part of (Finn-Aage and Carson 2012). It is important to note here that Duxbury and colleagues (2018) were answering questions about how the race of mass shooters is treated in the media, not attempting to answer questions about rampage style, public shooters that are more accurately covered by active shooter. The broader their definition, the more data they had to work with when it came to media framing of shootings.

Still, Lankford (2016a) reveals how broad definitions of mass shootings that include shootings in private homes and those resulting from gang violence can change the racial makeup of the perpetrators. Also using the four or more killed definition, Lankford (2016a) separates mass murders based on the location of the crime. He finds, somewhat similarly to Duxbury et al. (2018) that whites are responsible for 37.9% of mass murders. However, whites are far more likely than any other racial group to commit *public* killings. Whites were responsible for twice as much public mass killing as they were mass killing generally, committing 63% of the public killings in the data (Lankford 2016a).

Across definitions of mass shooters, prior research confirms Lankford's (2016a) finding that whites are the majority of public shootings. Prior research finds whites are the majority of school shooters (Rocque 2012), 75% to 79% of mass murderers, including serial killings (Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001), 63% of mass murderers committed in public spaces (Lankford 2016a), and between 57% and 60.6% of mass shooters (Silva 2021b; Yelderian et al. 2019;

Silva and Capellan 2018). In comparison, whites were responsible for 32% of homicides between 2000 and 2020 in the United States (FBI 2021), a value which better reflects previously discussed white perpetration of mass shootings and mass killings of all kinds (Duxbury et al. 2018; Lankford 2016a). Clearly, something different is going on when it comes to public killing, shootings in particular. Using the definition of active shooter to confirm these statistics will contribute to the overall literature of mass shootings, as well as clarify racial patterns in active shootings.

The other major demographic characteristic of the perpetrators of these types of shootings is their gender. Perpetrators of mass shootings are most often men, consistent with men's engagement in violence generally. Between 2000 and 2020, men were responsible for 79% of homicides in the United States (FBI 2021). Mass shooters have been found to be anywhere between 85% and 100% men (Silva 2021a; Silva 2021b; Follman et al. 2020; Silva and Capellan 2018; ALERRT 2018; Lankford 2016b; Lankford 2015a; Lankford 2013; Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001). These differences again come from differences in the definition of mass shooting used in the research. However, that men are the majority of shooters is undisputed to the point that it is rarely discussed as a factor outside of descriptive results.

The issue of white men's violence is rarely a point of discussion in shooter research. White men are studied for their political beliefs, their relationship to hegemonic masculinity, violence against women (Gallagher and Parrott 2011; Pepin 2016), and nationalism (Johnson 2018; Park 2018; Schein 2018; Nagel 1998). While violence is often an undertone of these studies, such that the way white masculinity contributes to violence is less often explored (Mathiason 2019; Schiele and Stewart 2001; Daniels 1997). Research into violence as a function of white masculinity has often been couched in extremist ideologies, particularly men's rights

and white supremacy (Sanchez 2018; Kimmel 2018; Kimmel 2014; Kimmel and Ferber 2000). While there are undoubtedly connections between some shootings and these ideologies, notably Elliot Roger's rampage in Santa Barbara, there are clearly situations where white extremist ideology does not appear at play and thus, shooters need to be studied for what they *do* have in common –white masculinity.

Race and Whiteness

Race is a pervasive social construct that permeates every aspect our society, crime and criminality included through the patterns of privilege and stereotypes across society. Though race is social construct, what race a person is born into has very real, long-term consequences. Race predicts educational attainment, life-long earnings, inter-generational wealth, the chances of being involved in the criminal justice system, and health and longevity (Mogos et al. 2021; Yang, Collins, and Burris 2021; Yearby 2018; Herring and Henderson 2016; Asante-Muhammed et al 2016; Pager 2009; Pager et al. 2009; Massey and Denton 1993). As previously discussed, race also predicts involvement in public shootings (Lankford 2016a), and thus an integral component of this research.

Even though race is not a biologically based concept, people use physical cues, especially skin color, to determine the race of others. Academics have long discussed race as a social concept, a socially, collectively agreed upon set of categories based on physical and social attributes. One of the most obvious examples of this is the U.S. Census which has changed racial categories on almost every Census since its inception (Keating 1997; Hickman 1997). In the beginning, the Census considered race along four categories: free white males, free white females, all other free persons, and slaves. By 1900, the Census had updated from slaves and

non-slaves to Black, characterized as “negro or of negro descent” (Census 2022), following the emancipation of the slave population in 1864. On the 1950 Census, race was reduced to white and nonwhite, which “consists of negroes [anyone with any Black heritage], Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and other nonwhite races” (U.S. Census 1954: 3A-6). Things change much more quickly throughout the end of the 20th century so by the time of the 2020 Census, questions of race are far more complex.

In 2020, the US Census gathered information on Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, further breaking categories into national heritage. This ethnicity question is followed by race, allowing respondents to check multiple boxes for more than one race. The categories are far more expansive than prior Censuses: white, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, “other Asian”, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, other Pacific Islander, and some other race, many with spaces for open responses to clarify origins (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). The history of the U.S. Census racial categories exemplifies the way racial categories are both changeable and have been changed significantly over time. It is also important to understand how white and non-white racial categories are tabulated in the United States, as Census data is used to help contextualize shooter demographics.

It is worth noting that the category of “white” has not changed in wording (despite absorbing additional groups over time), indicating whiteness is something that stands on its own. Other racial categories are presented as alternatives to whiteness, an undefined yet unchanging norm. Of course, broadening the racial categories of the Census has allowed individuals in the United States to better identify themselves and allows the government, researchers, and the public to “see” more people. However, this has also served to further differentiate those who are

not white, while whites remain a relatively undefined category, serving as the base, neutral, or comparison group for others.

As this happens in the official counting of all persons in the country, it also happens across all areas in life, but notably in academic research. Given the awareness in academia of race as a social construct, it would make sense that race would be examined in detail, whites and nonwhites alike. However, whites are often treated as the comparison group. Other racial groups are examined in relation to whiteness, constructing understandings of non-whites groups as “other”. Whiteness is treated as the norm even in disciplines where conceptualizations of race are complex, like sociology (Keating 1997). Nayak (2007) argues that whiteness, while not the norm, is normative. Whiteness is a norm that must be examined as other racial categories are, particularly because of the privileges linked to whiteness in modern societies.

Critical whiteness theorists, like Nayak, approach whiteness as a hegemonic social category based on a variety of physical characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes, that serves to subtly justify the current social structure. Whiteness is often equated with American identity; in other words, who is and is not American (Jardina 2019; Nevels 2012; Nagal 1998). While problematic as the “melting-pot” society, this identity connection makes logical sense given U.S. history. American politics is, and has been, dominated by white men which has positioned white men as most patriotic and American individuals (Nagal 1998). As their partners, white women also are fundamentally American. In this way, what is considered white is considered American. White culture becomes synonymous with American culture to the point that whites often do not think they have a culture as a racial group. Achieving the American Dream, the house, picket fence, breadwinner, and family at home ideal, becomes a marker of being white.

This middle-class ideal is so pervasive that poor whites are sometimes labeled “white trash” and are considered outside of the whiteness that is characterized by hegemonic political power and social privileges (Wray 2006; Hartigan 1997). People who are “white trash” do not behave white enough to be considered white despite the color of their skin. One explanation of this comes through Ahmed (2007), who presents race as both proximity to other whites and social inheritance. Through colonialism, history has given certain individuals whiteness. Through their proximity to others who have whiteness, people obtain whiteness by being perceived as part of the white group. This obtained whiteness orients them to society in such a way that allows them to access styles, aspirations, techniques, habits, behaviors, and capacities people who are not given whiteness cannot obtain (Ahmed 2007). Through this perspective, people labeled “white trash” are not born in close enough proximity to whiteness. They are just outside the whiteness that enables full access to society’s resources. Being born with pale skin is not enough to be considered white by society’s standards. White is not simply a racial category, but a social category as well (Wray 2006). Being white is behaving white: presenting white socially, economically, and through white attitudes. This makes up white habitus.

White Habitus.

White habitus is defined as racialized socialization that creates white racial attitudes, behaviors, tastes, and racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003). White habitus is developed through the high level of racial segregation whites experience, isolating them from non-white individuals, culture, and attitudes (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2007; Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006; Massey and Denton 2003). White habitus is also invisible to those who have developed it. Socialized

throughout their lives to white behaviors, attitudes, and culture, white individuals do not recognize their behaviors as being particularly white.

Failing to see whiteness and white culture in your own life is a recurring aspect of white habitus. Whiteness is the “base” category. It is the “norm” or “default” against which all other races are displayed. Whites often do not even consider themselves to have a race. While all races perform race and racialize others, whites, through their dominant social position, have racialized others without identifying or engaging with their own racial consciousness (Lewis 2004). However, even if whites fail to see their own racial status, whiteness remains at least somewhat important to their identity (Jardina 2019). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) (2020), in the late 1990s, 44% of white Americans reported that their racial identity was important to them. The SPLC (2020) argues that the rise of white supremacist organizations, that number is not likely to have changed in the last 20 or so years since the survey was completed. Of course, not all white Americans are white supremacists even for those for whom white is important to their identity. However, in part due to white habitus, whites have common political interests that align along racial lines. Jardina (2019) argues that whites can be mobilized, regardless of the strength of their white identity, to political action on behalf of their group even when seemingly race-neutral policies or laws are in question.

Prior to the Civil Rights Era when overt racism was the status quo, whites openly believed and positioned themselves at the top of the social and what they believed was the biological racial hierarchy. Murders of black Americans spurred on by racial advancements spiked between the end of the Civil War and the Civil Rights Act. Blacks who looked at white women wrong or for too long, who owned land, or worked for themselves were, and at times still are, on the receiving end of white violence (Onwuachi-Willig 2019; Park 2018; Nevels 2007).

Immigrant groups realized and activated violence against Blacks as a means of obtaining white status themselves. Violence against Blacks became a method of positioning others as white and over time, these groups did become white, including the Irish, Jews, immigrants from Eastern Europe, and Italians (Nevels 2007). Across the country but especially in the South, American society had been predicated on keeping Blacks impoverished and dependent on whites for so long that any amount of black advancement and independence was threatening to the social order. Keeping Blacks under control was an effort whites and those who were not-quite-white used to maintain and gain social advantages.

Even as the country and world began moving forward with more equal rights, southern whites in particular held onto their way of life, of which physical dominance was a key component. Whites in positions of power, regardless of legality, arrested, whipped, indentured, and threatened Blacks to remain in their states instead of going north for better pay and what was believed to be better race relations (Anderson 2016; Sokol 2006). During this time, whites openly considered themselves a racial group. Being white, but especially being a white man came with many privileges - socially, legally, and economically. The advancement of rights for any minority group was, and continues to be, a threat to white privileges.

Anderson (2010) argues that racism and racial ideologies are so pervasive because they are produced and based on normal cognitive functions. While racism itself, discrimination, and prejudice towards specific groups is not natural or biological, the way that people categorize others and reduce out-groups to simple stereotypes is. We simplify the complex social world into boxes and flat descriptions and generalizations to better process the information. The way in which those categorizations and generalizations harm others is socially produced. Anderson (2010) further argues that because of the ways in which our society is segregated, there are few

opportunities to expand those generalizations and create more complex understandings of out-groups.

Therefore, whites view themselves and other whites with more complexity and build an internal perspective of their in-group, other whites, that is more sympathetic to them and their problems. This is one way that whites that may not explicitly think about or value their identity as white individuals can still be motivated into action on behalf of the white social group. Action on behalf of a social group works can be beneficial to society in some cases. The civil rights movement of the 1960s is a reminder of the power of social groups to address social problems. However, the social action and ability of an oppressed group is the other side of the coin to the ability and social cohesion of the group in power.

Decisions made by those in power based on stereotypes held about those without power can and do have very real, life-altering consequences for those less powerful groups. Meanwhile decisions made by those without power based on stereotypes of the dominant group are less likely to matter, as those dominant groups can use their power to ignore or isolate themselves from the subordinate groups. Indeed, high levels of isolation from non-whites helps to create strong racial solidarity among whites, even if individual bonds do not exist (Anderson 2010). This was certainly the case during slavery and the Jim Crow periods in our country's history and continue to impact people of all racial backgrounds today, though in less overt ways.

Racial Blindness.

As feelings of victimization and loss of status persist today in the face of challenges to privilege, so do the benefits of whiteness. Even if whites separate themselves from overt claims to whiteness or privilege, they are less likely to be arrested, shot by law enforcement, be accused

of not belonging, of not being citizens (and upstanding ones at that); they are more likely to go to college, have stable employment, and paths to upward mobility; additionally, whites retire and live longer than other racial groups (Mogos et al. 2021; Yang, Collins, and Burris 2021; Yearby 2018; Herring and Henderson 2016; Asante-Muhammed et al 2016; Pager 2009; Pager et al. 2009).. Despite these privileges very much tied to being white, many whites claim not to have a race or to see race.

By claiming to not see race, individuals are able to explain away racial disparities through individual failings instead of coming to terms with institutional and systemic inequalities along racial lines. Color-blind ideology therefore encourages and expands racist stereotypes and ideologies all while under the guise of equality (Bonilla-Silva 2009). Racism in the U.S. has thus been transformed from a systematic process of oppression in which all white members of society are complicit, if not active members in oppressing the racial others, to KKK boogeymen, specific incidents of police brutality, and the racist uncle trope. Racism has been distorted and equated to white supremacy which “helped to designate racism as an individual aberration rather than something systemic, institutional, and pervasive” (Anderson 2016: 100). The way racism is defined today as a personal, repulsive trait allows individual whites to absolve themselves of any wrongdoing by pointing to their Black friend and lack of overt racism, while still holding racist beliefs, values, and engaging in racist actions.

Racial fears are laid over immigration and crime issues which allegedly have “no color”, allowing these individuals to remain non-racist on paper, despite engaging in discriminatory actions and voting along racial lines. Whites appear to become more and more conscious of their racial group and the associated issues when the status from being white becomes important to them, such as in the face of stagnant wages and the disappearance of industrial jobs. Whites with

a strong racial identity know the privileges they receive from being white which makes them aware of what is at risk of being lost (Jardina 2019). White identity and feelings of loss seem to work in circular fashion: the more status lost, the stronger an individual may hold to white identity in an effort gain some back, thereby becoming more aware of the privileges that are still at risk. Advancements for other racial groups threaten these privileges and foster resentment on the part of whites, the same way they did in decades prior.

After the 1960s and civil rights movements, whites are far less likely to mobilize along racial lines when presented with explicit racial terminology. Instead, whites are mobilized to political action through coded language that targets white fears and values. For example, in his 2016 campaign Trump tapped into nationalist ideology and white racial fears about changing demographics; used extensive colorblind and racially coded rhetoric to label whites as victims and all others as aggressors; and emphasized ideals of hegemonic masculinity that, for example, places men as protectors of women and the nation (Jardina 2019; Lamont et al. 2017; Sanchez 2018; Konrad 2018). This type of rhetoric works because whites, despite claims that they are not or individually do not recognize it as such, a social group (Lewis 2004). Regardless of whether group concerns and issues are communicated overtly or more subtly, are held consciously or unconsciously by the group members, common grievances motivate members of social groups to action.

White habitus, political power, and American identity synonymous with white identity conditions those labeled as white to believe the white lifestyle is correct, normal, and that lifestyles associated with those who are not considered white are abnormal and lesser (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006). White habitus then informs voting patterns, residential decisions, educational spending, laws, and all other aspects of society. Particularly as whites maintain hegemony

withing the political structure, what is white is considered normal and becomes what is and is not legal.

Race and Criminal Offending

A common narrative in the United States about crime and offending is that Blacks commit more crime. This belief began well before our modern criminal justice system, back when post-Civil War whites needed a way to control the now free Black population. In *The New Jim Crow* (2012), Alexander argues that the current criminal justice system in the United States is a system designed to reproduce the results of the Jim Crow era, disenfranchising and physically controlling the Black population. Blacks appear to commit more crime because they are paid special attention to by law enforcement, a historically white institution.

Even if the criminal justice system was not designed specifically to control the Black population, it does appear to be functioning for that purpose. People of color, especially Blacks, make up a disproportionate percent of the prison population in the United States. According to the most recent Census, Blacks make up 12.4% of the U.S. population but are 38.1% of the prison population (Jones et al. 2021; BOP 2021), 26% of all arrests and, as murder is the focus of this study, 51% of homicide arrests. In contrast, whites make up 69% of all arrests and 45% of homicide arrests (FBI 2021). Whites represent 57.9% of the prison population (BOP 2021) which is much more accurate to their representation in the population compared to Blacks. As of 2020, whites make up 61.6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census 2020). Therefore, the white prison population is relatively proportionate to the general white population. Meanwhile, the Black prison population is highly disproportionate, 3.07 times greater than their representation in

the general population. These disparities can be used to racialize crime. If proportionally, more Blacks are incarcerated than other groups, then Blacks must be more criminal.

This argument does not account for reality of how our society is organized. Blacks face the brunt inequality and deprivation in the United States, being more likely than whites to live in impoverished, urban areas, which are also more likely to produce crime (USDA 2020; Parker et al. 2018; Sampson 2011). In 2019, poverty among Black Americans reached a historic low of 18.8%, a value which is still greater than other racial groups. Hispanics come in just below, at 15.7% followed by Asians and whites tying at 7.3% each (Creamer 2020). Although these values reflect a greater number of whites in poverty, Blacks and Hispanics are far more likely to be impoverished than whites and Asians.

Blacks and Hispanics, but especially Blacks due to historic migration patterns (Massey and Denton 1993), are more likely than whites and Asians to live in communities similar to those described by Anderson (1999): persistently poor, economically deprived, street-based communities that have been, in many ways, ignored by the normative white culture of society. Anderson (1999) argues that a counterculture emerges in these areas that fosters illegal acts as a means of survival, both psychologically to reject the society that has already rejected them and physically to support themselves a capitalist country that requires money to feed and house oneself and their family. It is not then the case that Blacks are more criminal than whites as there is variation in criminal offending across individuals of all races. As Shaw and McKay (1942) outlined almost 80 years ago,

it is impossible to reproduce in white communities the circumstances under which Negro children live. Even if it were possible to parallel the low economic status and the inadequacy of institutions in the white community, it would not be possible to reproduce the effects of segregation and the barriers to upward mobility (614).

The lives of whites and Blacks are so different in this country, even when they have similar economic realities, that it is nearly impossible to find samples that can be compared.

The race-crime relationship is important to understanding public rampage style shootings called mass shootings, as the race-crime relationship is flipped on its head. What we think we know about race and its relationship to crime is influenced by the social realities in US society. That white men commit the majority of shootings is made more important by this flip in demographics of homicide. White men have historically had the most privilege and advantage in the United States. Why then are white men the most likely to begin firing at strangers in public areas? What is happening with white men that makes them step outside of traditional offending patterns?

Gender

Regardless of the definition of shooting used, men commit the majority of mass shootings. Unlike racial patterns in offending, men committing most public shootings does not contradict traditional patterns in violent crime or homicide. Men are overwhelmingly responsible for crime, especially violent crime, in the United States every year. Gender, like race, is a pervasive and controlling social construct that permeates every aspect of our lives.

The sex a person is born as, most often identified through their genitalia, typically determines the gender they are ascribed. As technology has allowed parents to determine the sex of their baby prior to birth, gendering a fetus has become popular through “gender reveal parties” where, through more and more elaborate schemes, pink or blue is revealed to let everyone know that the growing fetus will be ascribed either a girl or a boy gender upon their birth. Following gender reveals, the parents will be flooded with pink or blue items appropriate to begin

socializing the child to their ascribed gender. Despite this rise in gendering along the gender binary, the United States has also seen more discussion of the gender spectrum as people have rejected the restrictive gender binary of boy/girl and man/woman. The growing voice of the LGBTQ+ community, especially with the push for marriage equality and trans rights, have brought the gender binary and society's previously held ideas about masculinity and femininity under fire.

Despite pushback on this gender binary, the male/female gender roles are still strongly adhered to by much of society and separating people by men and women still plays a major role in socialization. Like race, gender is one of the first ways individuals classify others as they judge their external gender presentation. People try to organize others into the dichotomized gendered boxes of masculine and feminine based on the length of their hair, the clothes they wear, whether they wear makeup, and many other small cues that indicate if that individual is a man or a woman by society's standards. Understanding the expectations placed on people who are considered men helps explain patterns of criminal offending generally. As such, understanding the expectations and feelings of white men specifically will help explain active shooting offenses.

Masculinity and Gender Performance.

Both masculinity and femininity are tied to sex categories through genitalia upon birth and physical cues throughout the individual's life. Babies ascribed the male sex role are socialized into masculinity as soon as they're born through practices and items that begin even before birth. Studies find that the same babies wrapped in pink and blue blankets at separate times are treated differently by the same adults based on gendered ideas. Babies called Adam

were more likely to be encouraged to physical action like crawling, walking, and vigorous play than the babies called Beth, despite the babies being mixed and match across ascribed sex and gendered clothes (Smith and Lloyd 1978). Sidorowicz and Lunney (1980) find that when babies are labeled boys, caregivers are more likely to give the babies a football to play with and when labeled as girls, they are more like to give them a doll. While seemingly harmless, over time, this socializes young boys and girls to behave in certain ways.

Girls are treated more softly and given fewer opportunities and less encouragement for physical activities. Boys are encouraged to participate in physical activity and as they get older, they are more likely to engage in physical altercations. A study of kindergarten classrooms reveals that teachers were concerned about boys' aggression, getting into fights, being unsafe but were similarly frustrated with girls for being disrespectful or complaining. Despite differences in the potential for harm, these were considered equally problematic. In addition, girls who did not listen to the teachers were immediately reprimanded while boys were given a second chance (Gansen 2019). As boys and girls grow into young men and women, these patterns are maintained as authority figures, like parents and teachers, continue to follow these patterns of gendered socialization. While women are not exempt from violent behaviors and there are women who commit murder, rape, assault, and even mass shootings, women's engagement in these activities is much less common than men.

When women's violence does occur, it is treated quite differently from men's violence. Women's violence is treated as trivial, ineffectual, and based on emotion while men's violence is necessary, dangerous, and explosive. Even when men's violence is described by young men as in similar fashion, as stupid and wrong, it is simultaneously explained as necessary in the face of disrespect (Cobbina, Like-Haislip, and Miller 2010). Girls are perceived by boys to be too weak

to be involved in or targets of lethal violence, leading boys to exclude them from dangerous activities, thus perpetuating perceived gender differences (Miller and Brunson 2006). As women age, they are continually subject to more social control by their families, friends, and social institutions like their schools which in turn permeates other areas of their lives. Friendships between women discourage criminal activity (McCarthy, Felmlee, and Hagan 2004) while men's friendships, which include gangs, can have the opposite effect, increasing criminal activity. Masculinity is so tied to physical behaviors that females who are perceived to behave like men are more likely to be involved in criminal activities and violence (Miller and Bunson 2006). Being masculine, regardless of birth sex, increases engagement in physically aggressive and violent behaviors like crime. The increased social control of women when contrasted with less social control among men contributes to Connell's (1987) concepts of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity.

The ways in which boys and girls are socialized into the gender binary is, as Connell writes, "centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women" (1987: 183). Regardless of specific means, how individuals are socialized into their ascribed gender is centered on the global hegemony of men over women, where men are considered the most deserving of privileges. While hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in dominant position to subordinated masculinity types, masculinity generally is dominant over femininity. Femininity and subordinated masculinities are used to understand the hegemonic and dominant form of masculinity at any given time, as the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity can change over time, culture, and place. Connell and Messerschmidt outline that hegemonic masculinity was formulated "as the pattern of practice that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (2005:832) globally. While similar across place in our globalized society today, hegemonic

masculinity and emphasized femininity do not exist with the same characteristics and conceptualizations throughout history. They are defined and constructed through practice; behavior individuals engage in day after day that creates norms and ideals of gender identity and relations.

Emphasized femininity is conceptualized as the form of femininity that most complies with subordination by men and accommodates the interests of men of all kinds (Connell 1989; Korobov 2011; Currier 2013; Miller and Bunson 2006). As subordinated masculinities are defined through their relation to hegemonic masculinity, other types of femininity are defined through their level of non-compliance with this ideal. Just as the “ladies” in Miller and Bunson’s (2006) study of boys and girls involved in gangs were the ones who did not engage in physical violence or behave like one of the guys and were instead objectified as sexual objects, women who do not encroach on masculine gender roles and exist to fulfill the desires of men are considered more feminine than those who do not. Doing femininity “means reacting to men and cultural definitions of masculinity” (Currier 2013: 723). More specifically, Korobov provides the following characteristics,

“traditional or “emphasized femininity” norms encourage female passivity, compliance with men’s sexual advances, an unremitting desire to have a romantic partner, a pressure to be sentimental and emotionally committed and caring, a pressure to attract the gaze of men, and a pressure to manufacture romantic feelings and mitigate unhappiness or abuse” (2011: 53)

As noted above, femininity, particularly emphasized femininity, is constructed through its relation to masculinity and the desires of men. Hegemonic masculinity, the dominant masculinity, is constructed through ideals. Connell (1987) points out that the hegemony of a particular masculinity is often created through fantasy figures. Hegemony does not require all men to achieve its form, but to uphold it as the most honored version of masculinity.

Men are particularly influenced to behave in ways that are in alignment with that masculine ideal as they are ascribed and treated as boys and men from birth. Girls and women are taught to defer to that masculinity and to expect and encourage the men in their lives to act in accordance with and give deference to hegemonic masculinity and its values. In fact, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) specifically lay out that hegemonic masculinity was “not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense...but it was certainly normative” (832). Just because most men cannot attain the hegemonic ideal of the time does not mean they are not influenced by or do not benefit from hegemonic ideals. The hegemonic masculinity of a particular culture is not the masculinity that most men embody but the norm they are expected to *try* to achieve. In the U.S., the idea of hegemonic masculinity brings up characters such as Rambo, Captain America, John Wick, James Bond, and John Wayne; through their characters, actors such as Clint Eastwood, Jason Statham, Bruce Willis, and Sylvester Stallone; and real but exceptional individuals like boxer Muhammed Ali or quarterback Tom Brady, among others. These are society’s tough guys and heroes; men who fought their way, often violently, through hard times and won the day. Most men are not John Wayne, nor will they ever be, but they are still beholden to him as a normative figure and are influenced by the ideals his character embodies.

Contemporary hegemonic masculinity in the United States is characterized by physical strength; physical and emotional control; occupational achievement; family patriarchy where the man is the breadwinner; autonomy through frontiersmanship or the more modern outdoorsman/adventurer; and heterosexuality (Smith et al. 2015; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 1993; Donaldson 1993; Trujillo 1991). As previously noted, not all men can achieve hegemonic masculinity. It follows that these individual characteristics are also not ideals any man can embody and even those who can, cannot do so in all circumstances. Social

situations determine what gendered behaviors are acceptable and can constrain gendered achievements available.

Individuals contribute to social situations but often the structure of those situations is predetermined through previous, societal patterns of behavior. As Messerschmidt (2014) lays out, a man can be in a subordinated position simply by his father occupying the same social situation. Because fathers are idealized hegemonic patriarchal figures, they automatically embody the more dominant masculinity regardless of the son's role in his own family unit or how well he has met masculine gender expectations.

In this way, Messerschmidt (1993) argues that gender is a "situated accomplishment" where gender is accomplished in each social situation depending on the behaviors available to those involved. Social structures are so pervasive that we, as members of our society, often do not even know we are being constrained by them until we fail to comply with the normative behaviors laid out for us. 'Manly' or 'womanly' behavior depends on the situation. Behaving 'manly' in one social situation could require behavior considered 'womanly' in another, such as slapping another man's butt at a sports game. Doing so outside of a sports game or locker room would break social norms and acceptable behavior. Violating expected patterns of behavior results in policing of the action by others. Peers, strangers, and authority figures can all control unwanted behavior through shaming, name-calling, or even physical consequences. This policing of non-compliant behaviors serves to reinforce the expected behavioral patterns of social structures as much or even more than unquestioned compliance. In the informative study *Dude, You're a Fag* (2009), author Pascoe reveals the ways in which high school boys learn and enforce gender norms and structured behaviors through name calling (e.g., fag) and feminizing

non-compliant boys. Those who engage in gender non-conforming behaviors are made examples of to teach those watching what is and is not acceptable for people who want to be ‘manly’.

Gender is then achieved both through performing and regulating behaviors appropriate for the situation at hand and the gender the individual desires to present as (Messerschmidt 2014). Depending on the situation, the ways in which any masculinity or femininity is achieved can shift. Maintaining and defining hegemonic masculinity is not just for fantasy figures like John Wayne and the Rock, but also for individuals as they perform, enforce, and construct hegemonic practices in localized situations. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to other masculinities which are all constructed in relation to femininities. The masculinity or femininity and the manner of achievement, as discussed previously, depends on the social structure constraining the situation. How individuals do gender is therefore predetermined. Even rejections of the gender binary are a confrontation of the available performances, thereby reinforcing the gendered masculine and feminine norms available for others as people seek to put them back into predetermined gender boxes. Change, though possible, is slow and requires constant rejection and recreation of the normative and patterned behavior. One of these behaviors that comes in and out of acceptability depending on the social situation is violence. This is especially relevant when discussing masculinity as violence is rarely, if ever, an acceptable behavior for women.

While violence for the sake of violence is not a characteristic of contemporary hegemonic masculinity, it is one way of *achieving* hegemonic masculinity. Violence is closely linked to the hegemonic masculine ideals of dominance, control, and physical strength. Men who can attain one or more components of hegemonic masculinity in less physical ways, maybe through career success or becoming a patriarchal family figure, do not need to use violence to achieve

masculine status. For men who do not have access to, or have not yet accomplished, other hegemonic ideals, like occupational success, social dominance through status achievement, or being a patriarchal family figure, physical capabilities are still well within their reach. Physical bodies are always a resource even when other resources are not available.

Masculinity, Violence, and Criminal Offending.

Most crime considered serious is a form of physical violence. Murder, robbery, aggravated assault, and rape are classified as violent crimes per the FBI and all are, or involve the threat of, physical violence. Weapons like knives and guns used in such crimes are merely extensions of the physical body used to cause physical harm. Men and, by extension, masculinity, are consistently tied to violence of all kinds. Men are most likely to commit homicide, assault, and rape. Based on 2020 arrest data², males are responsible for 74% of all crime in the U.S., 77% of aggravated assaults, 88% of homicides, and 97% of rape. While arrests are subject to bias, these trends are consistent across decades of FBI reporting and are reflected in the National Crime Victimization Survey, which measures crimes both reported and not reported to the authorities (FBI 2021; BJS 2009), thereby capturing a better estimate of the reality of crime in the U.S. The consistency in trends of male violence across different measures reveals the reality that men in the U.S. are considerably more violent than women. One explanation lies in masculinity, particularly the toxic versions of hegemonic ideals.

Hegemonic masculinity is often linked directly to toxic behaviors in the general public. Separating hegemonic ideals from toxic ones is important to understanding when gender norms

² Arrest data has limitations like any other data type. Arrests can be influenced by benevolent sexism where women are not arrested because they are perceived as less aggressive or violent. While likely skewed, arrest data is generally considered reliable, even with some validity questions.

become problematic, damaging, and violent. While none of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are inherently negative and some are positive, when hegemonic ideals are taken to the extreme, they become harmful to all genders above and beyond the harm of idealizing one gender presentation over another. Often called 'toxic masculinity,' these harmful versions of masculine norms are generally defined as a system of beliefs, behaviors, and norms that are associated with masculinity and are harmful to self, others, and society at large. Characteristics of toxic masculinity mimic hegemonic ideals: hyper-competitiveness; individualism to the point of isolation; glorification of and/or a tendency towards violence; chauvinistic attitudes and behaviors; sexism; misogyny; entitlement to women, especially sexually; objectification of women; infantilization of women; and rigid conceptions of sexual identities and roles, as well as rigid and traditional gender roles and identities (Sculos 2017). Many of these characteristics are intimately related to violence. Oppressive, overly restrictive norms require oppressive and restrictive controls over the self and those around them, controls which include violence. Understanding the more extreme versions of masculine ideals may shine a light on what are considered extremely violent crimes, active shootings, as a method of achieving masculinity.

For men, crime is often a means of achieving masculinity (Messerschmidt 1993). Risk-taking, physical displays of power, establishing dominance or control over others either through physical or social means, and/or the competition between men all become forms of achieving masculinity. These types of behaviors are often also criminal, relating to things like breaking and entering, vandalism, assault, and in extreme cases, homicide. Given the high proportion of men in arrest statistics, it seems violence is often used in various social situations to achieve some level of masculinity (FBI 1980-2020). When goals related to nonviolent hegemonic ideals like

family, career success, even attaining heterosexual partners, are unavailable to men, goals related to their physical bodies are still available.

Many of these types of violence can be seen as violence towards others. Crimes are typically violence committed by an offender against a victim. However, some masculine norms are also harmful to the individual. Extreme emotional control presents as emotional repression. Emotional expression is limited under hegemonic masculinity and often restricted to anger as the only acceptable negative emotion for men. Tests of emotions and gender stereotypes find that when respondents are presented with the same expression across men and women's faces, respondents are more likely to report the male face as angry (Plant et al. 2000). Further, men's anger is often attributed to outside forces, in other words the man was *made* angry, while women's anger is attributed to an emotional nature (Barrett and Bliss-Moreau 2009). Stereotypes present women's anger as uncontrolled emotion while men's anger is in response to an external stimulus; framing men's anger as justified while women's anger is a biological weakness to emotion.

The limiting of men's emotions to anger creates a volatile situation for men, those who adhere to masculinity, and those around them. When anger is the only permitted emotion, all negative emotion is expressed as anger. Sadness, frustration, guilt, shame, and many more feelings all become anger. Consistent with this conceptualization of the negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity norms, men report feeling anger more often than women. Anger is also consistently linked to aggression and violent behavior in studies of crime and deviance (Rebellon et al, 2012; Kaufman 2009; Jennings et al, 2009). Specifically, individuals who report experiencing anger during conflict and believe that aggression is a means of resolving a negative situation score higher on masculinity scales than those who do not (Coleman, Goldman, and

Kugler 2009). Emotions other than anger become less and less accessible the higher individuals score on masculinity scales – the more they adhere to extreme versions of masculinity norms. Eventually nearly all emotions would be suppressed and when those emotions eventually boil over, would emerge as anger; anger which is more likely than other emotions to lead to deviant or violent behaviors.

In this way, what is often called “toxic masculinity,” an extension of hegemonic norms, likely explains a great deal of male violence in the United States as it informs and controls men’s responses to stimuli in various social situations. The more strongly an individual adheres to hegemonic masculine ideals, the more likely they will be to react to a situation with anger, and thus the more likely they are to act with violence. Social structures, structured action, and cultural scripts for behavior are important to understanding crime and men’s role in criminal offending of all types. Masculinity is achieved through structured action, which can be violence, meaning crime is intimately connected to masculine identities. As Messerschmidt (1993) argues

“Crime by men is not simply an extension of the “male sex role.” Rather, crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity. *By analyzing masculinities, then, we can begin to understand the socially constructed differences among men and thus explain why men engage in different forms of crime.*” (emphasis added: 85).

Active shootings can therefore be understood as a means of achieving masculine social status among certain groups of men and in certain social situations. Based on Messerschmidt’s argument, public rampage mass shootings, active shootings, can only be understood by examining the intersectional identity associated with that behavior: white men and white masculinity.

Whiteness, Masculinity, and Strain

White men may be more vulnerable to the pressures that lead to active shootings specifically due to their position in society as white men. The more privileged a group is, the more they have to lose when other groups begin calling for equality. When privilege is threatened, the loss of long-held benefits a group has had can feel unfair to members of that group. General Strain Theory (GST) provides a useful framework for understanding how this process takes place and why feelings of unfairness or injustice are important to violent outcomes.

Robert Agnew describes General Strain Theory (GST) as the way that strains (i.e., stressors) increase the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions, especially anger and frustration which, in the absence of legitimate coping skills, results in criminal or deviant behaviors to address those strains (Agnew 1992). Strains are separated into three main categories: experiencing negative stimuli (e.g., experiencing abuse), failing to achieve a positively valued stimuli (e.g. not getting a highly valued promotion), and the loss of a positively valued stimuli (e.g. experiencing a romantic break-up). Agnew (2001) explains that any of these types of strains are most likely to lead to crime when they are seen as unjust, high in magnitude, are associated with low self-control, and/or create an incentive to engage in crime. I argue that the first three, injustice, high in magnitude, and low self-control are the most relevant to explaining mass shootings.

Individuals who see the social system as highly unjust towards them and who also do not have legitimate or conventional coping mechanisms available are the most likely to engage in deviance out of all people who experience strains. As noted by Agnew (2001), one impediment to non-criminal coping skills is anger through the loss of self-control. Anger disrupts typical coping strategies, reducing the ability to clearly express oneself and objectively analyze the

situation. Individuals experiencing anger are more likely to perceive a situation as threatening than those who are not angry, indicating anger, and accompanying fear, heighten the perception of threats and increase the likelihood of oppositional reactions (Baumann and DeStano 2010). Fear has been found to reduce the emotional control of feelings like anger and hostility (Jakupcak, Tull, and Roemer 2005). Anger energizes individuals, prompting them to action quicker than calm individuals (Agnew 2001). Linked to anger and violence through research (Vazsonyi and Belliston 2007; Denson et al. 2011; Jensen-Campbell et al. 2007), low self-control impedes good decision making, resulting in quickly made coping decisions, like the use of violence.

In his discussion of GST, Agnew (2001) specifically argues that differences in individual emotional response is important to explaining gender variation in criminal offending because of the ways men and women experience anger. As discussed previously, men are likely to respond and be attributed anger in ways that women are not. Agnew (2001) elaborates that women's anger is "more likely to be accompanied by feelings of guilt, depression and anxiety" (p.322) than men's anger. Women's anger is internalized and directed at themselves, while men's anger is expressed outwardly, towards others. Emotionally restrictive attitudes associated with traditional masculine norms have also been connected to aggression as a means of regulating the emotions felt by those individuals. The authors conclude that "aggressive behavior occurs as a result of men's fear of their own emotions" which results in an increased likelihood of using aggressive tactics to solve problems, as the only acceptable emotional display is considered aggression and anger (Cohn et al. 2010: 60). Therefore, traditional masculinity, as discussed previously, is intimately tied to anger, emotional dysregulation, and low-self-control, i.e., reacting impulsively to stimuli.

Measuring the self-control or impulsivity of shooters is difficult as all but a few are either incarcerated or died, their feelings of anger and injustice are more easily available. Some shooters leave behind manifestos, diaries, or say things to those around them during a shooting. Their life stories, writing, and friends and family around them provide insights into these feelings and are useful data for understanding why these individuals engaged in shootings. Potentially counterintuitive to think of white men as feeling the victims of injustice in a society that has and continues to work for them, the rise of men's rights and white supremacist groups in recent decades indicates men in the United States are feeling unfairly treated whether it be along gender or racial lines.

White Men, Rights, and Entitlements.

Michael Kimmel's (2017) study of white men who belong to men's rights groups is one of the most comprehensive studies of how white identity and toxic masculinity foster the potential for violence. Kimmel examines how perceiving or experiencing a threat to their way of life brings these traits to the center of their identity in the same way GST argues strains can become overwhelming. The more intense the strain, the higher in magnitude, the more thinking, processing, and dealing with strains can become all-encompassing. Agnew (2001) notes that "although many types of goal blockage may lead to delinquency, the failure to achieve monetary, autonomy, and "masculinity" goals are of special importance" (325). As noted in the discussion of masculinity norms, things like financial stability and individualism relate directly to monetary and autonomy goals, respectively. It almost seems redundant to mention them outside of goals related to masculinity when discussing strains resulting from failed goals. For the men in Kimmel's (2014) study these strains are often divorce and losing full custody of their children.

For others, strains come from a lack of sexual access to women and financial losses, like job loss or alimony payments - another significant and seemingly emasculating consequence of divorce.

These strains result in a particular emotional situation that Kimmel (2014) argues is unique to white men. Kimmel finds that white men in these situations experience “aggrieved entitlement”. Aggrieved entitlement is defined as entitlement that has been thwarted by some unseen force; it is a “gendered sense that they [are] entitled – indeed, even expected – to exact their revenge on all who had hurt them” (Kimmel 2014: 93). Anxieties and anger resulting from aggrieved entitlement can be directed at any individual or group that is seen as benefiting from what they perceive is the reduced status of white men. The unseen nature of the forces responsible for lost privileges creates a situation wherein white men’s frustrations are distributed onto all other groups. Other genders and races who see even miniscule advancements become targets for white men’s frustrations because their advancements are seen as white men’s entitlements being lost. As globalization and free trade has taken good paying, low skilled work out of the country, men see the gains of women and men of color in employment as losses for themselves. Instead of blaming the global system or their government for not creating or keeping jobs in the country, their anger is redirected at groups that are still struggling to gain equality with white men. As Kimmel points out

“it hasn’t been black people who have foreclosed on their farms, or feminist women who has outsourced their jobs and closed the factories, or gay people who have sunk their mortgages underwater, or immigrants who opened the big-box store with massive tax breaks and a spectacular local government incentives that forced them to close the small hardware store their family had been operating for generations” (2017: 276).

Their feelings of loss and anxieties about their financial futures combined with their white identity that has long provided benefits above others fosters aggrieved entitlement.

Interviews with college students replicate Kimmel's (2014, 2017) findings, as many white male participants blame members of LGBTQ and minority racial/ethnic communities for problems they perceive in their own life and those experienced by other white men. This blame was often described in conjunction with terms like "deserve whatever they get", referring to negative consequences one might receive for "tattling," or reporting white men for threatening behavior (DeKeseredy et al. 2019: 12). DeKeseredy et al. (2019) conclude that young white men on college campuses share feelings of aggrieved entitlement that Kimmel (2017) identified among older white males. White men, especially those who conform to traditional ideas about masculinity, are situated to be more violent than women and men of color, as they are more likely to express their emotions as anger, blame others for their problems, and perceive equality as threatening due to their privileged position. While aggrieved entitlement is often misplaced, Kimmel (2017) argues it is a rational reaction considering their current economic and social positions. In the absence of peaceful methods of grievance reconciliation, aggrieved entitlement can lead to violent attempts to rectify the situation for the individual.

While many in the U.S. struggle with a lack of economic and social power, the difference between the anger of these white men and that of minority groups and white women is the ways in which white men feel entitled to power. Feeling they have lost some of that power, they seek ways to reclaim it – to feel in control and like they have a say over what happens in their lives. Lankford (2016a) argues that the way in which whites have more access to structural advantages than any other group in society may explain their propensity to public mass killings. As white men experience more strain when they do not achieve societal success, they experience more pressure and incentive for vengeance. Their advantageous position and socialization into norms that emphasize emotional repression limit their ability to cope when other groups begin to gain

similar advantages. Feelings of aggrieved entitlement, combined with ideas of masculinity that encourage dominance, can lead these men to retaliate on society, and/or individuals, that they believe are responsible for their problems. The method of retaliation is consistent with what society has taught them through hegemonic gender norms: “real” men solve their problems using violence.

Spending a portion of *Angry White Men* (2017) on case studies of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007 and the Columbine shooting in 1999, Kimmel theorizes that much male violence can be attributed to feelings of aggrieved entitlement. Though not a comprehensive analysis of mass shootings or shooters, Kimmel argues that aggrieved entitlement contributed to these terrible incidents as there is evidence the shooters felt emasculated by their peers and persecuted by those in positions of authority. One of the ways men develop aggrieved entitlement is through feeling persecuted by the government and other authority figures. When the government and those in power appear to favor minority groups over white men in efforts to correct inequalities, those corrections disadvantage white men. Men in the men’s rights groups Kimmel interviews often spoke about personal losses and pains and feelings of victimization, ignoring the structural and institutional benefits that they garner by being born male. These men report feeling like they are surrounded by hostility and are unable to express these frustrations openly (Kimmel 2014). The combination of feeling threatened and repressing emotions presents a greater risk of violence.

Other research by Kimmel (2018) reveals that aggrieved entitlement and threats to privilege, perceived or actual, seem to play a role in engaging with white supremacist discourse. Interviews with men formally involved with white nationalist, white supremacist, skin-head, and neo-Nazi groups in the U.S., Germany, and Sweden reveal similar feelings to men in men’s

rights groups, though often with more violent consequences. Feeling victimized by the government and political correctness, white men seek to reclaim their masculinity through white racial superiority, turning themselves from perceived victims to righteous soldiers.

Unfortunately, this ideological shift can emerge as violence against the groups believed to be threatening their power, like immigrants.

Aggressive and violent reactions to situations or individuals seen as a threat are not unique to white men though. Across individuals of various social identities, the more a situation is perceived as threatening, the more likely a person is to react violently (Umberson, Williams, and Anderson 2002). However, if white men like those who participate in studies such as Kimmel's (2014, 2017, 2018) and DeKeseredy et al.'s (2019) conform to the idea that men are not supposed to express emotion and indeed also feel that they are surrounded by hostility, they are more likely to engage in violence than those with more emotional outlets or who view the world as a more peaceful place, despite being normally peaceful. Hostility is a kind of threat; a negative stimulus introduced into a person's life that they will have to manage. I propose that negative stimuli contribute to active shootings when men do not know how to cope with those stimuli in ways other than violence. Eliminating the stimuli is one method of coping, but when that stimuli is a person or a group of people, elimination becomes a deadly coping strategy.

Drawing on Lankford's (2016a) argument that white men are uniquely positioned to feel aggrieved entitlement due to their historical access to structural advantages combined with Kimmel's (2014, 2017, 2018) interview data with white men, threats to white men's current social position create feelings of loss and anger, which are kindling for violent behaviors. In particular, the more strongly one adheres to or is socialized into traditional masculinity, the more restricted an individuals' ability to cope with strains and resulting negative emotions. The U.S.

society ripe for feelings of aggrieved entitlement as it disseminates traditional, white masculinity. Boasting one of the highest violent crimes per capita among comparable nations, looking through the provided framework, mass shootings are an almost inevitable consequence of this combined culture of masculinity and violence when faced with social change.

Clearly not all men are committing violence on a mass scale. It is certainly not the goal of this study to label all white men as violent or encourage others to do so. Instead, this study aims to understand the ways in which, as gender roles are placed equally upon all men by society, all men are uniquely susceptible to developing a sense of self dependent on trying to achieve hegemonic norms of masculinity. White men, as the basis for hegemonic masculinity in the U.S. are particularly vulnerable to overemphasizing traditional masculinity norms. Similarly, they can develop strong white identities through how race is woven through society. Both white identity and masculinity goals, when threatened, often result in anger, rage, and violence as means of achieving masculinity and restoring men and whites to their hegemonic position in the social order. Mass shootings are one avenue for reclaiming masculinity and reinforcing the social order. The physically violent act embodies the value of physical prowess. Taking another person's life is the ultimate form of dominance. For those who have felt emasculated, weakened, and victimized, physical violence against those who they believe have harmed them, even if as diffuse as "society", is retributive justice.

Research Questions

To better understand the relationship white identity and masculinity has to mass shootings, I pose the following research questions: 1) are there observable patterns to these shooting incidents, particularly in regard to race and gender?; 2) how do white men and women

understand their role in society and the identities of white men?; and 3) how do white men and women explain men's violence and, specifically, 4) how do white men and women explain white men's active shootings? These questions will be answered through FBI data on active shooters, with additional variables obtained through qualitative and quantitative analysis of news media on those shooters, and interviews with white men and women about masculinity and gender expectations, their identity as whites, perceptions of conflict and violence, and their beliefs and perceptions of active shootings and shooters.

II. THE REALITY OF ACTIVE SHOOTINGS

To understand active shooters, one must first have a strong grasp on the reality of active shootings, where they occur, how much harm they cause, how they are committed, and by whom. As such, this first analytical chapter will examine active shooter data over two decades for patterns in demographics and predictive variables. Primarily, this chapter will clarify the race and gender distribution of shooters and common narratives that surround shootings like the use of automatic weapons and the location of shootings. Only once the realities of active shootings are grounded in data can analysis of the identity and potential causes of shooters advance. The following chapters examine violence and gender through the eyes of the group most responsible for active shootings and their gender opposites.

This chapter will first examine the race and gender of active shooters based on data provided by the FBI and the Texas State University Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center (ALERRT), compiled by myself, and, when available, checked against qualitative accounts of the individual shootings. Media accounts are used to investigate the reporting of race across these accounts which are distributed to the public, and finally, the harm caused by shootings is analyzed by shooting characteristics for identifiable predictable patterns based on gun type, location, and shooter demographics. The findings are then examined within the context of actual shooting events to understand the results of the statistical analyses.

Introduction

Despite race consistently reported among demographics in crime statistics produced by the FBI (FBI UCR 1933-2020), race is surprisingly missing from active shooter reports published by the FBI and by the Texas State University's Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid

Response Training Center (ALERRT). These reports provide a large amount of information on shooting incidents: the locations of the shootings, the number of deaths and number of wounded, the type of gun(s) used, law enforcement involved, and demographics of the shooters. The report provides the shooter's age (13-64), their sex (2.98% female), and how they were apprehended or died (35.08% committed suicide), but the race of the shooter is not included in these reports.

I argue that race is missing from official shooter statistics, in part, because the shooters are predominantly white. As previously discussed, whites are considered the base or neutral category against which others are compared (Biefeld, Stone, and Brown 2021; Lewis 2004). It seems then, that it is taken for granted that these shooters are primarily white since whiteness is virtually ignored. Unlike race, the gender¹ of the shooter is reported. Studies of rampage style shootings find that men are responsible for between 85% and 100% of such shootings (Silva 2021a; Silva 2021b; Follman et al. 2020; Silva and Capellan 2018; ALERRT 2018; Lankford 2016b; Lankford 2015a; Lankford 2013; Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001). As such, it is unsurprising that 96.7% of active shooters have been men between 2000 and 2019. Arguably, the inclusion of data on gender, but not race, in active shooter reports suggests that masculinity is a more acceptable topic than whiteness in the context of crime.

Indeed, criminality is conventionally linked to blackness (Williams and Clarke 2018; Jones 2017; Alexander 2012) not whiteness though criminal offending spans all racial categories. It is easier to ignore white criminality than to explain it because “white crime” is not part of our

¹ Most criminal databases list the sex of the offender or victim based on official records and do not question the gender of the individual. I use gender in this analysis as masculinity that is imposed on and expected of those labeled men based on their male sex organs. There is a single transgender shooter who was coded based on their gender identity, not their official sex.

national narrative. The Black² crime narrative is so pervasive that “the term *white criminal* is confounding, while the term *black criminal* is nearly redundant” (author’s emphasis, Alexander 2012:198). Not including race when whites are the primary offenders serves to perpetuate this narrative and frame any racial other as criminal. White violence is thus made individual (Alexander 2012). That is, something must be wrong with the individual as opposed to patterns of behavior influenced by factors that affect certain racial groups. Rather than examining the racial component of these crimes, explanations for shootings often turn to presumed mental illnesses and individual life characteristics of the offenders.

It is a common argument that shootings result from mentally ill loners who have experienced a mental break (Metzl and MacLeish 2015), and while there is some evidence that several shooters have suffered from mental illness of some kind (Dutton, White, and Fogarty 2013), it is unlikely that mental health issues are the primary or only cause of mass shootings. Even when there is evidence that a mass shooter has a diagnosable mental illness, it likely “exacerbates problems in their lives and makes it harder for them to cope” with various strains and negative life events as opposed to driving the crime (Lankford 2015a: 363). Shooters more often seem to be motivated by some form of revenge, either due to social isolation, loss of status or employment, or failures as part of their romantic lives. Many shooters appear to experience some amount of paranoia, having told loved ones they are being spied on by the government or think those in their social circle are purposefully cruel, but there is little to no evidence to suggest psychosis (Knoll and Annas 2016) and paranoia alone is not evidence of severe mental illness. Mass shooters are no more likely to be mentally ill than the general population, regardless of

² Racial categories other than white are capitalized based on the Associated Press standard. Whites generally are considered to have much less shared history and culture than those of other racial categories and do not have a history of being discriminated against for their skin color (see Bauder 2020).

media reports (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). As discussed previously, if this were the case, just over 22 million people in the U.S. would be on the verge of a mass shooting.

Instead, the unique set of pressures put on white men leading to feelings of aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel 2014) makes a more convincing argument. Not all white men feel aggrieved or targeted by the government and social change, but all white men, as a function of their privileged race and gender status, are susceptible to feelings of lost privilege and aggrieved entitlement. In addition, the absence of race in official statistics also creates an additional incentive to examine the race and gender intersectional identity of shooters as a motivating cause behind these crimes.

Previous studies of shooting incidents find whites to be responsible for between 57% and 79% of public mass rampage style shootings (Lankford 2016a; Maloy et al. 2004; Maloy et al. 2001), which is far greater than their representation in FBI homicide offender statistics. Between 2000 and 2020, whites were only responsible for 32% of homicides (FBI 2021), almost half their representation in the lowest estimate for active or mass shootings (Silva 2021b; Yelderian et al. 2019; Silva and Capellan 2018). In this chapter I discuss active shooter data and analyze their demographic patterns and shooting incidents. Specifically, I will answer the following research questions:

To what extent are whites more likely to be active shooters compared to other racial groups?

To what extent are there differences in the racial representation of active shooters and homicide offenders?

Methodology

The following is a quantitative analysis of a database collected by the researcher, the foundation of which is secondary data available through the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid

Response Training (ALERRT) Center and the FBI. The use of existing government sources is a consistent practice with regards to shooting studies (Lankford 2016a; Lankford 2016b; Silva and Capellan 2018; Silva and Greene-Colozzi 2021; Silva 2021a; Silva 2021b). ALERRT publishes reports of active shootings yearly from 2000 to the present which details the event qualitatively with some additional descriptive statistics. The shooting descriptions were coded and compiled into a single database for the years 2000 to 2019, the latest available at the commencement of this research.

Following the creation of a database of active shooters, qualitative data were collected on those shooters using media sources. Although this diverges from traditional studies of shootings which are generally quantitative (Kwon and Cabrera 2017; Lankford 2016a; Blair and Schweit 2014; Lankford 2013), case studies of shooting incidents dive deeply into the shooter's life and the minute by minute, if available, walkthrough of the crime (Glasgow 2015). However, case studies only target a one or a few incidents at a time. This study seeks to contextualize as many shooting incidents as possible for which information is available.

Sample.

The definition of active shooter used in this study comes from the ALERRT reports. In conjunction with the FBI, ALERRT defines an active shooter as *an individual engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area*, limiting events to those where a firearm is the primary weapon and eliminating incidents resulting from gang activities. This definition is based on the investigations on which the attorney general has been granted authority to assist. These are defined as “violent acts and shootings occurring in a place of public use” and “mass killings and attempted mass killings” (Blair and Schweit 2014:4-5). The reports clarify that this

definition is not meant to study mass shootings or mass killings. However, as previously discussed, compared to more traditional definitions of mass shootings, the definition in the ALERRT reports produces incidents which are more consistent with the type of behavior of interest in this study and to the public.

Using the ALERRT active shooter reports, a database was compiled of the available information in the reports. The reports provide the following information: date, time, and location of the shooting; the shooter's name; the shooter's age; whether the shooter was female; the type of gun or guns used in the incident; number of victims wounded; number of victims killed; a brief description of the incident; and how the incident was concluded, typically with the arrest or death of the shooter (though some escaped discovery). The data produced by these reports is compiled into a single dataset of 306 shootings and a sample of 303 shooters.

To expand on and provide further context to these shootings, two media articles were collected for each shooter, a total of 612 articles. These articles were obtained using Lexis Nexis's online search engine of news media. The first two articles related to each shooting were used in the final sample. Two articles were collected to provide ample coverage. Should the first article have limited data, sourcing a second would hopefully overcome those limitations. Limiting the collection to two articles was done to limit the amount of repetitive information and the total amount of data to sift through.

Articles were not included if they were private blogs, opinion pieces, or editorial sections of newspapers which are listed in the description of LexisNexis articles. This decision was made to reduce author opinion in the data. The use of open-source media is a common practice for gathering information on shooters; it is used by the New York Police Department for their active shooter report, Gun Violence Archive (which lists the websites as part of the dataset), and

academic researchers (O'Neill, Miller, and Waters 2017; Lankford 2016a; Lankford 2016b; Lankford 2015a; Lankford 2015b; GunViolenceArchive 2020; Lankford 2012; Larkin 2009). Given the scope of this study and the sensationalized nature of mass shootings, open-source data is an appropriate and acceptable source of information for this study.

The news media articles provide context for the statistical patterns revealed by the shooter database gathered using the ALERRT reports. These quantitative data, in conjunction with the qualitative media accounts, point to patterns in shooter behavior and incidents that contribute to shootings and help explain the differences in harm resulting from these incidents. Interviews with white men and women in Chapter ## will expand on these questions from the perspective of white individuals.

Analytic Strategy.

The 612 articles have been coded qualitatively for 21 codes. The codes cover theoretically relevant topics including: mentions of the shooter's masculinity (any component of the traditional male gender role); terrorism; racism; the rationale of the shooter, if any; possible law enforcement connections; bullying by or of the shooter; aggrieved entitlement; the ethnicity and/or race of the shooter; discussions of white identity or white nationalism; strains the shooter experienced; and many more. These codes were developed prior to coding to address the theoretical groundwork laid out in the prior chapter that will be used to contextualize and better understand men, white identities, and strains.

Notably missing from the active shooter reports is the shooter's race. This was solved with an email to the ALERRT center who then provided a spreadsheet of shooting locations, dates, and the race of the shooter. This dataset included all shooting crimes, not just active

shootings and the shooter's names were not included. By matching zip codes and towns between the active shooter dataset previously compiled to the new shooter data, the race of each active shooter was collected. While race is difficult to measure, using the officially recorded race of the shooter reduced potential error as the identification was completed entirely by law enforcement and does not rely on self-report or eye-witness testimony. The FBI codes for race are Caucasian (white), African American (Black), Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Other. Other includes individuals, known from the media sources, to be Native American, Egyptian, and Pakistani among others. This is of particular importance to note as Egyptians are considered Middle Eastern according to the United States definition of MENA, the regional acronym for the Middle East and North Africa. As such, the individuals identified in the media as Egyptian were re-coded as Middle Eastern. Of the 306 shooters in the database, four were unknown to authorities and thus had no reported racial category, resulting in 302 shooting included in the race-based analyses.

I begin with descriptive statistics on shooters based on the ALERRT (age, race, gender, etc.) and article data for enumerated codes, such as whether there was an officially diagnosed mental illness reported for the shooter, a media narrative that is popular when reporting shootings (Knoll and Annas 2016; Metzler and MacLeish 2014). To answer the first research question regarding shooter demographics, shooter race and gender were tested against the same demographic in the population and across homicide offender statistics through a series of single sample t-tests.

To expand on this question and the often-overlooked racial component of shooting incidents, the race of the shooter was analyzed across media mentions of the shooter race and connections to terrorism in the articles covering the shootings. Bivariate relationships were

initially tested with Fischer's Exact tests of independence to determine any statistical relationship between the race of the shooter and media discussion of race and terrorism. Logistic regressions were then run to test the reliability and clarify the relationships between the dichotomous race and terrorism in media articles and the shooters race. Logistic regression tests dichotomous outcome variables and as such, is best applied for the variable of whether race of the shooter was mentioned by the media or not.

Strengths and Limitations.

The goal of this first component of the study is to create a comprehensive dataset on mass shooters that includes more than the victim count. A strength of this method, particularly the use of active shooter over mass shooter and the ALERRT data, is that this dataset is more complete than many other shooter datasets. Databases on mass shootings rarely record the name of the shooter, much less their sex, race, and what happened to them. The ALERRT reports provide context, which is expanded using the media articles, and provides a more complete image of the shooting incident. The dataset in this study is used to provide descriptive statistics on mass shootings that are more comprehensive and useful to researchers than most of the count-based datasets that currently exist (for example, MotherJones 2022).

Using the ALERRT data means that the study is limited to known shootings that have come to the attention of law enforcement. This is a limitation that is consistent across shooter databases as prior datasets similarly rely on law enforcement reports. Law enforcement data is thus subject to law enforcement knowledge and the ALERRT reports are further subject to law enforcement agencies reporting to the FBI. However, over 18,000 law enforcement agencies in

the country report crime data to the FBI each year (FBI UCR), making the ALERRT reports as close to population level data as possible.

Despite the near-population level sample, the data provided to the FBI are not always complete. There are unknown, missing, and juvenile shooters whose identities have never been reported. Though many teen and preteen shooters have their identities released to the public as they are processed and tried through the justice system, especially if tried as adults, young shooters that fail to injure or kill anyone often have their identities protected by law enforcement due to their age. These incidents are few but do exist within the active shooter reports resulting in missing demographic data.

Another limitation of this part of the study is the use of media articles. Media are always subject to bias of some kind, from the author, those providing information to the author, and the media outlet itself. Opinions put forth explicitly by members of the public or the author of the piece were not coded to reduce extraneous bias. Perspectives provided by family members of the shooter were included for analysis as first-hand accounts of the individual. Further, only two articles were collected per shooter and the content of those article varies significantly. Some incidents did not inspire as much media coverage, resulting in vague or extremely short descriptions of the event in question that did not provide much additional coverage.

However, the strength of this method is that the most relevant articles were collected. The search produced the most relevant articles containing the shooter's name and reference to a shooting incident based on the LexisNexis algorithm. While this may not have resulted in much additional context for some incidents, overall, the articles produced a large amount of content and contextual material. Using both qualitative data from the articles and quantitative analyses is a major strength of this study. These data and media accounts of the shootings are also used in

conjunction with interviews conducted with white men and women in Section 2 to understand men's violence and shootings and the potential relationship masculinity and strain has to active shootings.

Active Shooters: Race, Gender, and Harm

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for these shooters and the shooting incidents. There were a total of 305 incidents included in the final analysis. Co-offenders were removed from the analysis to avoid repeat and identical incidents in the data. Based on media reporting, the primary actor was identified and included in the analysis. Descriptive statistics of co-offenders are included in Table 1. As Table 1 below shows, active shooters are mostly men. Only 2.98% of the shooters are women, although co-offenders are most likely to be women, 60%. Most shootings are carried out by a single offender, however, as only five shootings involved co-offenders.

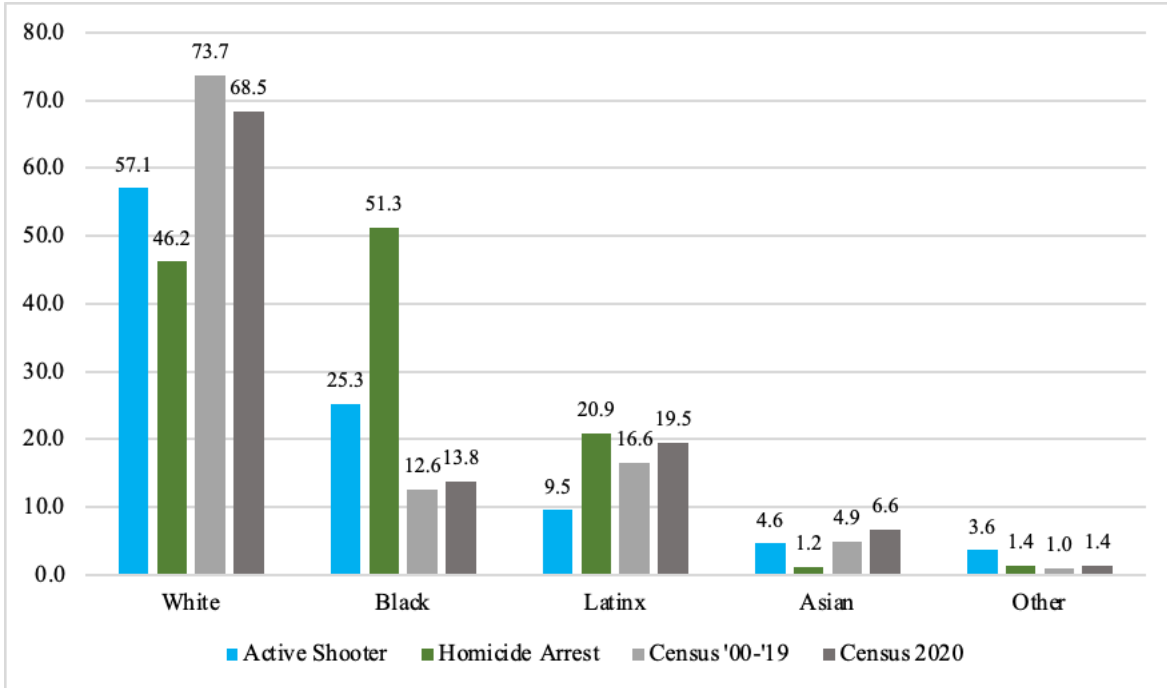
Table 1: Active Shootings 2000-2019 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	n	% \bar{x} (sd) when applicable
Offender		
Age	300	34.89(32)
Gender		
Men	293	97.02
Women	9	2.98
Race		
White	174	57.05
Black	77	25.25
Asian	29	4.59
Hispanic	14	9.51
Middle Eastern	6	1.97
Other	5	1.64
Co-offenders		
Gender		
Men	2	40.0
Women	3	60.0
Age	5	30.2(12.38)
Race		
White	1	20.0
Non-white	4	80.00
Victims		
Killed	305	3.23 (5.72)
Wounded	305	5.55 (28.47)
Overall Count	305	8.77 (32.44)
Primary Gun		
Handgun	193	63.91
Rifle	77	25.50
Shotgun	32	10.60
Multiple guns	77	25.25
Location		
Government	31	10.20
Open-space	42	13.82
Religious	12	3.95
Commerce	135	44.41
Education	58	19.08
Private Residence	12	3.95
Healthcare	14	4.61
Multiple locations	59	19.34
Resolution		
Offender Suicide	107	35.08
Offender Killed by LE	69	22.62
Offender Killed by Civilian	2	0.66
Offender Arrested	122	40.00
Offender Escaped	5	1.64

Race

Whites represent the largest racial group in the United States. In 2019, 73.5% of the United States population was white, followed by Blacks (12.7%), then Asians (5.7%). The 2020 Census reported that 68.5% of the United States is white. This percentage dropped more between 2019 and 2020 than in any other year, partially resulting from changes in coding practices of racial categorization on 2020 Census. As discussed in the previous chapter, individuals who described themselves in more than 30 characters were coded based on only the 30 characters captured, limiting their identity typically to one or two racial categories. On the 2020 Census, the coding system allowed for more complexity in the responses, and better representation of the country's demographics. Up to six racial categories are coded on the 2020 Census, compared to only two on prior Census reports (Jones et al. 2021). The data in this study cover 2000 to 2019, thus the use of the 2020 Census data is not strictly necessary as a comparison point, but I believe it is important to account for how the racial makeup of the United States was changing during the second decade of the study timeline and to account for what is considered more accurate racial labeling (ibid). Comparisons of shooter and population racial demographics across the 2000-2019 Census and American Community Survey data during that same period and race data from the 2020 Census is provided separately herein to capture full racial profiles of the United States. The data is displayed in Figure 1 and analyzed in Table 2.

Figure 1: Active Shooter, Homicide, and Population 2000-2019 & 2020 (percent)



Using the American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates from the Census Bureau, which are available across for 2000 through 2019⁵, whites are 73.5% of the U.S. population on average. The data were analyzed using multiple single sample t-tests comparing the proportion of active shooters by race to the proportion in the population of the same race. Shooters labeled “Latino” by the FBI have been considered Hispanic for the purposes of this analysis.⁶ The results of these tests are in Table 2 (displayed as percentages) and report the two-tailed p-value for each test across four racial categories for the population proportion and homicide arrest proportion against active shooter proportion.

⁵ Census race data is available for the year 2000 but not available as estimates for 2001-2009. Whites dropped from 75.1% of the country in 2000 to 74.0% in 2010 and thus the average of 10 years, 2000 and 2001-2019 was used here.

⁶ Hispanic/Latino are ethnic categories, not racial groups. Although there is a lot of variation across Hispanic cultures, Hispanics have shared cultural origins and history that non-Hispanic whites do not and as such, are often presented alongside racial categories.

Table 2: Two-tailed T-Test Results, Race of Active Shooters Compared to U.S. Population and Homicide Proportion

Race			%	t-test value	d.f.	p-value
		Demographic				
White <i>Active Shooter %</i>	57.05	U.S. Population				
		2000-2019	73.9	-5.73	305	0.0000
		2020	61.1	-1.43	305	0.1547
		Homicide	46.2	3.82	305	0.0002
Black <i>Active Shooter %</i>	25.25	U.S. Population				
		2000-2019	12.3	5.52	305	0.0000
		2020	12.1	5.60	305	0.0000
		Homicide	51.3	-9.94	305	0.0000
Asian <i>Active Shooter %</i>	4.6	U.S. Population				
		2000-2019	4.9	-0.0082	305	0.9935
		2020	5.9	-1.09	305	0.2760
		Homicide	1.2	2.66	305	0.0083
Other <i>Active Shooter %</i>	3.61	U.S. Population				
		2000-2019	8.8	-4.86	305	0.0000
		2020	5.4	-3.62	305	0.0946
		Homicide	1.4	2.06	305	0.0399
Hispanic <i>Active Shooter %</i>	9.51	U.S. Population				
		2000-2019	17.4	-4.69	305	0.0000
		2020	18.7	-5.46	305	0.0000
		Homicide	20.9	-6.77	305	0.0000

Homicide arrest data was obtained through the FBI Uniformed Crime Report, which was published yearly between 1933 and 2019, changing to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in 2021 (BJS 2022). Homicide and active shootings are considered distinct types of murder by law enforcement and academia, so understanding the differences will help researchers and the public better understand these crimes. Other types of homicides committed with a firearm to target individuals result from spontaneous fights or domestic arguments or occur during the commission of another crime like robbery. In comparison, active shooters rarely know their victims personally and intend to wound and kill as many as possible, not just an individual or individuals who have wronged them (Greenberg 2013; ALERRT 2019).

Understanding the populations that commit homicide and those that commit active shootings is important to better understanding past active shootings and methods of preventing future active shootings.

As such, active shooter racial data is compared to both race in the U.S. population and in homicide arrest statistics. The UCR does not have accurate or available race data for arrests until 2010 and thus the averages in Table 2 reflect average arrests by race from 2010 to 2019. These are compared against the 2000-2019 active shooter averages as they do not change significantly when limited to 2010-2019⁷.

Active shooters between 2000 and 2019 are 57.05% white. This is significantly lower ($p < 0.001$) than their proportion in the population over the same period. Thus, whites are underrepresented in active shooting incidents which reflects their underrepresentation in homicide. Based on 2000-2019 Census populations, the proportion of white, Black, Hispanic, and Other active shooters are all significantly different than we would expect. However, all but Black shooters are underrepresented compared to their proportion in the population. As discussed in Chapter 1, Blacks are overrepresented in homicide data and arrests across crime categories for several reasons.

Just under thirteen percent, 12.3% of the population between 2010 and 2019, Blacks make up 51.3% of offenders arrested for homicide (FBI UCR 2010-2019; US Census 2000-2019) and 25.25% of the active shooters between 2000 and 2019. Though still disproportionately high, Blacks are significantly less ($p < 0.001$) involved in active shootings than typical homicide. Though still disproportionately higher than their population, Black engagement in active shootings more closely represents of their population proportion and reflects a massive drop in

⁷ The reduced, 2010-2019 was tested as a precaution and found no significant differences.

violence compared to homicide offenses. Black Americans are therefore significantly less likely to commit a mass shooting than typical homicide. As such, their overrepresentation in active shootings is unsurprising but, I argue, can also be also considered an underrepresentation as they commit statistically fewer active shootings than conventional crime statistics would predict.

Hispanics, 9.51% of active shooters, are significantly ($p < 0.001$) underrepresented in active shooter data compared to homicide offenses and their population proportion. Latinos represent 9.51% of active shooters, significantly less ($p < 0.001$) than the 20.9% of homicide offenders they represent (FBI UCR 2010-2019; US Census 2000-2019). Between 2000 and 2019, Asians represented an average of 4.9% of the population and were 4.6% of active shooters between in those years which is not a statistically significant difference. Asians are proportionately represented in active shootings compared to their representation in the population but significantly overrepresented in active shootings ($p < 0.001$) compared to homicide offenses (US Census 2000-2019). The same pattern affects those labeled “Other” which includes those categorized as Middle Eastern⁸ in the ALERRT/FBI data and Native American in the media articles. This is important information for future research. However, this disproportionality reflects only 29 Asian and 11 Other shooters which is far less numerically than 174 white shooters, and thus represent far less societal harm.

Therefore, while these results may make it seem appropriate to study Asian or Black shooters as a disproportionately high percentage of active shooters compared to their percent of the population or homicide offenses, and it certainly is a good direction for future research, there

⁸ The other category was used for all other people of color as Middle Eastern is not a category reported in FBI homicide arrest statistics and thus cannot be compared individually. Native Indian and Pacific Islander are arrest categories but are not in the shooter data. Media article analysis identifies some of the “Other” shooters as Native American but the frequencies are very small.

were 29 Asian and 77 Black shooters between 2000 and 2019. In contrast, 174 of the shooters are white, representing over half, 57.05%, of shooters between 2000 and 2019. This reflects a significantly lower proportion than their representation in the population during those years based on the Census categories at the time.

However, during that same time period, whites were 46.2% of homicide offenders, which is significantly lower ($p < 0.001$) than their representation among active shooters (FBI UCR 2010-2019). Further, when considering 2020 population data, which is arguably a more accurate view of race in the U.S., whites are not differently represented in shooter data to a statistically significant degree ($p = 0.1547$). Taking all the findings together, whites are surprisingly proportional to their representation in the population when it comes to committing active shootings. Whites are underrepresented in homicides yet more accurately represented in active shootings based on their proportion of the U.S. population. Understanding white Americans and whiteness generally is therefore incredibly important to understanding active shootings.

Gender

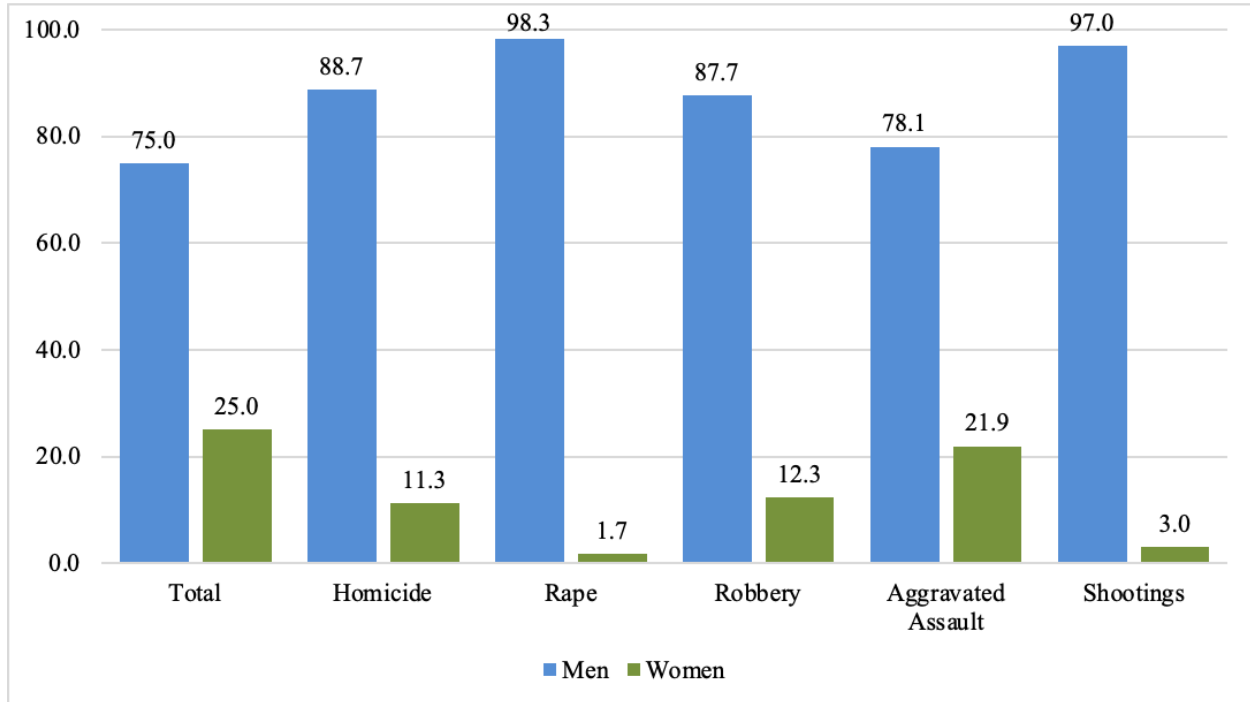
The FBI provides sex data (categories of male and female) in arrest statistics but does not report a separate gender identity category. Qualitative analyses of the media article finds that only one shooter identifies with a gender other than the one they were ascribed at birth. There is no evidence that the other shooters were not cis-gender. The original sex variable was therefore converted to a conventional gender variable using categories “men” and “women”, including the transgender shooter with the men. That single shooter was born to the female sex category but identifies as a man. This individual was openly transgender at the time of the shooting and told law enforcement he was bullied for “trying to be a guy” (Kenton 2019). He therefore lived as a

man, and it is more accurate to include him with the masculine shooter gender as opposed to the feminine. Gender was dichotomized to remain consistent with categories of sex reported by the FBI and the way gender is ascribed in society. Further, there is no evidence in the media articles that other shooters did not conform to this dichotomy. Gender identity and masculinity specifically are key components of this research, and as such, using a variable for gender as opposed to the birth sex of shooters is best.

Men represent just under half of the general population in any given year (US Census Bureau). Men were 97% of the active shooters between 2000 and 2019 but only 75% of all criminal offenders, a significant difference at $p < 0.001$. Men are more likely to commit homicide than women, representing 88.7% of all homicide arrests during the same period (FBI UCR 2000-2019). As such, it is not surprising that men are more likely to commit active shootings than women. However, men are significantly more likely to engage in active shootings than homicides, at a significance of $p < 0.001$ ⁹. Figure 2 is a visual representation of criminal offending across men and women, averaged over 2000 and 2019. Men are overrepresented all crime and violent offenses, but at even greater proportions for violent crimes.

⁹ Result of a single sample non-directional t-test comparing the proportion U.S. population arrest statistics to U.S. active shooters ($t=8.49$, $p=0.0000$).

Figure 2: Average Arrests by Gender 2000-2019 (percent)



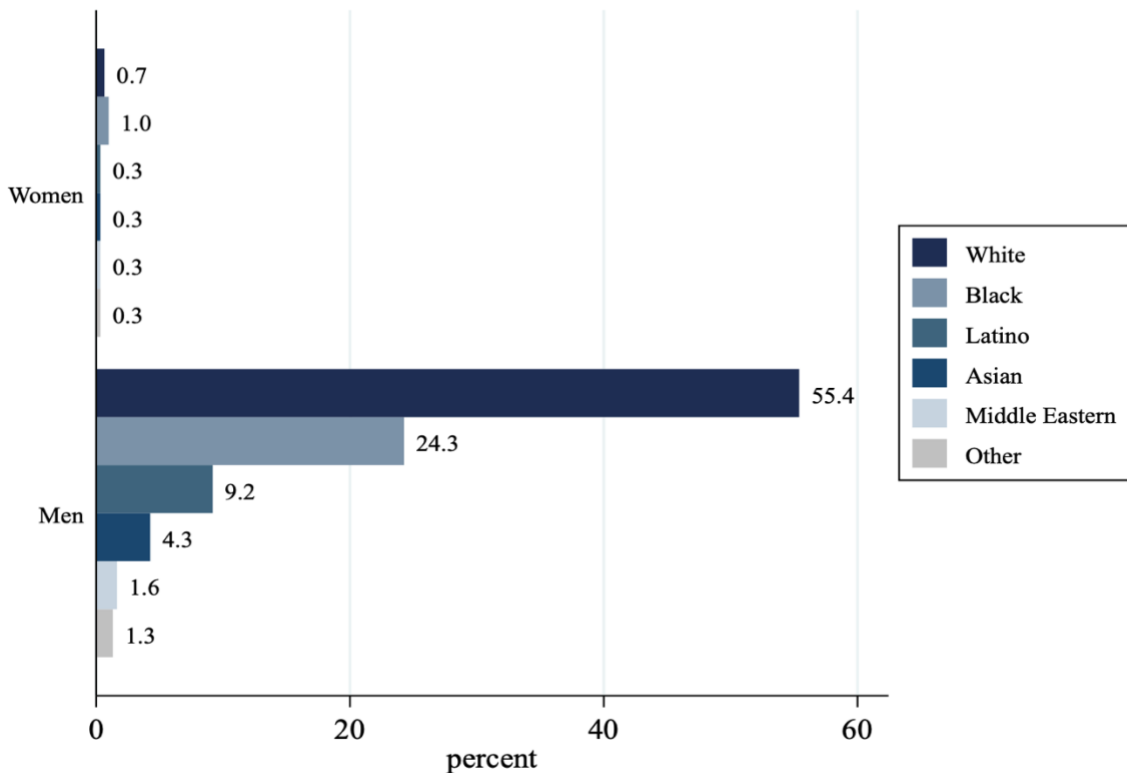
Men are represented most in rape¹⁰ (98.3% of arrests) and active shootings (97.02%). Whites and men commit most active shootings in the United States. As such, it should be of no surprise that white men are the most common active shooter. Out of the 291 (97.02%) shooters that are men, 57.7% are white, followed by Black men (25.1%), Asian men (4.12%), Latino men

¹⁰ In 2013 the definition of forcible rape was changed to be more inclusive of crimes against men and rape that does not include vaginal penetration. The averaged percent represented in this table include the legacy and updated definition. The percent of rape offenses committed by males dropped by approximately 1% with this change in definition from 2013 to 2014 and their lowest participation in this type of crime is 96.6% in 2019.

(9.97%), Middle Eastern men (1.7%), and all other men (1.4%). These data can be found in Figure 3¹¹.

Shooters identified by the FBI as female and categorized as women account for only 2.98% of all active shooters. Black women committed 33.3% of these shootings, followed by white women (22.2%), with all other racial groups, Asian, Latina, Middle Eastern, and Other totaling 11.1% each. Though tempting to conclude Black women commit more active shootings than white women, a reversal of the patterns across men, these data should be read cautiously. These percentages represent three Black women, two white women, and one woman across each of the remaining categories. These statistics, while valid, represent a distinct minority when it

Figure 3: Active Shooter 2000-2019 by Gender and Race (percent)



¹¹ The percentages reflect all active shooters, not per gender and thus reflect a different percent of white men compared to previous report.

comes to this type of offense. Due to the small frequency of women shooters the results are highly dependent on individuals. Though I hope there will be no more shootings of this nature carried out by individuals of any gender, should there be further incidents involving women offenders, there may be opportunities to examine statistical patterns in active shootings by women in future research.

The results in this section confirm prior research into mass, public, spree, and rampage shootings. Active shooters are men, and they are white. I have argued that race and gender identity of these shooters holds important information for understanding why these incidents occur. Therefore, analysis of interviews with white men and their gender opposites, white women, will be explored in the second section of this study. Additional topics related to shootings using the quantitative and qualitative data compiled are explored in the following section. It is necessary to address popular narratives of active shootings when seeking to understand how these incidents occur. For example, if as hypothesized, there are no relationships between the harm resulting from a shooting and reported shooter mental health or type of gun used, the dominant identity of active shooters becomes even more important.

Narratives about Shootings and Shooters

Active shootings are mostly committed by white men but there are a variety of explanations put forth following a shooting incident that rarely engage with the race and gender of the shooter. Therefore, the first question of investigation in this section is:

What do the media communicate to the public about shooter race?

Do the demographics of the shooter (race, gender, age) affect whether the media communicates the shooter's race to the public?

Following a shooting, gun control and weapon bans, especially of automatic firearms and the AR-15 semi-automatic legally permitted in the United States, circulate (Greenberg 2013). Shooters are said to suffer from mental illness, especially schizophrenia (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). The locations in which shootings take place are often considered vulnerable and in need of additional, armed protection, such as when shootings prompt politicians to suggest schoolteachers carry their own firearms (Balinit 2022). In any shooting, one or more of these explanations may have been a contributing factor: some shooters used AR-15s and most used semi-automatic firearms; some certainly had diagnosed mental illness (though more often depression than something like schizophrenia based on the articles analyzed); and some schools are not as well prepared for a shooting as others and some locations constrain victim escape or shooter access. Whether these explanations are statistically linked to the harm resulting from shootings another question that will be answered in this section using the active shooter FBI/ALERT data with additional variables and context collected through the media articles is:

Is overall shooting harm related, as hypothesized by media narratives, by gun use, shooting location, and shooter mental health?

Media and Race.

As discussed, data on race and active or even mass shootings are not as common as would be believed given the salience of race generally. Race is rarely absent from media accounts of criminal offending. Studies of news media find that whites are more likely than Black and Latinx persons to be portrayed in news media generally and in any role of criminal offending: victim, perpetrator, or officer. People of color on the other hand are more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators than victims or officers (Dixon and Linz 2000; Dixon, Azocar, and

Casas 2003). Dixon et al. (2003) finds that Blacks are “much more likely to be absent from network news” entirely when stories are not covering crime (517). Therefore, when they are presented in stories of crime as either perpetrators or victims, though more often perpetrators, Blackness is implicitly linked to criminality. Other racial groups that are not the primary face of media (i.e., any non-white group) would be similarly linked to whatever aspect of the news they are most often presented alongside. Due to the patterns prevalent in prior research, it is hypothesized that:

White shooters are less likely to have their race identified by the news media than shooters of all other racial groups.

Analyses of 610 media articles of 305 individual mass shooters whose race is known finds that generally, the race of the shooter was not mentioned. Out of 305 shooters in these articles, 82.30% (n=251) have no racial identity mentioned by the news media, resulting in a small percent, only 17.70 (n=54) where the shooter’s race was identified. It seems unusual that race was so infrequently mentioned by the media outlets, as they often reference or display the race of those involved in other crimes (Tucker 2018). Even with only 17.7% of shooters were identified by race in the media articles, there are discernable statistical differences in how the media treats shooters based on their race.

Finding support for the hypothesis above, when compared to all shooters of color, whites are less likely to have their race mentioned in media accounts of the shooting. The database reflects a relatively small sample size, despite being close to a population count of active shooters, and there are small frequencies for some racial categories. This prompted the use of Fisher’s Exact tests, as opposed to Chi-Square tests, to determine racial patterns in media articles by mentions of race. The results can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Fisher’s Exact Tests of Independence of Media Mentions of Race and Terrorism in Connection to Active Shootings

	Shooter Race (known)	<i>n</i>	Race in Media (%)	Fischer’s Exact p-value (one-sided)
Test 1: Dichotomized Race	White	21	12.07	0.004
	Person of Color	33	25.07	
	Total	305	17.70	
Test 2: Expanded Race	White	21	12.07	0.000
	Black	13	16.88	
	Latinx	3	10.34	
	Asian	9	64.29	
	Middle Eastern	5	83.33	
	Other	3	60.00	
	Total	305	15.23	

The first test of the dichotomized race variable (white versus nonwhite) finds a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the 12.07% of white shooters ($n=21$) and the 25.07% of persons of color ($n=33$) who have their race mentioned by the news media. Finding significance in this first test, a second Fischer’s Exact was run across the expanded race variable and again returns a significant result ($p < 0.001$). The Fischer’s Exact test cannot explain between which groups these differences occur, though it may seem safe to assume there is real difference as Asian shooter race was reported approximately five times more frequently than white shooter race. To test whether this difference is a statistical reality, logistic regressions¹² were run to further test where the differences by shooter race observed in the Fischer’s Exact tests are individually statistically significant (Table 4).

¹² Logistic regressions are ideal linear models for examining dichotomous independent variables. Logistic regression does not assume the data are normally distributed. However, even with the natural log transformation, a robust variance control was applied to limit the effects of additional variance in the data.

Middle Eastern and Other shooters have very small frequencies which makes conclusions based on those data potentially unreliable. As such, Other and Middle Eastern were condensed into a single category (Other/ME) to ensure all categories have more than 10 observations and making tests more reliable (Long 1997). All three models testing media mentions across race when including other demographic information are highly significant at $p < 0.001$. The small frequency over of race mention in the media resulted in large 95% confidence intervals meaning that there is wide variation in how much more likely race being mentioned is per variable and category. However, the overall models are significant and there is enough evidence to support that shooters of Asian and Other and Middle Eastern descent are more likely to have their race reported in media than white shooters.

Table 4: Logistic Regression of Race Mentioned in the Media by Demographic Characteristics and Mentions of Terrorism (N=302)

	Race in Media (0 Not mentioned, 1 Mentioned)					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Odds Ratio	95% c.i.	Odds Ratio	95% c.i.	Odds Ratio	95% c.i.
Expanded Race						
<i>White (0)</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Black (1)</i>	1.48	(0.69, 3.14)	1.41	(0.64, 3.10)	1.49	(0.68, 3.30)
<i>Latinx (2)</i>	0.84	(0.23, 3.03)	0.78	(0.21, 2.88)	0.88	(0.23, 3.38)
<i>Asian (3)</i>	13.11***	(4.00, 42.95)	16.57***	(3.71, 73.94)	18.82***	(4.40, 80.46)
<i>Other (4)</i>	19.43***	(4.77, 79.21)	83.46***	(7.69, 904.93)	89.77**	(5.77, 1396.23)
Gender						
<i>Women (0)</i>			-	-	-	-
<i>Men (1)</i>			20.61*	(1.80, 236.00)	17.43*	(1.28, 236.76)
Age Group						
<i>0-17 (0)</i>			0.07*	(0.01, 0.72)	0.06*	(0.01, 0.65)
<i>18-29 (1)</i>			1.55	(0.41, 5.91)	1.54	(0.39, 6.06)
<i>30-39 (2)</i>			0.91	(0.19, 4.29)	.82	(0.17, 3.88)
<i>40-49 (3)</i>			3.49	(0.85, 14.29)	3.36	(0.79, 14.20)
<i>50-59 (4)</i>			1.25	(0.25, 6.16)	1.34	(0.27, 6.57)
<i>60+ (5)</i>			1	-	1	-
Terrorism						
<i>Not Mentioned (0)</i>					-	-
<i>Mentioned (1)</i>					3.72**	(1.38, 10.03)
Wald Chi2 (d.f.)	32.95 (4)		32.62 (10)		35.22 (11)	
Prob>chi2	0.0000		0.0003		0.0002	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

The first model in Table 4 finds no differences by race for mentions of shooter race when comparing white shooters to Black or Latinx shooters. Asian shooters were 1,211.0% more likely than whites to have their race mentioned by the media articles. Other and Middle Eastern shooters together are 1,804.3% more likely to have their race mentioned by the media than white shooters. The overall model is highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

The inclusion of gender (0 women, 1 men) and age, grouped by decade¹³, altered these results slightly. Men are 1,961% more likely to have their race in media stories of their shootings than women. This is unsurprising as most shooters are men and thus, most of the media articles analyzed are about men. The inclusion of demographic variables like age and gender do not change the relationship between white, Black, or Hispanic shooters having their race mentioned in the media coverage of their incident. For Asian shooters who are women, the inclusion of other demographics provides a modest increase to the likelihood of having their race discussed in the media, 1,557.0% more likely than white women. Asian men who commit shootings are much more likely than that. Asian men are 2,673.0% more likely to have their race mentioned in the media than white women are.

These effects are even stronger for Other/Middle Eastern men¹⁴. Compared to white women, Other/ME men are 10,307.0% more likely to have their race identified in the media, 8,346% more than white men. The effect of age on the media's identification of shooter race is

¹³ Shooters over 60 years of age were condensed into a single category as there are four shooters between 70 to 79 and only one shooter over 80 years of age.

¹⁴ The inclusion of age and gender greatly increases the likelihood of those who are labeled Other or Middle Eastern to be identified as such in media reporting, indicating a suppression effect. The small significance of age and gender variables indicate that race remains a highly important factor when it comes to race being reported. However, the more information available about the shooter, the more likely Asian and Other/Middle Eastern shooters will be identified by their race. Notably, the effects of the base category of White, Black, and Latinx shooters is not affected the same way.

small. Across all age groups, only shooters who were minors, those under 18, had a significant effect on racial identification in media. Shooters who are under 18 are significantly less likely to have their race mentioned in media reports, by 93%. Minors are not always identified in public records regarding criminal behavior and juvenile court records are typically kept confidential, so this relationship is not surprising. Among active shooters however, the media stories in this study reveal that many young people who engage in these crimes are deidentified and put on trial as adults for the severity of their crime.

These patterns may reflect bias regarding who the media does and does not consider a “typical” criminal. In the case of white shooters, white is the base category for all racial groups and therefore the race of the shooter may not occur to the media to report. On the opposite side of this argument, Blacks and Latinx are more commonly presented as the face of criminality in our society (Tucker 2018). As discussed in Chapter 1 (literature), the more routinely the public sees certain racial and ethnic groups incarcerated, the more likely they are to perceive that group as more criminal, regardless of the legal practices or biases that put them there (Anderson 2012). As discussed, Blacks make up 26% of all arrests, 38.1% of the prison population but only 12.4% of the population. Individuals of Hispanic origin make up 20.7% of arrests and 23% of the US population but represent 30.5% of all inmates (FBI 2021; Jones 2021; BOP 2021). This disproportionate representation across crime statistics makes these two groups perceived as more criminal and therefore commenting on their race may not occur to the media outlets as it is already assumed these racial groups are participating in illegal and violent behaviors.

As poignantly stated in the *New Jim Crow* “the term *white criminal* is confounding, while the term *black criminal* is nearly redundant” (Alexander 2012:198). In other words, labeling a criminal as white is confusing and labeling a Black criminal and based on similar

disproportionalities, labeling Hispanic criminals as such is unnecessary. In comparison, people of Asian, Middle Eastern, and other racial groups are less likely to be considered criminal, with the clear exception that people of Middle Eastern descent are more likely to be considered extremists or terrorists than people of North American descent (Dixon et al. 2009). A huge percent of shooters of Middle Eastern descent, 83.33%, had their race mentioned in the media following their shooting incident compared to only 12.07% of white shooters.

Given the racial dimensions of terrorism and the high degree of racial identification in media, the media articles were coded for mentions and discussions of terrorism in relation to the shooting. When added to the logistic regression models in Model 3, terrorism modestly increases the effect of media's racial identification of Asian shooters but has a much greater effect on Other and Middle Eastern shooters. Mentions of terrorism increase the likelihood of the shooter's race being identified by media by 272.0% holding other demographics constant, i.e., for white women. Among Other/ME women who participated in shootings, this likelihood increases by an additional 8,877% compared to white women, as opposed to just 8,246% when terrorism is not included in the model. For Other/ME men, including terrorism in a media article increases the likelihood that they will have their race discussed by 10,792% compared to white women, 9,149% compared to white men.

Again, these are massive likelihoods and I believe generally reflect the small overall number of shooters whose race was mentioned in the media overall. However, the significance of the effects present compelling evidence of increased likelihoods, even if only 200% more, for Asian and Other and Middle Eastern shooters compared whites to have their race discussed alongside their offense.

The hypothesis that white shooters are less likely to have their race identified in the media than all other racial groups is only partially supported. There is no statistical difference between the racial identification in media across white, Black, and Latinx shooters. However, white shooters are significantly less likely to have their race identified than Asian, Middle Eastern, and Other shooters, particularly when the media connects the shooting to terrorism. Young shooters are less likely to have their race discussed, consistent with police and court policies surrounding youth identity protection for juvenile crimes.

Conclusion

As white men are the most common active shooters, the identity of the shooters as white men must be examined as a predictor of these crimes. Instead of looking to mental health issues or the type of weapon used to explain active shootings, focusing on the common identity shared by these shooters can help society better understand why these incidents occur and what may be done to stop them. As such, the remainder of this study focuses on white men, the most common race and gender identities across active shooters from 2000 to 2019. White men, their opinions about society, gender expectations, violence, and active shootings will be examined in depth through in-depth interviews analyzed in Chapters III, IV, and V.

III. WHITE MEN ON GENDER: MASCULINITY, PRIVILEGE, AND PRESSURE

The following chapters (III-V) examine masculinity and violence through the eyes of white men and women. The results of the previous section find white men are the most common active shooters, a type of murder they engage in at disproportionately high levels compared to typical homicide and far more proportionately given their proportion in the population. Understanding white men and how they engage with their race and gender identities will shed light on this offense pattern. This chapter will explore gender through the eyes of white men and women, revealing ways that men are constrained and encouraged through their masculine expectations to engage in violence. The intersection of masculinity with race will be examined in Chapter IV.

Questions about gender expectations and identity were asked at the beginning of the interviews. Chapter III investigates the gender aspect of the research question: how do white men and women understand masculinity today? This part of the interview asked men what it was like to grow up as a boy, what it is like being a man in today's world, and what they believe society expects from men generally. Women were asked about being women as well as how they perceive men. The responses to these questions overlapped with later topics, and as such, violence works its way into the participants conversations about masculinity generally before violence is formally introduced via the interview script. Violence is framed by these men and women in this chapter as integral to masculine performance.

Methodology

The following chapters are based on semi-structured interviews, conducted with white men and women in the United States, regarding race, gender, conflict and violence, and active shootings. The interview portion of this study expands on shooting studies previously conducted

by providing context and perspectives on the narratives commonly surrounding shooters and shootings. In particular, the interview participants are asked their perspectives on white men and active shootings. Though participants were not asked directly about mental health at any point, nearly all of them addressed mental illness when discussing active shootings. Similarly, many discussed access to guns and gun culture when asked about shootings, revealing the strength of these narratives in the public sphere.

It is well documented by shooting researchers that men are overwhelmingly responsible for mass shooting incidents, and, while proportions of the racial make-up of shooters changes with the definition of shooting used, white men are consistently more likely to be responsible for such shootings than they are for homicides generally. As such, it is imperative to study other U.S. based white men to gain insights into the lived experiences of the active shooter demographic.

The section uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews with white people from the U.S. to explore this demographic: white men as the target demographic and white women as their gender opposite, controlling for race. The prior section identifies that active shooters engage in these offenses at all ages between 12 and 88 ($\bar{x}=34.89$, $s.d.=15.08$). As such, the only age restriction placed on the participants was that they must be legal adults to eliminate issues of youth vulnerability and the need to gather consent from guardians.

A smaller number of white women were interviewed as a comparison group who arguably experience whiteness in similar ways to the men but are not subjected to the same masculinity norms. Their perspective is used to better understand how whiteness operates in relation to masculinity, through the lens of femininity. Gender was dichotomized as men and women to reduce perspective in the study to the ends of the gender continuum. Non-binary

persons are extremely valuable to gender studies, and further research should look at shootings through the perspective of persons who are neither men nor women. For the purposes of this study, especially the theorized role masculinity plays in active shootings, limiting the gender representation to men and women was deemed best.

The interview participants delve into shootings and explain, from their perspective, why these shootings occur and what being a white man may mean when it comes to shootings. These interviews aim to answer the following research questions:

How do white men understand their role in society and their identities as white men?

How do white men explain men's violence and white men's shootings?

Sample and Recruitment Strategy.

Twenty white men and ten white women were interviewed between October 2020 and July 2022. Participants were obtained through convenience sampling using the researcher's personal and professional network. Flyers and emails were sent to friends and acquaintances and distributed by those contacts to persons unknown to the researcher. No friend, family member, or personal acquaintance of the researcher was permitted to be involved in the study. Deception for the sake of reducing bias was used when recruiting participants: there was no mention of mass shootings or active shooters as a topic of discussion listed in the recruitment materials (copies of recruitment materials are provided in the Appendix). Instead, violence and conflict were terms used to prepare participants for potentially difficult topics.

Interview Process.

The participants were provided with an informed consent via email form prior to the interview and verbal consent was obtained at the top of each interview and recorded in the final transcription. The interviews were completed over Zoom, as many took place at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, lasting between one and two and a half hours (averaging an hour and a half). Interviews were recorded with the participants' permission, then transcribed and coded. Video, which was automatically recorded by Zoom, was immediately destroyed following the interviews to protect participant identities, and audio was deleted following transcription. Identifiable details such as the participants' names, family or friends' names, the state and/or town they live in, colleges they attended, and, at times, job titles were changed at the time of transcription to protect the participants' identities.

Participants were questioned about what it means to them to be a man or woman today, about gender expectations for both men and women, and to reflect on the gendered aspects of U.S. society. Following a discussion of gender, participants were asked about their racial identity, to reflect on what being white has meant to their lives, and the importance of their race in U.S. society generally. Discussions of the causes of conflict and how conflict is perceived to be resolved was followed by a discussion of men's violence and the participant's perceptions and opinions as to why men are more involved in violent crime. These topics lead into a final conversation on active shooters: possible motivations and causes of their behavior; the participant's opinions on how and who becomes shooters; society's potential justification and/or rationalization of these events; and a reaction to shooters' as white men, opinions on why white men are seemingly more likely to engage in active shootings, and how, as white people, the demographic reality of shooters affects them. Due to the semi-structured nature of these interviews, not every conversation followed the script precisely. However, conversations about

shooting crimes were always kept to the end of the conversation even if the participant brought up mass shootings prior to the researcher doing so. This was done intentionally to keep the participants' responses about race, gender, and conflict from being biased by the questions on shootings. Upon ending the interviews, the participants were thanked for their time and provided with the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. Three individuals took the opportunity: Hooker, Lollipop, and John Doe.

Analytic Strategy.

Each interview was transcribed by me using NVivo. Following transcription, these interviews were coded for both previously determined, theoretically based themes and themes that emerged during the interview process, transcription, and subsequent read-throughs of the transcripts. This method utilizes both a priori coding, where codes are applied to the text, and emergent coding, where codes are drawn *from* the text, a grounded theory approach (Stemler 2001). While typically one method of coding is used in qualitative studies, using both emergent and a priori coding made the most methodological sense for this study. Ample literature on masculinity and crime provides a strong theoretical grounding for this study in whiteness, masculinity, and strain (Kreager 2007; Dagirmanjian et al. 2017; Wyatt 2010; Sumeru 2020; Messerschmidt 1993; Amato 2012; McCarthy, Femlee, and Hagan 2004; Gallagher and Parrott 2011; Daigle, Cullen, and Wright 2007; Smith et al. 2015; Steffensmeier and Streifel DATE; Cobbina, Like-Haislip, and Miller 2010). The script was designed around these concepts and therefore coding must include them. However, interviews allow for a variety of unintended and unknown subjects, themes, and concepts to emerge organically from the participants.

The purpose of in-depth interviews in this study is to have participant-driven data that is opinion and perspective focused; this requires being open to emergent codes. The use of both emergent and a priori codes allow for an analysis of the topics intended to be elicited or directly asked of the participants by the researcher, while also allowing the participants to drive the study. Interviews were semi-structured and therefore often veered off into tangential yet related issues to the question at hand. At times, the tangents and stories provided by the subjects allowed them to better explain the ways in which racial identity, gender, and violence interact than did direct responses to the script questions, and possibly better than even intended by the participant. The use of emergent codes is necessary for fully understanding the topics of interest through the participants, while a priori codes ground the data in established theory and hypothesized relationships. Testing these two coding practices, Blair (2015) finds that at times a combined approach is the best method depending on the research and the researcher. As such, the use of two styles of coding is the best practice to capture all the themes present, is precedent in prior research, and is a best fit for this particular study.

Codes based in theoretical concepts and societal narratives discussed in Chapter # surrounding race, gender, and shootings include, but are not limited to: aggrieved entitlement; strain; whiteness; white habitus; white privilege; components of traditional masculinity (fatherhood, heterosexuality, financial success, physical prowess, social dominance, emotional suppression); societal expectations for men, women, and people of color; changes in societal expectations; shooter mental health; shooter bullying; racism; colorblind racism; the use of racially coded language; causes of conflict; causes of violence; conflict resolution; and explanations of male violence. Emerging themes include codes such as: feeling white; guns

(control, access, and ownership); justice, prejudice, and revenge as motivations for shootings; sense of community; and sexism.

I reviewed each transcript countless times through the course of the original interview and notes, transcribing the interviews, and coding. I first read through the transcripts with thematically expected codes, while taking notes on emerging and common themes. I then went through each transcript again to code for noted emergent themes. This process continued until all themes were coded and exhausted. Ultimately, each transcript was reviewed for coding five times to capture all themes present. Each read through was focused on different codes to try to isolate certain themes. This strategy made it easier to focus on the codes at hand and limit thematic distractions during the coding process, while allowing for notation of emergent themes to be followed up on during a subsequent reading. NVivo collects codes into a single file, allowing the researcher to examine each code by itself, with the pseudonym of the participant attached to their contribution to that topic of study. Codes that were discussed by a majority of participants and of most relevance to the topic of shooters will be discussed in depth.

Study Limitations and Recruitment Challenges.

As with all methods, the limitations to interview studies are many, as are the strengths. Interviews take significant time and generally do not, often cannot, obtain generalizable samples the way survey methods can. However, interviews produce in-depth perspectives on the topics in question. Participants can elaborate, clarify, and explain themselves and their thoughts in ways that they are unable to do through surveys, even surveys with open-ended responses. The depth of the data collected is highly valuable to researchers and the public.

It is important to note that the interview sample is a convenience sample, collected from my personal friendship and professional networks. As such, I expected that the sample would lean towards those with a bachelor's degree, with liberal political views, and around 30 years of age. As expected, all but one of the participants has more than high school education but occupations ranged from working to upper-middle class. Fortunately, there were also more conservative minded men and women who chose to speak with me, and the age of the participants ranges widely from 22 to 80. All opinions and perspectives were highly valuable to the study, though these differences did not generally change the overall picture being described to me by all the men and women in sample. This was somewhat surprising given previous research on how these demographic groups alter perspectives; yet I believe this reflects how deeply the findings from this study are felt in U.S. society. Regardless of political party or leanings, certain feelings about being white, especially being a white man, run deep.

The feelings whites express about how society feels towards and treats white people, particularly white men, are, I believe, one of the main reasons recruitment was challenging. It took much longer than expected to obtain 20 white men for my sample. However, the saturation I had already obtained by the tenth participant allowed me to accept a smaller sample size than the 30 originally intended. The interviews are long, honest, and complex, providing rich data to explore the ways in which white men (and women) navigate and understand their place in the world and the ways in which their identity may influence violent behaviors, up to and including some of the most extreme - active shootings.

Being Men: Pressures, Expectations, and Violence

Men occupy a position of privilege in our society. This privilege is not a moral judgement but a historical fact. Men have been in control of U.S. society for centuries, holding positions of power in government and business, and for most of our country's history, the only ones able to own property and vote. Social structures and institutions are built to conform and prioritize masculinity. Still, while men occupy privileged positions compared to others, those privileges come with a rigid set of norms men are expected to follow. The participants in this study outline the social complexities they navigate as men, the pressures they face from society and themselves, and their efforts to be the best men they can be. These pressures are described as contributing both directly and indirectly to men's violence against others.

The first part of the interview and this section answers the question: What does it mean to be a man to white men and women today? The ideals of hegemonic masculinity are open to change and may have shifted since Connell's original thesis in 1987 and their revision with Messerschmidt in 2005. Understanding the ways in which masculinity may contribute to active shootings begins with understanding the pressures and requirements of contemporary masculinity.

It was hypothesized that the men in this sample would face the same pressures outlined by contemporary hegemonic masculinity, as outlined in Chapter I. Hegemonic masculinity, as the idealized form of masculinity, pressures all people in a society to conform to it. People born male are ascribed the masculine gender role before birth and are taught the associated expectations their whole lives (Connell 1987). Contemporary hegemonic masculinity is characterized by individuality and frontiersmanship; heterosexuality; patriarchal family structures and being a breadwinner, and as such, occupational achievement; physical strength;

and emotional control (Smith et al. 2015; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 1993; Donaldson 1993; Trujillo 1991). The men in this study echo these pressures while pushing back on them as unrealistic or impractical.

Class or age differences in the men's responses to interview questions would not have been surprising. However, there were few differences between the respondents. Although the four men over 60 in this sample had less sophisticated language about gender in their repertoire, they expressed very similar, if not identical, sentiments to the younger men. For example, while few of the younger men struggled at times to phrase their thoughts, the 54-year-old spoke about gender at length and easily.

The men in this sample also have similar educational backgrounds. Only one of the men did not continue his education past high school and both his daughter and wife have. As such, their income levels are also similar. Although occupations differ, all the men in this sample are, or would have been prior to retirement, considered middle class.

Following questions about masculinity, the interviews asked the respondents their perspectives on what causes conflict and how conflict is resolved. Many of the participants spoke of violence during this part of the interview though they were free to define conflict for themselves. Many of the respondents jumped to violent conflict, a few even brought up active shootings, without prompting and gendered violence as masculine prior to questions of men's violence in the script.

This was followed by questions about why they think men commit and are arrested in greater proportion for violent crimes than women. Specific data on men's violence were not provided to the participants, but none of the 30 participants questioned that men were committing more violence. The only exception is James (28) who begins his conversation about

men's violence with what he sees as a type of discrimination against men when it comes to domestic violence. He remembers reading studies in college about how men and women commit similar amounts of domestic abuse but says that men's violence is likely more harmful because men "tend to be a little stronger" than women. His argument is backed up by research on domestic violence (Straus 2006). Often framed as a men's problem (Smith et al. 2015; Pepin 2016) men and women commit domestic violence at similar levels, though men's violence towards women is almost entirely based in attempts to control their partner while female violence towards male partners is typically motivated by attempts to resist violence (Johnson 2020). However, James goes on, like the other men, to talk about the ways men are violent in other ways at greater levels than women.

Men are the most common violent offenders across offending statistics. As previously discussed, men were responsible for 75% of arrests for all crimes in the United States between 2000 and 2019, the period covered in this study. For violent crimes (homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) men were responsible for 88.2% of all arrests (11.8% women) (FBI 2021). Men's violence is normal, expected, and unquestioned in our society in many ways. William (54) says "it's no secret that it's gonna be males... gonna act out violently *cause that's what males do*" [emphasis added]. Lollipop (participant's chosen pseudonym), 31-year-old white woman from Boston, echoes William in her interview "Why *wouldn't* a guy do [violence]?" [emphasis in original] describing how "we praise men for violence...we reward that." Lollipop is not alone in her assessment that men's violence is rewarded and therefore expected and encouraged by society. All the women agreed with her that violence is socialized into men as part of cultural norms. This is one of the few places in the conversations that women's perspectives diverge from the men. They emphasize cultural factors and the pressures of hegemonic masculinity in the

manifestation of men's violence while the men differ somewhat, placing more emphasis on biology.

This chapter follows the interview script, focusing on masculinity first and incorporating aspects of men's responses of questions of conflict and violence where they overlap. In this chapter I will examine how men today understand and grapple with current societal expectations of masculinity generally and their own masculine identities through competition and dominance, emotional control, sexuality, fatherhood, and the patriarchal family role, how women approach masculinity through these lenses, and the way the men and women perceive that these ideals inform and encourage aggression and violence.

Fatherhood.

The role of father is addressed by most of the men in the sample as important to being a man. Even for men who do not currently have children, their potential role as fathers and family providers factors heavily into their understanding of what men are and what men are expected to be. Fourteen out of the twenty men in the sample described being fathers, either currently or in the future, and the role of fathers in taking protecting and providing for their family as important to being a man. Fatherhood is intimately tied to hegemonic masculinity through other norms of heterosexuality and societal patriarchy (Veissière 2018; Nevels 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Marsiglio and Peck 2004; Collier 1998). As men are the head of society and the country, so men are the head of their family and home.

John Doe, who describes himself as a "funny little 20-year-old," feels the pressures to start a family even at his age. When he expresses that he does not want children, he is met with confusion. Not told explicitly that he needs to have children, the reactions he experiences to his

decision to be child-free makes him think having children and a “normal” family is still a strongly held expectation for men. He says there is

subliminal pressure that we, or that men usually face, I think, to um, you know, be able to.. continue the bloodline, I think. Our like, I don't think it's our main role to continue the bloodline but subliminally in the back of your head you're always thinking like, I have to have a family, I need to keep going, and keep uh, you know, in my case, my name going.

This is echoed by Jake (25) who says “pretty much every boy that's grown up has always been told to.. uh grow up quick, get a job, make money, have a house, start a family, support that family, kind of deal” and to “be the man of the house.”

For many men, financially providing for family is a masculinity goal tied intimately to the traditional role of men as head of the family. Anthony (80) sold his house and gave his kids the money to support themselves and their families. He describes this act as part of “my purpose...the man's purpose.” Theodore (67) echoes Anthony that he believes providing for the family is a man's purpose, describing what it means to be a man through family. He says,

as a man you realize you have a.. the drive to take care of your family, to take care of the people that you're closest to and you wanna, you wanna earn a livin', you wanna support them, you wanna make sure they've got everything they need. And with me that was part of my drive was to make s- was to work and make sure my wife and the kids we had, you know, we had everything we needed

Theodore repeatedly returned to the topic of family when discussing men and men's roles in society. His focus on family as a primary component of masculinity is emphasized by the number of families he has seen broken at his workplace. He describes a lot of his coworkers experiencing divorce and many single parents work there to make ends meet. The value he personally places on the family unit makes this especially frustrating for him to witness, a frustration primarily directed at the men. He says these men get a “wandering eye” and “goes off,

divorces his wife,” leaving his children with their mother. He says he loses respect for these men is failing to support and care for their children financially, as their ex-wives should not be responsible for both the emotional and financial care of the children.

Mitch, a 32-year-old professor of criminal justice from the Midwest, has a different take on being a provider and the man of the house from Anthony and Theodore’s financial focus. For him, being a parent is about protecting his family, “protection is still the same sort of nobody gets hurt, providing has sort of been you know, how do we keep the house moving? How do we keep the sort of the.. the unit afloat, I would say.” He describes making dinners and doing laundry frequently. Household chores like these are a type of providing traditionally relegated to women (Adams and Coltrane 2004; Hochschild and Machung 1989). His job as a college professor gives him time flexibility that he uses to keep his family afloat in non-traditional gendered ways.

He knows that his views are not necessarily common and does not think many other heterosexual men treat fatherhood as generalized parenthood, partnering with the women in their lives. He describes the following interaction in his youth,

I can remember my dentist when I was like 15 sayin ‘Mitch, you gotta- you gotta put your foot down. My father didn’t know how to, how to fry an egg. And now I know how to do laundry. If you don’t be careful, you’re going to be stuck doing all of this’. And he was joking but I remember thinkin’ like... wouldn’t be good if I knew how to do that? Because there will come a time when I will have to figure these things out.

And there is, as Mitch laments the way children “just *burn* through laundry” [emphasis in original]. However, based on conversations with coworkers and friends, he says household chores are still often split along gendered lines, a belief supported by research (Hess, Ahmed, and Hayes 2020; Patterson, Sutfin, and Fulcher 2004). Along with doing a more equal amount of

the housework and child care, Mitch also earns less than his wife. He says that men in his life, often those older than him, though he does not think younger men are exempt from this opinion, ask him about his wife out-earning him with the intent to make him feel bad about it. He explains

it's sort of this like.. uh.. it's a jab.. and they chuckle. And I don't (clears throat) I don't love it. Um.. but I- I sorta like flick back like 'well we're not knuckle-dragging Neanderthals, and we're doing okay'. Like I don't..(clears throat) I've been able to brush it off but I can- I mean I know guys that.. that would really be a problem- that is *has* been a problem. Right, people have gotten divorced because of sort of that, that power dynamic, right? [emphasis in original]

The men who say these things to him are typically older men in their 50s or 60s, including his own father. Due to their age, these men are perhaps socialized into the single-income family, male breadwinner ideal more strongly than Mitch who is half their age.

Mitch attributes some of his ease at taking on traditionally feminine household chores to his desire for financial security and the lack of it he had in his youth. For Mitch and his wife, it does not matter who between them makes more money so long as they have enough as a family. As he says, "we don't want for things anymore, however that needs to happen I'm fine with it." Though he dislikes it when men attempt to demean him in that way, he frames it as their problem as the financial security of the home comes before masculine pride entrenched in a breadwinner ideal.

It is an ideal that Steven, a 28-year-old from Maine calls an "antiquated definition" of masculinity. Steven does not believe the expectation that men alone provide for a family financially is something that "can really apply as much anymore since most households are two income households but, uh, by necessity." Younger men may be more open to alternatives to the breadwinner ideology, particularly as the economy has changed drastically since the mid-1900s. Men can no longer support families on their income alone and women no longer need to rely on

men for financial survival (Cherlin 2014). Despite being economically impractical or impossible, these ideas persist today for men young and old. Across the sample, men acknowledged the role they are expected to occupy as fathers and providers. Nearly all the women in the sample discussed similar male gender norms of fatherhood, family, and providing they see affecting the men in their lives.

Eight of the ten women in the sample discussed a patriarchal, provider role that men are expected to embody. Catherine, a 60-year-old woman from Vermont says that she does not believe these roles have changed much for men since her childhood. She describes unequal, gendered expectations for family:

I think as far as we've come we've still got this men, you know, support the family and a modern man would, you know, assist in the work in the household and the childrearing but his- his main job is to support the family. And if he doesn't financially support his family, he's a deadbeat. Where I don't know that women- that people would say that about women. And the opposite when women don't do the physical things that they should do- they're um- it's a lot more negative than if a man doesn't do the physical things that he should- that he should do. ... the man is- he's going to provide financially and he's going to, you know, kind of be the one that makes sure everybody is cared for. Whereas the girl is- the woman is going to take care of the emotional kinda, keep the home fires burning type.

Men are expected to be financial providers as opposed to caring for physical needs. Even if they are allowed to participate in physical care more today than in the past, the emphasis is on financial provision.

What Catherine describes is what Mitch runs up against when men in his life poke fun at him for making less money than his wife. He is not seen by these men as fulfilling his role as a father despite how much work he does physically caring for his children. This belief that men should not do, or are not as capable of, physical care for children is based in sex-typing, in which

an individual's sex is seen as determining their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Since people born female and assigned womanhood are physically capable of giving birth, they have been assigned child-care responsibilities for centuries. Even as attitudes about men's capability to care for children appear to have changed since the mid-1900s, women are still thought of as the primary parent involved in physical childcare (Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow 2001; Hess, Ahmed, and Hayes 2020). These gendered beliefs about financial responsibility and household and childcare work persist even though it is not economically feasible for most of the population to live on a single income.

The men and women in the sample have described how providing financial support is deeply tied to family and fatherhood for men in the United States. These messages are distributed via authority figures, media, friends, and family through modeled behavior. For Arnie (30-year-old physical therapist in Virginia), it is his therapist who communicates this masculine norm within the home:

my therapist is a great example of that [gendered family roles].
Really interesting guy.. um helps me a lot.. but he's very gender
normative and he tells me all the time I'm the man and I should be-
I need to be the- the payer of the household

Clearly, subtle pressure and modeling of norms are not the only way men receive these messages. There are explicit pressures by figures of authority telling men that they should be the head of the household, making the big decisions, and providing financially. Undeterred, Arnie jokingly calls himself a "glorified trophy husband" because his partner, a woman, makes much more money than he does. Arnie feels he is free to follow an alternative path despite the traditional provider and protector norms still in place. Even though he sometimes faces resistance from those around him, Arnie says that,

I appreciate that I can follow whatever brings me joy which is cooking and cleaning and.. child rearing even though we don't have children, things like that. That's - that's what I enjoy and I don't have to be constrained to be the.. dad who comes home and drinks a beer and then watches football - yuck, trash. Um.. and I think there's- there- I appreciate seeing more of that as part of the conversation. There is more interest in.. the ideas about men exploring these different kind of spaces and roles and things , without that having som- assumption of sexuality- not that I care about that, I get called gay *all* the time and I don't care. Um.. but I think it's a really great space. [emphasis in original]

Despite being told explicitly that he needs to fit into more traditional gender stereotypes, Arnie rejects many of these norms in favor of the things he enjoys. Doing so results in attempts by others to control and gender his behavior, like his therapist, friends, and family explicitly telling him things he should or should not do. This is also done by questioning his heterosexuality, another key masculine trait. Arnie enjoys wearing bow ties and dressing in colorful clothes, uses gender neutral pronouns for his work email, and says “they” when speaking about his partner to others¹. Due to gendered patterns in fashion and speech, the combination of bright clothing and gender-neutral pronouns creates confusion about his sexual identity when others try to fit him into a gendered box. He says others often instantly gender him and his partner. Others assume his partner is a “he” and that she and Arnie are a homosexual couple.

Heterosexuality is another key characteristic of contemporary hegemonic masculinity and deeply tied to fatherhood through biological processes (though men can be fathers without providing DNA). The idealized man is heterosexual, good with women, even a “player,” someone who engages in sexual relations not to maintain closeness to a woman but to revel in his conquests. Heterosexuality also implies what it is not. Being heterosexual means one is not

¹ Arnie referred to himself as a man and used both “wife” and “partner” throughout the interview. He confirmed he is comfortable with the use of the pronouns he/his via email.

homosexual. In extreme forms, this manifests as homophobia, anti-gay sentiments, and violence against those who are not straight or do not perform heterosexuality along socially scripted lines. Here are the first glimpses into how hegemonic masculine norms encourage aggressive boundary enforcement, up to and including violence, and how this discuss will connect to active shootings later.

Heterosexuality and Anti-other.

The heterosexual norm of masculinity and the ways that it can lead to harm are not lost on the participants of this study. Many have not only felt the pressures to be and act heterosexual and engage in heterosexual relationships to achieve masculinity but have encountered negative and violent forms of this characteristic. Twelve of the men in the sample brought up heterosexual relationships as part of being masculine expectations and what it means to be a man.

Elias (35), a high school teacher from Vermont, notes that there is “still this like, heterosexual expectation in society” that he sees among his students today. In trying to determine if things have changed since he was a teenager, he says “I see my male students still kind of treating female students the way that *I* remember treating female students and still getting that like, social acceptance for it” [emphasis in original] and thinks maybe “we have not come to the place in society where like, we can really expect our boys to be respectful with their female friends and classmates and partners and things like that.” Though he says “I,” referencing his own treatment of women, it becomes clear later in the discussion that Elias was mostly talking about the dating behavior of his friends.

Seeing young men today act the same way his friends did in his youth has given him a relatively negative outlook on heterosexual relationships despite his own seemingly happy

marriage. The heterosexual relationships around him in his youth were messy and often ended in pain. The boys in his friend group put him in an uncomfortable and complex social situation when it came to their behavior and his sense of right and wrong. He says many of his friends dated multiple young women in high school, breaking promises of monogamy they had made. At the time he felt he “wouldn't be a very good male friend” if he exposed their behavior.

Despite his misgivings, Elias wore a mask of masculinity and supported his male friends. Not doing so would have put both his friendships and masculine achievements at risk (Edwards and Jones 2009). Protecting the men around him and keeping their secrets was necessary for him to maintain his friendships while simultaneously perpetuating hegemonic ideals of heterosexual masculinity and the subordination of women. After all, under hegemonic masculine norms, his friends were just doing what heterosexual young male men do: dating around. Young men take for granted and feel pressured and expected by others to engage in hegemonic norms that encourage heterosexual displays through multiple sex and dating partners (Eck 2014; Edwards and Jones 2009), something Elias' friends seem to have felt and pursued.

Though he kept their secrets, Elias believes “I was looked down a little bit by some of my friend group for not doing more of that sort of thing.” Elias did not only feel looked down on by his friends but felt confused about himself and his own masculine identity. He says, “I remember having some feelings like ...Wishing I was a little bit more like the other boys.” The strength of masculinity norms around heterosexuality and dating caused him to question himself and made him feel like less of a man than his friends. Even though Elias did date some, at times he wished he was more like the other young men around him, someone who more adequately performed masculinity as outlined by social norms. Elias says his college years gave him time to “deprogram” a lot of those behaviors and now attaches more importance to fatherhood and his

family life than his dating history. Indeed, fatherhood is a means of “aging out” of certain masculine norms for many men (Eck 2014; Massoglia and Uggen 2010).

Heterosexuality norms around dating also put the pressures to initiate relationships on men’s shoulders, which, for Brian (30), who calls himself shy, can be difficult and frustrating. Jake (25) echoes Brian’s frustrations and has additional concerns about this expectation, particularly in the age of “Me Too,” a social media movement where individuals, primarily women, post about sexual harassment and violence with the hashtag *#metoo* to bring awareness to the issues, at times calling out celebrities and men in power for harmful behavior (Hosterman et al. 2018). He says,

as a straight male its.. terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. Because of all the um- I’m a very quiet person anyways. I just keep to myself. I will very rarely talk to *anyone* when I’m going out other than my friends, whether it be male, female, anybody. Um but some of my more open friends who um.. they’d be in college at bars, stuff like that, it’s um, they’re terrified because of all the new movements and stories coming out and generalizations. Um.. of doing something wrong. It’s like uh if they’re approaching a woman, they’re terrified of being seen as a creep or um.. stalkerish or.. people being afraid of them when.. of course, you don’t know these people like as a woman you wouldn’t know this person. You don’t know him. He’s just some guy but it’s terrifying because even if you aren’t like that ... you’re terrified that you’re gonna be seen that way and labeled that way and ostracized. As.. uh, because I’ve seen it a couple of times happen. And.. it’s, I understand where it comes from. Why that is a- like why men are seen that way. I truly see that. Especially I have a lot of female friends and.. I find myself kind of agreeing with them a lot of the time like “wow okay that’s not okay what are they thinking” but then.. as y- just a- as just a regular person, not, not being one of those kinds of uh, frightening or potentially harmful people.. you’re stuck. It uh, can’t go anywhere. You pretty much just uh, hopin’ for the best is mainly what it is. Yet you’re still expected to make the first move or like that when you’re too terrified to make the first move.
[emphasis in original]

Struggling to find the right words, Jake grapples with the ways sexual dynamics between men and women have become more challenging as women have become more outspoken about inappropriate behaviors and work to hold men accountable for them. While Jake understands women's fears about men, particularly strangers, it has become confusing and frightening to be in the driver's seat of sexual relationships. This emerging vulnerability is antithetical to masculinity and places men in the backseat of relationships they have been told to drive, undermining masculine achievement. Failures to achieve masculine goals are particularly likely to result in negative emotion (Agnew 2001), which is reflected in Jake, Brian, and Elias' accounts of dating. Failing to access women as a function of heterosexual norms is clearly of concern to men.

Another kind of vulnerability heterosexuality introduces into men's lives is the stigma associated with homosexuality. Gay men are associated with femininity both sexually and socially and therefore must be rejected by hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, men who aim to achieve hegemonic masculinity must reject and distance themselves from homosexuality and gay men to perform masculinity as prescribed by the hegemonic ideals (Schermerhorn and Vescio 2021; Pascoe 2007). James (28) notes that knowing he was gay at a young age made him sensitive to the gender norms. He observed people around him using words and ideas about homosexuality to insult or put others down, which made him feel that being gay was a negative thing.

His observations correspond closely to CJ Pascoe's work, *Dude You're a Fag* (2007), which finds that young men in high school participate in a deeply anti-gay, pro-heterosexual culture where the slur "fag" is used to insult, at times torment, and reduce the social standing of other young men. A victim of this same kind of behavior, Steven (28) remembers an incident in

his youth where another boy “calling me a faggot because I had a pink polo and would just pick on me. And then he punched me in the face.” Steven recounts this violent event calmly. He seems to have brushed off the assault even in the moment, claiming he simply walked away. Interestingly, Steven calls this event a fight even though he did not hit back. The language he uses places him and his assailant on equal footing. In doing so, he partially reestablishes his masculinity after being called a homosexual and failing to engage in physical violence.

John Doe (20) took a similar approach when threatened with physical violence for not performing heterosexual masculinity as others expected him to. As the only openly homosexual young man in his high school, he was on the receiving end of a fair amount of bullying. Like Steven, he never participated or fought back when assaulted or threatened. Instead, John Doe threatened to report them to the police if they harmed him, which does seem to have worked to help him escape a few potentially violent situations physically unscathed. He says he believes fighting back would not have helped his situation and may have made things worse:

I don't think I would've even earned their respect if I won. They probably woulda just been like 'oh it was a lucky gu- or a lucky swing' they'd make some uh, you know, horrible comment to try to validate the fact that they had lost. And I would also imagine that if I did win that would probably affect their masculinity in some negative way as well. Cause what, you know, high school.. farmer wants to be beaten by the artsy gay that, (laughs) you know, wears heels when he wants to?

His understanding that the young men in question, should they have lost a physical fight to him, would have found a way to “validate” losing to avoid perceived loss of masculinity is astute. To compensate for lost masculinity, reframing stories, like Steven did, and engaging in forms of hypermasculinity like violence can and are used by men to reclaim masculine achievements (Sumeru 2020; Sasso 2015; Babl 1979).

Through this retelling, John Doe also describes an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony is defined as leadership or dominance of a social *group*, not necessarily individuals. Even if he had succeeded in gaining physical dominance over his bullies, he would not have gained social dominance. He may have even made things worse for himself as they worked to reestablish their masculine identities. Thinking along similar lines, John Doe theorizes that they did not like him because,

I might have threatened their masculinity because if I made them question their sexuality then I would assume that that would in fact.. uh.. there's a word I'm looking for but I don't know what it is - it's not whirlwind but you know, it would like tarnish their, so far, like.. uh, cisgender heterosexual like, track record. That by you know, interacting with me I'm somehow making them less masculine. That was at least what I, you know, perceived from a lot of my interactions with them.

Consistent with this belief, research finds straight men react with public discomfort, anger, and anti-gay attitudes to a perceived advance by a homosexual man. These feelings also elicited aggressive and violent compensatory behaviors towards the gay man they believed threatened their masculinity (Schermerhorn and Vescio 2021). Luckily for John Doe, the boys around him did not often resort to physical violence and he left high school relatively unharmed.

John Doe, like Steven, was able to make light of these behaviors and how he navigated a heterosexual social environment where his identity as a gay man threatened others' masculinity resulting in aggressive and attempted compensatory violence towards him. However, he also admits to having been in therapy for years to learn healthy coping mechanisms for such stressors, after punching hole in his mother's wall at the end of a particularly stressful day. He says, "I just flipped out and I punched a hole in the wall," something eerily similar to his father's method of coping with negativity. John Doe's father

“punched a hole in the wall before just because like, his gas pump didn’t work but you know, it was all these other little things that he wouldn’t address or talk about or try to work through so he would just progressively get angrier and angrier and angrier”

The description of stressors piling up having caused both himself and his father to punch holes in the wall lines up perfectly with Agnew’s (2001) argument that strains can compound and produce deviant coping when individuals do not have access to healthy or socially acceptable methods of coping with negative emotions. Violence is a method of coping under General Strain Theory. Through this lens, the young men who targeted John Doe may have done so after a similar set of strains affected their day, his sexuality establishing him as a subordinate masculine figure.

Violence is always available to men to establish and reestablish their masculine identities, something one of the women ties explicitly to active shootings later though she struggles to explain why. Through further investigation of masculine norms and how violence is integral to masculinity, the masculine aspect of violent crime and active shootings becomes clearer. Violence as a means of demonstrating one’s masculinity also emerges during discussions of protecting the home or family for many of these men. Protection of others, especially wives and children, emerged among many the participants

Protection.

Twelve out of 20 men describe protecting others, especially women and children, as a key component of being a man. A small age-related difference emerged here. Out of three 80-year-olds in the sample, two referred to the animal kingdom when trying to explain the masculine protection role. Anthony (80) describes nature documentaries he watches as having clearly outlined men’s role in society as the protector of the home and family. He says the male

of the species supplies the “handiwork” to have offspring and then “protects all the little ones.” As an example, he explains that male elephants have longer tusks than their female counterparts and are physically larger because it is “the male’s job, to protect the species, so there is a species.” To Anthony, human men are protectors of the family in the same way as animals: it is their job, biologically, to do so. He says that

Man is pre.. preprogramed to protect the hou- the teepee. Uh.. if you went out West and, and you had the bad guys come, Jesse James and them or you were attacked by Indians, what could a woman do? She couldn't even fire a gun. That was not the things- the men did it.

Through his description of male violence as biological, Anthony seemingly inadvertently admits that men’s violence is a product of socially prescribed rules of behavior – “that was not the things” women did. Women were not supposed to shoot guns at the time he described. Gender roles constrained and distributed duties between men and women, such that “the men did that,” that being violence.

Theodore (67) adds that being a protector is “somethin’ in the makeup of a man” and that men “will come out and they will come out fightin’” if there is a threat to themselves, their home, or their families.

I would say most of ‘em have an aggressive nature. Because- it goes back to men went out to war. They went out to fight. And.. women were expected to stay in the back- in- no at home.

At the same time, he echoes something John Doe said earlier about men’s violence:

Somethin’ will trip you over. And what it is-is different for, with each man. It could have been a home environment, somethin’ happened to ‘em, somebody done somethin’ to ‘em. that tripped ‘em over into that [violence]. I mean it's uh, there's just no tellin’ what can trip somebody over into that. And men are.. most of the killin’ you see done. Even the street crime is done by men. And where does that aggressive - it's that aggressive nature in men that causes ‘em to do that. If it's not channeled and dealt with in a

proper manner, you're gonna have somebody who's out there killin' and doin' some awful things to people that they shouldn't be doing.

Both Theodore and Anthony say that men's violence is biological, referring to history and biological drives to protect the human species, and yet both also describe social factors. As Anthony describes gender roles having prohibited women from wielding weapons the way men did. In kind, Theodore describes that the women were "expected" to stay home when the men went off to fight.

Similarly, William (54) describes men as being biological pre-conditioned to protect others and be aggressive and violence. William claims that aggression is "part of our male evolution," explaining:

everything about the design of the male physique is-was built around - has evolved towards warfare, physical, you know, combat- things like that- hard labor, whatever it might be. Um and that didn't stop at- with the body, it continued into the brain, right?... at the most fundamental level, the re- I think the reason why men populate our prisons everywhere in society - at every point in time in history is because we're biologically designed.. you know, or evolved for.. warfare and violence and-and inter-tribal violence has always been part of our character.

At the same time, he also describes men's violence as something that needs to be controlled internally by men, and if not, then it needs to be controlled externally, like through the criminal justice system. In kind, Theodore later says that men need to "channel" their aggressive natures in a proper manner, describing violence as a generally inappropriate coping mechanism for aggression and frustration. Williams argues men need to learn to control violent behavior and that if, as adults, they have not "regulated or, you know, sought to regulate.. those types of violent impulses or.. just you know, mechanisms, now they're just dangerous." If these tendencies can and should be controlled, men's violence is not purely biological or natural. If

men are controlled by their biological impulses, they would be unable to curb those aggressions. Theodore and William are describing the ways men's violence is socially produced. If men can and should learn to control violent impulses, then violence and aggression are not biological imperatives.

Hooker (59) also discusses biological factors when seeking to explain men's aggression and violence. He says,

I think testosterone has a lot to do with it. It's..well.. men traditionally have been.. the most violent of the race. Um..it- due to a lot of reasons. Some is testosterone, some of it's been, you know, for years, men were the, the soldiers and men were the, sailors and.. and men were the explorers and.. and I think that.. aggressive nature of man.. is what has led to the majority of the..men being the ones who are doing the violent crimes.

For Hooker, the social roles men occupied in the past inform the behaviors we have normalized today, like aggression and violence. Historical holdover of gendered practice means that men do not have to be currently in those occupations to foster aggressive tendencies.

Also linking violence to biology somewhat, Frederick (26) says that he does not know enough about brain chemistry to speak authoritatively but believes some chemicals "like, testosterone," may lead to higher rates of violence.

I don't think testosterone is the aggressive chemical, but I'll use testosterone like maybe there's this- men have more testosterone so maybe like testosterone is like this... precludes someone to be more aggressive

Like Hooker, Frederick does not think that biology is a complete answer to the question of men's violence and protective roles. He goes on to say,

if it is true that our societies, that early human societies were run by men and you can compare that to other human-like primates.. the males are much more aggressive than the females. So maybe there's some like, some brain chemistry in men.. ... It doesn't make

them more aggressive, but it makes it more likely that they could be

For Frederick, testosterone and the biology of men may provide some basic ingredients, but society and the roles men are prescribed create the environment for those ingredients to produce violence and physical aggression. Expanding on Frederick's argument, John Doe (20) says of men:

they've got more testosterone than women. Um.. and that like, I-even myself like I'm a more feminine man but I get very, very irritable at points in time and I get very snappy and frustrating and annoying and um.. you know, I can't attribut- you know, I don't watch my hormone levels, I don't have any way to measure that and correlate that with any swing in um imbalance or anything but um.. I think that the biosocial perspective could probably most adequately describe why men are more prone to violence. That not only their.. testosterone levels because you know, that can only play so much of a role but um.. then also the societal aspect where uh, you know, between toxic masculinity and the expectations placed on men for like growing. There's a lot of expectation to grow, to be better, to be bigger, to have more money, to.. sometimes be hairier. I don't know but (laughs)... and then tie that into the testosterone and this, you know, boys don't cry uh, mindset, I think that it can probably, it stirs a societal turd and we end up with very angry, violent men.

Like John Doe, Arnie (33) argues for the role of testosterone in aggression while accounting for socialization. He says,

There's probably a bit of that nature/nurture thing. I mean, testosterone certainly has a role in it. The more testosterone, we know that tends to be- you tend to be less cognitive in your thinking processes, less rational if you will. Um and then men are socialized to.. to be more aggressive.

Arnie says that when he has been confronted with aggression, it has always been by men, whether it be road rage, talking to a woman in a bar and some man takes offense, or as the victim of attempted robbery. Though he says he does not know exactly why it is that it has always been

men, he believes that men's socialization is a big part of it. He says men are encouraged to be more physical and to engage in "sports, wrestling, things like that."

Like Arnie, Felix (33) says he has only experienced violence at the hands of other men. He says being bullied as a child,

informs my opinion about it being a male thing 'cause it, just, they're all- all boys that beat me up as a kid. Uh.. yeah and it wasn't like I was ever sent to the hospital or anything it was just kind of.. very aggressive rough housing on the playground that left me sort of, black and blue.

Like others, he thinks violence is probably "a mixture of like, biological conditioning and social conditioning...I think it's probably true that like, men are biologically more predisposed toward violent crime." And while he believes men are biologically primed to violence, he attributes a lot to cultural aspects as well. He says,

I think that [biology] is sort of mutually reinforced a certain sense.. a certain sense of expectation to dominance like what we were talking about earlier that like, white men should lead, should dominate, should conquer the pressure and you know, so forth and um.. and that when you kind of couple those expectations, social expectations for dominance with the biological predisposition toward a fight instinct, you get a society where men.. are.. you know.. largely the perpetrators of violent crime.

Felix refers to white men specifically, likely due in part to being questions of violence following questions on race and gender. By doing so, Felix unknowingly taps into the greater purpose of this study: understanding why white men commit a greater proportion of active shootings than other crimes. The men thus far have outlined violence as a socially normal way for men to handle their problems, like threats to the family. Like Agnew (2001) and General Strain Theory, these men describe violence as a means of coping with negative emotions and strains that impact their lives. Unlike GST, the men in this study find biology at least partially responsible for this form of coping, something which would affect white men and men of color alike.

Biological explanations allow men to construct a role for themselves within the family that is not susceptible to social forces, which, when understood in this way, establishes men's aggression as unquestionable (Sumeru 2020). It is simpler to accept biology than change social norms and institutions around gender. As Charles (80) says, "in the animal kingdom, the males are more aggressive than the females. That's- that's neurotypical, *I understand that*" [emphasis added]. It is black and white, laid before him and other men so they do not have to think about their role in the same way they have to analyze social dominance in the workplace or navigate changing financial roles within the family. Being the protector of the family gives men a role in society that re-positions them as superior and irreplaceable to the family even as women take on financial responsibility within the family that threatens the traditional breadwinner model. The strain of being unable to provide individually for the family financially can be offset by claiming the role of physical protector.

An example of the pressure put on men is provided by Elias (35). Though not a violent person, he says he is quick to act when his children might be in danger. It is an interesting situation for him, as he recalls feeling like he did not "measure up" as a man when he was younger because he did not participate in his high school culture of fist fighting. The way he sees things,

some people are very like, sort of quick to act and they'll run into traffic over stuff and for me, it's harder. I, I, I literally stop moving. It's like my body kind of locks up. Um.. and I think when situations like that have happened in my life, that often feels to me like there's something manly that's not in me. Because like men would.. men would be more than willing to kinda stand up to an aggressive male. Men would be more willing to defend women in a situation, right? And like.. I sort of naturally, I don't know if I'm thinking about my own safety or whatnot but when if situations get out of hand and I often find that I'm not - I don't have that switch.

Elias described a specific incident that has haunted him for years. Out on a drive, he stopped for snacks at a gas station, and witnessed a male customer yelling at a young, female cashier for being in the bathroom when he wanted to check out. Elias says he “kind of froze up” and watched the conflict unfold. He laments

I didn't have it in me to even go up and pay for the potato chips. I felt like I could not look her in the face because I didn't do anything. And I ended up just like, slinking-slinking out the store, just totally embarrassed at how I conducted myself 'cause I just did nothing.... I remember that whole ride home.. was really tryin' to like, figure out like why (chuckles) in that kind of a situation like, why could I not defend somebody who was being victimized. Like why didn't I have that in me? Um, and I still honestly don't have an answer to that question. That's bothered me for years.

The idea that “there’s something manly” that is not in him because he will not run towards a burning building or confront a large, angry man seems a form of self-preservation, not a flaw. Still, he has not forgotten the woman at the gas station or how he felt in that moment of perceived failed masculinity over a decade later.

Though men occupy positions of privilege in relation to women, taking on the role of protector and the physically more capable of the two genders also puts men’s bodies on the front line of violence. In an ironic twist, being physically threatened or attacked is another form of strain (Angew 2001) meaning men cannot substitute one form of hegemonic masculinity for another to escape strains resulting from those expectations.

Indeed, William (54) describes masculinity as requiring physical sacrifice, saying “it’s men who die in our wars ...men who do the hard nasty things.” Similarly, Brian (30) describes what he sees in men as a “confidence and machismo way of thinking, you know, it's a man's duty to protect his family and to.. to do, you know, the- the dirty tough jobs that no one else wants to

do.” Men like Elias, whose first instinct is not to run into a dangerous situation even to protect others, are taught that they are lessor than those that will.

Therefore, putting their physical bodies at risk under the guise of protecting others is one method men have at their disposal to prove their masculinity. Men who will not, or cannot, occupy subordinate positions socially to those that embody that hegemonic masculine protector, physically strong ideal (Connell 1985; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2014). Physical protection of others, the use of their bodies to protect and support others, is a means of achieving masculinity that can come with great cost and strain. Masculinity through physical behaviors, up to and including protective and aggressive acts of violence are one way of obtaining masculine performance. Later, this violent means of establishing masculinity comes up again when participants attempt to explain why men commit active shootings, integrating multiple aspects of masculinity. Though protection implies that men’s bodies are put on the front line of defending their homes and families, prior research establishes men as protectors of the nation as well (Nagal 1998). Many of the participants expand on violence through protection to discuss the ways that physical competition, size, aggression, and social dominance are part of being a man.

Physical Competition and Dominance.

Competition among men is another integral part of masculine performance under hegemonic norms. Gender is a situated accomplishment where social situations require different performances based on the behaviors, rules and scripts of interaction, and roles available to the people involved (Messerschmidt 1993, 2014). As such, every social situation men encounter are settings in which they must accomplish masculinity using the available, socially acceptable

performances in relation to others. Since masculinity is superordinate to other genders, men not only compete to be the most masculine, but to dominate and subordinate all others present. All social environments are arenas for masculine competition.

This competitive, dominant component of masculinity is felt by the men in the sample in different ways and to different degrees, but nearly all of them describe it when speaking about being a man. Seventeen of the 20 men in the sample describe physical size and posturing as important to being a man and 13 discuss dominance more generally. Harold, an 80-year-old from New Hampshire describes masculine situated accomplishment as,

the way that kind of male machismo, kinda, peer pressure kinda drives things. Inspires, you know. Can you climb that? Can you jump off that? Can you (laughs) you know, throw that? You know, stuff like that? It's just.. there's always.. there's always a, a if not overt, a, a kind of understood challenge.. um.. that men have to... I guess prove themselves.

Harold also says he has “bumped into a guy in a bar just because it’s crowded” and the guy immediately turns around asks him if he wants to fight. He believes a lot of men’s competition and violence comes down gender performances in the presence of something akin to peer pressure and alcohol. He says “especially if they’re out drinking, partying. Um.. they gotta- they gotta break something because they’re with their buddies and it’s- it’s just all for laughs.”

Charles (80-year-old from Connecticut) recalls something similar about competition and says the following about his childhood experience:

My mother would have been horrified for me fighting. But it, it was normal. You did it. I had a brother, we fought like hell. Two years difference. That's what we did. Who's stronger? Who's faster? Who's- who's more agile?

Both Charles and Harold laughed when talking about competition between men. Physical fights among young men are communicated humorously in their later years. For younger men, like

Elias (35), this competitive expectation was presented as less amusing. He says that as a man “you're always looking around and you're kind of measuring up” and comparing each other. Measuring their gender performance against others is how men determine their own position within the social hierarchy and the appropriate masculine performance for the situation. The success of their masculine performance positions them as dominant or subordinate in relation to others, determining their behavior going forward.

Like Messerschmidt's (1993, 2014) theory of gender as situated accomplishment, masculinity is presented by these men as competition men do for other men. Lollipop, a 31-year-old-woman from Connecticut echoes this idea, saying that she believes men are controlled by certain expectations that were set for them by each other. She says “It's just like.. they're like caught in a web of their own lies. They're like creating insane standards for themselves. Um, that nobody wants.” She sees men's expectations to perform masculinity through physical behaviors as being created by men and distributed through media, which is then perpetuated by men's individual performances for each other in a cyclical manner.

Mitch (32) similarly describes this physical competition as learned behavior. He says, “men are just socialized to be louder and bigger and badder,” to take up more space and compete with one another in a physical sense. Alternatively, Jake (25) argues that because men are physically larger than women on average, they “try to do more things and get away with more things” in a physical sense. Ultimately though, he argues masculine physicality and competition comes down to “growing up seeing media this way or hearing it this way but men tend to be more um.. more apt to.. it's a violent crime, it has to be men. If it's um any sort of burglaries or robberies, it tends to be men” and says men are not taught to restrain themselves.

To Jake and Mitch, men's physical behavior and violence is caused by societal factors and social norms. Men are typically portrayed in media as more violent than women, as aggressors, as soldiers, government agents, and criminals (Craig 1992). Men grow up exposed to and often idealizing these portrayals. Performing masculinity then becomes a replication of the ideals they have been exposed to. Jake further argues that men are not only taught aggression as an ideal but are also not taught to control their aggressive behavior when it occurs. While being physically larger, on average, may make men more capable of successfully engaging in physical behaviors, ultimately for Jake and Mitch, socialization makes violence both acceptable and desirable for men.

James (28) similarly argues that the media plays a role in allowing men to be more violent than women. In part due to his understanding of patterns of domestic violence as being relatively equal across men and women (Strauss et al. 2004), he goes on to say that

I don't think men are more inherently violent than women. I think it's- I think through.. through socialization, how we're raised and- and what we see around us in the media, we're [men] just given more permission that it's.. that it's an option.

Men's violence typically does not result in a lot of consequences from his perspective. He says, "I've seen a few men around me get violent...with almost little to no consequence." These violent behaviors have often resulted from what he calls "stupid disagreements" and "defending self-honor," to the point that simply embarrassing the men involved is enough to trigger a violent reaction. He says it is as if "they feel like they're *entitled* to.. respond with violence" [emphasis added]. James believes men learn these interactions through media images and messaging where violence is at the very least acceptable, if not desirable.

He says,

we see it in like, media and movies and tv like.. it's oh.. kay, it's okay to.. beat someone up if they're a bully or if, if it's to defend the honor of.. of your love or of a, of a female um...you know it's, it's and at the end of the day like, no, you shouldn't really go around and punch someone in the face like that's really not a solution for anything.

Media messaging is a factor in men's physicality, competition, and violence for many men in the sample who describe movies and television as normalizing men's violence.

Though James says that punching someone is not a solution for anything, violence does solve masculine problems by demonstrating one's masculinity. Physical violence and aggression by men is a display of masculinity men can always wield should they feel their masculinity is in question (Sumeru 2020). Further, the recipient of the punch would be repositioned as subordinate to the perpetrator, establishing not only the puncher's physical prowess but his social dominance.

Steven (28), who was a recipient of one such punch, says that "a lot of the culture that is directed at men is of other men engaging in violence" and goes on to describe the movies he was raised with, where heroism and violence goes hand in hand.

I can't even count the number of action movies, of tv shows that I watched growing up as a kid through now that were.. 'hey the Rock is punching some guy right now, that's super cool. The Rock is shooting at somebody. Uh Jason Statham is driving a car off a bridge into another car and they're both exploding.' Like, I think that plays a big part in it. It definitely primes us um.. when all your heroes are- are... engage in violence to get their way, like, it's not going to.. be conducive to...I'm not going to say it changed anyone's mind and said 'oh now that I've seen uh.. uh..' I don't know, uh.. uh.. 'now that I've seen Jackie Chan kick somebody through a window now I want to do that too' maybe there's some of that but I think it's more subconscious than that. I think it's.. it can- it can define you without you knowing.

Like others, Jeffery (63) does not blame media completely, but thinks a lot of male aggression is encouraged by media. He says,

the whole macho man things ... the whole Rambo thing and the whole you know, Mr. T, even though that was tongue in cheek, right? Um.. um.. yeah guys like Bronson and then.. uh.. you know, Steve McQueen. I don't know. But a lot of it was in movies I guess. But you know, tv too.

The media's messages are both overt and subtle according to these men. Essentially, men do not watch these films and immediately want to fight others, Jeffery says, but media can define for the individual situations where violence is acceptable without them being fully conscious of it. These men do not consider violence a "real" solution or an appropriate way to handle problems, but they do describe violence as normalized.

Brian (30) has been on the receiving end of such aggression. He was in a bar with his family when they were approached by an aggressive man. He and the other men in his party stood up, standing between the man and the women they were with, causing a loud argument and eventually threats of physical violence. Unsure what prompted the incident, he believes male violence results from a

culture of.. aggression and machismo and violence 'cause you're.. I guess in some.. some circles, some- some young men are expected to.. solve problems physically growing up and that's just kind of the culture of establishing a hierarchy in a group of people ... That expectation being- being- being.. exuding strength and confidence which often just leads to.. proving strength and confidence and there's that expectation of "oh it's.. if you lose or if you aren't willing to put your body where your mouth is then it's emasculating or you're less of a man if you aren't willing to be part of a physical confrontation

Physical strength and violence are ways men can establish dominance over others, particularly over those who also believe that physical strength is an important aspect of being a man. He says it is an easy way to gain status, at least it is easier to "try and intimidate a bunch of people than it would be to try and convince them, you know, that you're intelligent or that you have something valuable to say." It does not suit everyone's lifestyle to be that person nor does the tactic work on

everyone, he says, but physical size and aggression are intimidating. Even men who are not convinced the large, aggressive man walking into the room is “top dog” will still try to avoid him just in case he becomes violent.

Though physical competition is certainly prevalent in men’s lives through size and intimidation and violence is a possibility, competition among men is not typically physical fights according to the men in the sample. Even so, most of them have experienced violence at the hands of other men. William (54) recalls his childhood neighborhood as relatively violent and competition among boys was frequent. As he puts it “it wasn’t like *shootings*, but you better be able to protect yourself. And.. you know, you were constantly sort of tested in that capacity” [emphasis in original]. Even now when talking about men interacting with one another he says

some of that’s serious and some of it’s not, right? Cause guys’ll like, you know, they’ll-they’ll like chest thump with each other, you know? And they’ll escalate right up to a point (laughs) and then not, right? Um.. and even, you know, it’s also interesting you know, like.. you know that’s even happened to myself and a lot of people- a lot of guys I know, you get into a fight with another guy and then it’s over with. Right?

The escalation of tense or competitive situations is necessary to achieving masculinity. Men cannot back down from competition; doing so negates their masculine performance. If both men “escalate right up to a point,” the possibility of violence, and then both men back off, they have saved their masculine presentation through their willingness to engage in violence.

The possibility of physical fights is a common theme among the men. “Toughness and fighting” were big components of several their childhoods. Wrapping together a few masculine norms, over the course of his interview Elias describes feeling like he was less of a man because he would not engage in the fighting culture of his school, did not date as much as his friends, and did not step in when a young woman was being harassed. Both the physical ability and the

willingness to engage in physical competition or violence is an integral component of masculinity. Regardless of how individual men may feel about violence, men like Elias who consider themselves nonviolent understand that their physical ability and willingness to engage in violence could be tested at any point. When that time comes, if they fail to perform appropriately, they know their identity as men as well as their physical selves will be under attack.

As a professor of criminal justice, Mitch (32) has had first-hand experience with violent men especially when he goes on patrol with local police officers. He sees a big part of the problem as being cultural, arguing that society has “cut boys breaks” for physical, aggressive, and violent behavior. Because “we expect men to be more violent,” they are also more rewarded for violence and aggression than women are. This attitude towards gendered violence is further motivated by alcohol, which he describes as contributing to “an inability to control your impulses” and general lack of self-control. He describes alcohol as creating a “Jekyll and Hyde” situation where “they’re fine without it but the second they try it it’s like okay, I’m ready to fight everybody. I’m ready to harm you, and I’m ready to rumble.” Ultimately the chemical effects of alcohol and testosterone are fomented by societal expectations for male behavior. Of course, women also drink and are capable of physical violence, but Mitch says women handle problems through verbal mechanisms: name-calling, gossiping, targeting reputations. For men, problem solving is always physical: fighting it out. He says,

I think that distinction is clear. I think men- it’s just uh.. sort of socialized this propensity of violence. That.. I’m going to dominate you, right? That’s why bar figh- I mean how many.. how many female-on-female bar fights can you think of? ... we’d run out of ink if we print every bar fight.. between men, right? It’s just like this thing that happens, right? ... I think men are just socialized to be louder and bigger and badder.

Self-described as a bully as a child and teenager, Mitch experienced this socialization and got away with violence against others at a young age. He was bigger than other children, apparently “the size of a third grader in kindergarten” and used this size difference to satisfy his needs. His family lived paycheck to paycheck, and he often did not have enough to eat at school so he would take other children’s lunches, something he regrets as an adult. He learned young that being physically aggressive got him what he needed and wanted without consequence. Under General Strain Theory, Mitch used his physical means to cope with the strain of not meeting his needs for food. Over time, he learned less violent methods to cope with strains in his life, especially as his needs began getting met in other ways and he realized that violence would not serve him as well as an adult in a professional work setting. However, as a child, the threat of violence on his part kept his victims from retaliating, linking physical dominance to social dominance as physical size can intimidate others and confer social capital.

In most settings physical dominance is not socially appropriate, so the men typically discussed fighting as a willingness to fight, not actual violence. Competition for social dominance is more common than needing to establish physical dominance. In many situations, dominance is established without anyone having to do anything other than perform the social role they occupy, like the employer over the employee or the father over the son (Messerschmidt 2014). For example, Harold grabbing a drink in a bar is on equal footing with other men in the setting, until he bumps into one of them. At that point, the two of them are in competition. Whomever comes out on top of that situation is the most masculine. Men who boast and try to pick a fight are demonstrating their masculinity through their willingness to engage in physical violence in response to a physical affront. The social competition up until a fistfight might be enough to prove one’s masculinity and is much more common for men than physical violence.

Brian (30), a member of the U.S. military who works on a base, provides an example of one of the ways men are expected to hold socially dominant positions. According to him,

“soldiers always assume that I, you know, outrank my coworkers based on my gender and um, I've corrected a few folks before where I've been onsite with my boss, who is a woman, and they'll kind of - she'll ask a question and then they'll answer to me. And it's this kind of weird situation where I'm, I'm standing like "I just work here" you know? She asked the question you should answer to her ... it can be uncomfortable when I'm.. looked at differently um.. ... with the soldiers where a female coworker asks a question and they look to me, that immediately makes me uncomfortable. I'm like 'why?' And I know why they're looking at me, but they shouldn't be.”

He says, “I just work here” and tries to laugh it off. Because Brian is a man who presents as masculine, it is presumed that he is a figure of authority over femininity and women, especially in a hyper-masculine setting like the military (Schaefer et al. 2021). Even when his boss asks the question and is standing in front of them, the other men in that situation assume that Brian is the one they should answer to.

Brian’s anecdote about his workplace reveals the ways that masculine social dominance is not only about competition among men as described by Elias, but also how masculinity generally is hegemonic. As someone who performs masculinity, Brian is given deference over the femininity displayed by his superior. Men have been presidents, senators, congressmen, CEOs, and represented at all levels of power in society for many years before women. People in the U.S. expect to see men in positions of power and therefore keep putting them in positions of power. Competition emerges when two or more men are up for one position, or even competing for masculine achievement in a group setting (Messerschmidt 1993). The man with the most power in the room is the most masculine. When other methods of achieving masculinity fail them, when they cannot present as fathers, financial providers, or achieve heterosexual norms

with women, they may resort to violence, even the most extreme forms like active shootings, to claim a masculinity they could not achieve through less harmful means. For some in this sample, this occurs when men experience negative emotions or negative life events that, due to another masculine ideal, they do not know how to manage.

Emotional Control and Suppression

Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes perceived invulnerability and physical, mental, and emotional control (Messerschmidt 2014; Edwards and Jones 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Jakupcak et al. 2005; Adams and Coltrane 2004). Achieving this component of masculinity is extremely difficult and unhealthy as it encourages men to withhold emotions and express anger while discouraging help-seeking. Emotional control and the suppression of emotions came up repeatedly for the men in the sample. This was expected given prior research on masculinity, but it was spontaneously brought up by many of the participants. Twelve out of the 20 men in the sample explicitly describe emotional control and suppression as part of masculinity and all 10 of the women did as well.

When asked about societal expectations for men, Felix (33) mentions professional success and leadership, fatherhood, and then that “my partner would encourage me to say something here about how society expects us, expects men, to not be too emotional” and that she “often tells me that I should be more in touch with my emotions and that the reason I'm not is because of society’s expectations.” Felix claims to be “agnostic” on whether or not that truly applies to him but later admits that he does not like being emotional around other people and that he especially dislikes “like crying in front of other[s], I hate doing that.” Of course, Felix could simply be a private person and in many ways, he does seem to be. However, given the

prevalence of emotional suppression among the men and women in the sample and across masculinity literature (Cohn et al. 2010; O'Brien et al. 2005; Plant et al. 2000) there is reason to believe Felix's personal dislike for showing emotions, particularly sadness and tears, in front of others is a product of societal influences.

William (54) describes an event in his life where emotional suppression was very clearly the expected norm for him and others around him. Following the kidnapping by his father, William remembers "I went back home and there was never any discussion about it. You know it was tremendously traumatic and um.. yeah just no- no conversation – that's what it was like. You know it was.. no emotional outlet." While this was true for William and his sisters alike, William had additional influences that restricted emotional outlets. The men who remained in his life, his uncle and grandfather, were "very stoic, both of the- very.. you know, you just handle your problems, you do this, you know. And you take it on the chin. You do whatever you have to do." William gives a lot of credit to these men for raising him. They were tough, but good to him and no doubt instilled this "take it on the chin" mentality. This mentality and emotional control he sees as having manifested as what he sees as "primitive" behavior:

for the *longest* time, right? Uh there was never any talk about if- if you were a guy and you expressed emotion, it better be anger or (chuckles) uh.. you know, sexual desire or something primitive, right? Um.. But I.. you know men, men are.. also complex emotionally, right? We just show it, I think, in different ways compared to women. Or we don't show it sometimes. But that doesn't mean we don't feel it. [emphasis in original]

William himself ascribes to this emotional control norm but acknowledges the harm it causes. Having struggled through a difficult divorce, nearly losing contact with his children, he knows men are certainly not invulnerable and how difficult it can be to embody that controlled emotional ideal.

When asked what it is like being a man, Trevor (38) echoes William, saying “I think the main thing that comes to mind is men don't cry, or show emotion.” Regardless of the emotional strain put on them, men feel expected to carry on with their lives, to uphold their responsibilities, and move forward, shoving emotional pain and turmoil aside. Steven (28) argues that this norm is out of date and unrealistic:

idea that a man has to be.. sort of, upfront, has to keep his emotions in check. Has to carry on without complaint, that sort of thing. I think that that is also out of date. Um.. I think even at the time it probably wasn't true. It was probably more that a man was expected to keep his emotions in check in public.

Steven acknowledges here the impossibility of complete emotional control as he says “it probably wasn't true” that men carried on without complaint even when he believed those expectations to be stronger. As William pointed out, just because men are often not voicing their strain does not mean they are immune to feeling them.

Acknowledging that the emotional avenues available to men have largely been simplistic like anger instead of sadness, these men highlighted the ways the masculine ideal of emotional control becomes toxic and harmful. Anger disrupts cognitive processing and can lead to poor decision making and violence (Rebellion et al, 2012; Baumann and DeStano 2010; Kaufman 2009; Jennings et al. 2009; Agnew 2001). While being in control of one's emotions is not a negative thing itself, extreme control to the point of being unable or unwilling to experience more painful emotions such as sadness, grief, and shame, and only experiencing anger is harmful to the individual and those around them.

William, now a college professor, veteran, divorcee, and father is a product of all his experiences, some of which have been very painful, says about men

men are more complex than we've given them credit for in that they've shouldered a lot of burdens, right? Um, and they suffer a

lot and that we don't really- haven't really cared about their suffering, right? I mean it's men who are primarily homeless, it's men who die in our wars, mostly, right? Uh, not to slight women. It's.. you know, men who do the hard nasty things, right? It's *men* who, you know.. do, do the types of jobs that nobody.. wants to do, right? I mean the slug it out types of things. And, and you know, there's a price that- that they pay for that emotionally and physically, right?... life's not always easy just because you're a guy, in fact it's pretty fuckin hard sometimes. [emphasis in original]

The phrase *heavy is the head that wears the crown* comes to mind when considering William's words. Indeed, men have been in control of society for centuries and received the majority of benefits society has to offer because of this. Being a man may bring with it many privileges - more than other groups in society - even today. But privilege does not mean life is perfect or easy. There are various disadvantages individuals can face due to other, non-gender identities. Withholding emotions, save for anger, is, as men in this sample describe, painful and difficult. This severe emotional control is detrimental in the face of how Theodore (67) describes men. Somewhat humorously, he says "we [men] have fragile egos... There's a lot of guys - a lot of guys won't admit to that but guys - as a group we have fragile egos. They get uh, hurt easily. Get offended easily" and that an offended fragile ego can result in a quick temper and violence.

John Doe (20) perceives this ego and temper issue a little differently. According to him, and the "toxic masculinity" that he says he has internalized and is working through, emotional suppression often adds up to an explosion. Referring back to his father punching the wall, he says that it is not that men simply have fragile egos that break at the slightest provocation but,

things could just continue to pile up, pile up, pile up. And I've seen it in my dad. He's punched a hole in the wall before just because like, his gas pump didn't work but you know, it was all these other little things that he wouldn't address or talk about or try to work through so he would just progressively get angrier and angrier and angrier and be like "no it's fine I'll ignore it" and then that one,

that straw that broke the camel's back led him to punch a hole in the wall or something

Replace “things” with strains and John Doe could have been paraphrasing Agnew's (2001) argument under GST that strains often compound to produce deviant coping – like violence towards others or property like their own wall.

John Doe sees a lot of masculinity through the lens of his father who would tell him explicitly that “boys don't cry” when he was younger. Ever the joker, John Doe says he is a stubborn person so “when he said that I just cried” – an active rejection of the masculinity his father was attempting to instill in him. Surrounding the humor is a very real tale of expected emotional control and suppression in pursuit of the hegemonic male norm. John Doe says about men,

they believe that their masculinity even is questioned when they allowed themselves to be vulnerable and cry or like, I think I've only seen my dad like cry twice in my lifetime. And that's over the span of two decades. Like that's weird to me. That's kind of sad that he pents up his emotions so much

John Doe's ability to play with gender and take on femininity may contribute to the awareness he had of this issue. Steven, who previously described men as being expected to shoulder on through all things, believes that men are not as emotionally healthy as women because of a disproportionate use of medical treatment. He says,

I think statistically, men go to the doctor less than women do... just shouldering the burden sometimes can, can lead to physical health outcomes that are worse. Uh, as well as mental health outcomes that are worse.

Indeed, research supports this claim. Studies of men find they are less likely to seek medical care of any kind and suggests that among men there is a “widespread reluctance to seek help (or to be seen to be seeking help) as such behavior was seen as challenging to conventional notions of

masculinity” (O’Brien, Hunt and Hart 2005: 514). Jake (25) describes men as being the “last ones” to perceive therapy as a legitimate avenue for help. Hooker (59) takes a similar view, saying that “there was a time when ‘men don’t cry’” but now, “I think there’s.. less.. emphasis on ‘manly man’ um.. I think men.. showing emotion.. are not looked down upon as they used to be.” However, this may be a matter of degree or what kind of people individuals choose to surround themselves with. Jake, younger and very open to therapy himself, agrees that men are seeing therapy as less of a weakness than in the past, but immediately follows up with:

even still.. most of the people I know that go to therapy are women. And I feel like a lot of men I know could benefit from it - going through it myself and having been in it many, many years myself it’s.. it fixed my life at times. It literally fixed my life. And nowadays I wouldn’t be in the same place without it. And I just wish that other men could see that it’s not an issue. It’s just like going to a chiropractor but for your head. It’s the same thing. Like the same idea. It’s just fixin’ it.

The men in this sample outline, regardless of their personal stance on emotional vulnerability, penalties to masculinity that result from expressing emotions or being emotionally vulnerable, like asking for help or going to mental health treatment. Even those men who think therapy is valuable and important think that men are generally looked down on as less of a man for being vulnerable.

Women’s Perspectives on Men’s Emotions.

As outsiders to masculinity, the women in this sample see a complimentary but alternative picture of masculinity. Masculinity to them is not just their gender opposite but also an expectation and component of loved ones. Nine out of the ten women in the sample are heterosexual and all of them have close male family members. They have spent their lives witnessing men and masculinity from the outside. All ten of the women in the sample talk about

men's emotional control and repression as a key component of masculinity and the masculine gender role today. Sheri (27) says that "men are expected *of course* to like, not talk about their emotions, not really have emotions. They're supposed to *just be men* and get on with their life" [emphasis added]. Sheri talks about men shutting down their emotions as a given. Considering 22 out of the 30 participants talked about the way men handle their emotions in one manner or another, there is support for these claims. Like Sheri, Ava (24) says that she thinks men are expected to "to uphold like values of masculinity and to be invulnerable," as if masculinity and invulnerability are one and the same.

Lollipop (31) identifies this emotional control and suppression as inherently harmful, using the term "toxic masculinity." When asked what she means by toxic masculinity, Lollipop says that it is

the celebration of cutting off all emotional parts of yourself? I don't know if celebration is the right word. It's basically like um.. trying to.. um.. it's basically like equating strength with like having no emotions. Or like.. celebrating like- or like the emotion of like anger.. might be okay. But like anything else, is seen as weak and feminine.

Under hegemonic masculinity, being anything but masculine is unacceptable. To achieve an appropriate masculine performance, men cannot engage in any behavior that could be considered non-masculine. As femininity is the antithesis of masculinity, engaging in behavior that has been defined as feminine is unacceptable for those who have been ascribed the male gender role. Like John Doe, who likes to play with gender in his clothing, and Steven who wore a pink shirt. Both experienced violence for not engaging in masculinity correctly and other men tried to force them into compliance. By violating masculinity norms, they threatened what masculinity is: tough, unemotional, and, of course, blue. Violating masculinity norms threatens hegemonic masculinity which is prioritized across society.

Along with providing, protecting, engaging in appropriate heterosexual displays, and engaging in constant competition with other men, hegemonic masculinity tells men to rigidly control their emotions. The hegemonic norms of our society limit men's ability to ask for help if they are struggling emotionally to keep up with all these requirements. Andrea (48) provides an example from her own life:

when my husband and I first got together and we were dating, I had said to him 'what would you like to do?' and he said 'whatever you want to do.' And I said 'no' I said 'your wants and needs in this relationship are just as important as mine and I would like to know what it is you enjoy doing so we can do that stuff sometimes.' My husband started to cry. Because nobody had ever told him his wants or needs were important.

She says he had spent his entire life up until that point trying to provide for his ex-wife and children, such that she believes he truly did not know what he liked, wanted, or needed when asked. She says it took a long time and therapy for him to talk more openly about his feelings and emotions and even so, sometimes she needs to push him to talk to her. As such, she believes "men are still very much programmed not to.. verbalize their wants, their needs, their likes" and wants to see men become "equals on the emotional playing field." Her husband's intense reaction to being told that his needs were as important as her own needs is an example of what these participants describe when it comes to emotional suppression: that men clamp down on negative emotions until they build up and eventually burst out in one way or another.

Research finds men have more access to mental health treatment (Weissman et al. 2018) but use that access less than women do (SAMHSA 2015; O'Brien et al. 2005). Mikayla (24) believes accessing mental health treatment is based on how individual men feel about their masculinity. She says,

I think a lot of it comes from whether or not you feel comfortable in maybe your masculinity to ask for help which is not something

that our society considers.. to be a manly act. Um and I think just in general, like the expectation of men to figure it out on their own, to always have the answers, and to not need to ask for help, plays a pretty big role in whether or not somebody will actually seek out that help.

Not only do masculine expectations restrict men's emotional outlets and teach them to hold in stress and strain to their own detriment, but also makes seeking help to develop and manage that emotional control difficult, if not impossible. The masculine expectations to handle everything alone, to be independent, and invulnerable make men *more* vulnerable to strain and stress because they do not learn how to cope with them in healthy ways or ask for help. Under General Strain Theory (GST), men are doubly impacted by strain. First, as Agnew (2001) argues masculinity goals are of particular importance, men are required by society to achieve goals that put them at risk for deviancy in ways women are not. Second, those goals they are expected to achieve actively work to keep them from coping with the negative emotions failing to achieve these goals cause.

For the women in the sample, these gendered emotional norms are one way in which women are privileged in U.S. society compared to men. They discuss the same emotional expectations that many of the men did and vocalized the harm they see it causing. Women, who are more freely able to express their emotions as a component of their gender role, might be able to see this component of masculinity more clearly as it is the opposite of a norm they are expected to embody in their own lives. While just over half of the men (60%) discussed emotional control and masculinity, 100% of the women did.

The good news is that these women generally think this might be changing for men, at least a little. Kathy (55) believes it is a little more acceptable for men today to show their feelings than in the past, and Arlene (60), a therapist, agrees. She says that there has been "a lot

of work- male psychology work for men to be able to own themselves in a different way and be more relational. Um, and nurturing and broad regarding meeting their own needs,” but that there are still remnants of some of the more restrictive male roles.

Indeed, all the participants discuss ways in which the hegemonic norms defined in 1987 and 2005 remain relevant to men today. It does appear some changes are occurring. The men feel they can occupy a more diverse kind of masculinity and are under less pressure to be the sole breadwinner or emotionally in control. However, these may be a greater acceptance of a subordinate masculinity (Messerschmidt 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987) instead of a redefining of the hegemonic values.

Shifting Masculinity

To picture the hegemonic male, one only has to think back to the traditional father figure or action hero from the middle of the last century. The traditional, nuclear family ideal from the 1950s permeates society through social structures and institutions that reward marriage and having children like tax incentives to seemingly innocuous things like television sitcom families. Hooker (54) who grew up in the 60s and 70s, when he believes gender expectations were undergoing change, says that while historically there was an expectation for men to be the physically strong protector over women, today the “man isn’t the strong one and the woman the weak one” anymore. He believes there is more equality between those two genders today. When he first started working, women were never supervisors or managers at work, but he says he is happy to see many in those positions now. From Hooker’s perspective, “women are a lot more.. (sighs) levelheaded. And.. better able to handle crisis.. than a lot of men are” revealing one way that gendered norms have changed. In his youth, women would not have been considered able to

handle positions of authority as femininity is often framed as too emotional for responsibilities like managing companies or leading countries (Swan 2007), despite women's frequent engagement in emotion work to stabilize an emotionally heated situation more often than, and in service of, men (Kincaid, Sennott and Kelly 2022; Hoschchild 1979). Today Hooker has worked under multiple women and been happy with their leadership. Women taking on higher positions is a trend across the country, as women hold more positions in government and as CEOs than ever before, though they are still the minority (CAWP 2022; Buchholz 2022). If women continue to occupy more and more positions of power, the positive perception of women as capable leaders could continue to spread across society, reshaping gender expectations over time.

Some of the men describe the role of men today as one where men make space for women in traditionally male spaces. John Doe (20) says that although he believes women are expected to participate in the workforce and seek upper-level positions today, but that women are also expected to be "maybe not stronger than they're supposed to [be] but they're expected to.. really stand up to men in a lot of male-dominated fields." From John Doe's perspective, men are not making space for women. Instead, women are fighting men for space and carving out their own success. He says "it's expected of them [women] to.. continue to fight the male power within the workplace," so as women occupy more space in the workforce and male dominated fields, they have to fight men to maintain their position. Watching his father strain under the pressure to provide and have a successful business while also seeing women fight for their place, may be one of the reasons why John Doe believes the traditional breadwinner ideal is still relevant to men today. Under this ideal, men feel the need to achieve and maintain high-paying positions within the workforce and women are seen as less deserving of those positions, because their wages are considered supplemental, not necessary for a family's survival.

Unlike John Doe, Jake (25) thinks women in the workforce in greater number has made it so that people “can start doing what they want” because men are not considered the only ones who must work and support the family. Though he still describes providing for the family as an expectation he feels as a man, he says that the expectation that

the husband brings home the money and the mo-the mother stays home and takes care of the kids. That’s definitely not a thing anymore *as much*. Especially with uh, the current generation growing up that.. the early- well the late millennials and even some late GenZ- early GenZ started to grow up and start families and find themselves it’s finally starting to break that mold. That’s what I see on the women’s side at least. [emphasis added]

The women around him are working and providing for their families the same way the men are. However, he says that even among women he knows who believe expectations should be equal across men and women, “there still seems to be that expectation of men to step up at everything, always have a solution.” Pushes for equality in financial achievement and providing for the family do not seem to have alleviated the gendered expectation that men provide in some manner above and beyond women. For Jake it sounds as though men are still expected to lead the family, even if women have a larger role than in the past through their financial contributions.

For Mitch (32) gendered social change is current, not a movement from the past as Hooker described. He sees the age of the “American Buffoon male,” referencing Tim Allen in the 90s sitcom *Home Improvement*, having passed, but that “we’re working towards” a society in which men and women are more equal. William (54) also sees many changes and describes feminism as having opened doors for men and women alike, improving lives across genders. He describes how

you know, we-we’re not workin’ in coal mines, most of us, and we’re not workin’ on you know, mindless, you know machinery tasks. You have a lot of guys that pursued their -their own interests. Uh.. be it you know, poetry or music or art or

craftsmanship or, whatever it might be, right? And those options weren't available to guys... 30 years ago, 40 years ago, right? Like they are now. Um.. so in that way it's- it's a lot better. I've actually been able to be in my kids' lives right?... It wasn't just a c- an academic career that allowed that. It was the full range of options that had opened up for men. And some of that actually came out of like, feminist changes to institutions

Societal changes that are based around women or women's movements have bettered the lives for people across the gender spectrum. Feminism works to deconstruct patriarchal structures and the valuing of one gender over another, not to devalue men (Becker 1999); it seeks to decenter and deprioritize men from structures and positions of power, not to silence and remove men from society.

It is the decentering and the deprioritizing of men that even those men who call for equality seem to take issue with, like William, though he is not alone. While many changes to gender norms have been good, William is concerned about what he calls "efforts to feminize men." In doing so, William frames femininity as undesirable and reinforces the hegemonic belief that anything considered feminine is not appropriate for 'real' men. Despite the good that has occurred through these changes, e.g., fathers that are more involved with their children, safety in the workplace, and improvements in medicine, William remains concerned that men are being made "unmanly," that the traditional hegemonic masculinity is being eliminated. He exemplifies the way hegemonic norms control individuals. Even though he likes the changes he has seen for men resulting from feminism, he devalues femininity and reestablishes the hegemonic ideal of an unemotional, invulnerable 'manly' man, the antithesis of femininity: a man defined by honor, power, and stoicism. As such, he reinforces hegemonic norms even as he claims to reject them.

William is what Patricia Hill Collins (building off Memmi 1965) calls a "colonizer who resists" (1999). These are individuals who benefit from the system of power they live within but

either voice opposition to the unequal effects or sympathize with those who are oppressed, bridging the gap in some ways between the oppressors and the oppressed. By vocalizing the issues of the system from a place of privilege without supporting real change, they often reaffirm support for the current order and contribute to existing power structures by making the oppressors less reprehensible as a group. As such, they increase their own power and privilege even while claiming to work against it.

These individuals are confusing, as they often genuinely desire to see other groups better off. However, any new system that is constructed to be more equal will not benefit them more than the one unequal one they exist in, thus disincentivizing them from making real, structural changes (Collins 1999). For example, William genuinely appears to appreciate feminist changes to masculinity that have made it easier for him to have relationships with his children post-divorce and to pursue music or poetry if he wants to. At the same time, he believes men need to hold on to a more traditional version of masculinity that does not value those changes. By continuing to prioritize a definition of masculinity over anything feminine, William reinforces the hegemonic norms that made his divorce and custody situation so painful in the past, likely without recognizing he is doing so.

William's apparent difficulty navigating the changes masculinity seems to be undergoing highlights something echoed by other participants. As gender expectations, particularly for men, have appeared to shift in ambiguous ways, those changes have taken from them a purpose or certainty in their roles. No longer exclusively set up to be the financial and physical protector of women and the family, the men describe being somewhat unsure what they are expected to be. Freedom to pursue anything also means there is no longer a clear plan for what they are

supposed to be doing. William describes masculinity today as being “amorphous” and struggled to describe something specific that society expects from him and other men.

Like William, Arnie (30) appreciates changes to masculinity that he sees as having emerged in the last 10 or 20 years. He says

I appreciate that I can follow whatever brings me joy which is cooking and cleaning and.. child rearing even though we don't have children, things like that. That's- that's what I enjoy and I don't have to be constrained to be the.. dad who comes home and drinks a beer and then watches football

While feeling free to be himself and follow his passions at least in his home life, Arnie also describes being unsure what it means to be a man today. He describes a reckoning among men, because men

have been doing some trash stuff for a long, long time... the reality is there are bad men out there and they are continuing to do bad things and they're still on the news doing said bad things. And then.. like, I- part of me is like 'I'm not- I'm not one of those guys like I'm not doin' that bad thing' but also there are people with this identity that are doing *exactly* that and I can['t] control them and.. frankly I totally get it. I- I totally get it. [emphasis in original]

Being a man, to Arnie, is difficult to separate from negativity. He says that it can be difficult to talk about male experiences without discussing Trump who said,

famously 'grab 'em by the pussy' I mean like that, like that is so a.. that's like the worst statement anybody could possibly make and yet it's still so prominent and- and a lot of people are in support of him and then I think that that gives a lot of.. uh.. pause to anyone who might say that there's any clear answer about what men should or shouldn't do or how we should be acting because.. there's trash out there.

By “trash” here, Arnie is referring to men who operate in adherence to extreme versions of hegemonic masculine norms that result in things like overt misogyny and the subjugation of women, such as with his comments about former President Trump. Speaking similarly about the

heterosexual expectation for men and more toxic versions of men's sexual advances on women, Jeffery (63) notes,

I mean even in the 80s.. That's what I was saying. Even in the 80s they were being disingenuous if they thought that that was okay. Because I knew- I knew it was wrong. Maybe I was lucky cause I had a good mom and I had a good upbringing. Um.. but it was always not right. I mean, the Me Too thing, I mean, Me Too was just.. It's just people.. admitting that they were always wrong. They're not admitting that it's wrong now. It was always wrong.... It was never okay. And we're just comin' to realize it. Well, some of us.

While Jeffery describes what he considered a bygone world in which men behaved badly without consequence, Arnie, who is still in the workforce, grapples with the consequences of men's prior and current behavior.

Though Arnie understands and supports women speaking out, he describes the difficulties he faces in this own life due to changes across gender relations. Arnie feels he is unable to fulfill aspects of his job because he has been warned not to be in closed offices with female students who he might be advising or teaching. While he wants men to be held accountable when they do terrible things, he says that "'believe women' means the contrast to that is- is 'don't believe men.' And.. that feels very dangerous territory, uh for men. And that's not something that *I* ever received training on" [emphasis in original]. Although not being able to be in alone in an office with a female student may not appear overly limiting, during COVID-19 lockdowns it did make meeting with students difficult when other faculty members were not in the office. It may seem a small price to pay on men's part to keep women safer in general, but Arnie does not feel like his actions are protecting women. Instead, it feels like he is distrusted by those around him to behave and do his job appropriately.

Echoing Arnie and Jeffery's points, Morgan (35) also brings former President Trump into the discussion, explaining men's expectations in society through gendered and racial privilege.

I think society expects a *lot*.. from men and white men. Um and a lot of that touches on that masculinity.. uh piece where men and white men.. are-are seen as the father figures. Um are seen as - are-are defaulted to in positions of leadership. Um.. are- are granted.. exceptions in many ways when their behavior is really bad. Um.. like I just look at our previous two presidents and.. I-I think there's no starker- like.. white men are given so much and they're given so many passes for bad behavior. Barack Obama.. could have never become president of the United States and potentially almost seen a second term like, Trump almost got a second term. He was close. It was- it was- it was close. I mean it wasn't close in the popular vote but it was close in the electoral college and.. those last few states coming in. And Obama could have never.. become president or even flirted with a second term if he had done one tenth of one percent of what Donald Trump did. Because white people wouldn't have excused it from a Black man. White people are very willing to excuse *bad, awful, sexist, racist* um hateful, treasonous behavior.. from a white man. [emphasis in original]

For Morgan, though white men are subject to a lot of expectations that fit with contemporary hegemonic masculinity and describes emotional control as toxic, he also sees men - especially white men - as getting a lot of passes by society. His description of the differences between former presidents Obama and Trump has been echoed by media outlets, journalists, and academic research.

One, a Black man, was held to a presidentially high standard and still called illegitimate by some, including his successor Donald J. Trump, by calling into questioning his birthplace (Kelly-Romano and Carew 2017-18), using his middle name, Hussein, and Muslim father to falsely label him a terrorist (Joseph 2011). In contrast, President Trump, a white man, mocked a disabled reporter (BBC 2015), discredited a purple heart recipient (Olorunnipa 2019), was involved in numerous financial and sex scandals (Graham 2017), and received overwhelming support from whites around the country. Barack Obama received 43% of the white vote in 2008

and 39% in 2012, never breaking 50% of whites in the country, though still winning both the electoral and popular vote (Washington Post 2012). In 2016, Donald J. Trump won 57% of the white vote. His opponent, a white woman, only earned 37% of the white vote. Though Hillary Clinton won 54% of the women's vote in the country, she did not do well with *white* women, earning only 45% of their vote (Doherty, Kiley, and Johnson 2018). Whites banded together behind Trump's racially coded language and xenophobic attitudes, revealing the depth to which people in the country adhere to their own white identity and fear outsiders (Buyuker et al. 2020; Jardina 2019).

Clearly, though men as individuals feel more freedom to play with masculinity, society is still deeply entrenched in not only masculine figures as leaders under a patriarchal norm, but white masculinity as heralded above others. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity is white masculinity. As the dominant racial group, white men are superordinate to men of color just as men who perform hegemonic masculine norms are superordinate to those that do not. The middle class, breadwinner family ideal, the American Dream has always been far more attainable for whites than any other racial group. The ways their racial identity intertwines with masculinity is explored further in the following chapter focused on race and in Chapter V where white identities and the norms of masculinity discussed in this chapter are connected explicitly to active shootings.

Discussion

To understand white men's shootings, understanding how white men and women engage with hegemonic masculinity and the pressures men experience under masculinity as a component of their identity is incredibly important. This is particularly true through the ways the participants

describe masculine norms as intertwined with and encouraging displays of dominance, aggression, and violence. Although the men and women in this sample communicate traditional hegemonic norms from the outset, they also describe some fluidity they feel is possible within these expectations. The mid-1900s “traditional” masculine ideal often considered traditional still holds quite strongly: the breadwinner, heterosexual male with a career, house with white picket fence, wife, and 2.5 kids. Able to protect the family physically while also providing financially and leading the family socially, being the “man of the house” is a long-standing ideal tied to gender hierarchies and patriarchy. There is still immense pressure to achieve this traditional masculinity which is simultaneously restrictive and empowering. The strain that they feel from expectations of hegemonic masculinity is not offset by the fluidity of pursuing subordinate masculinities or engaging in feminine behaviors.

For much of U.S. history, men “by virtue, custom, and earning power, were the heads of their family” (Cherlin 2014: 30). Men were in complete control of their family’s finances and property, their wives, and their children. Women were typically relegated to duties within the home but contributed to the family finances by doing laundry, caring for boarders, and cooking for small sums. The breadwinner ideal, where the man is the sole earner, emerged as the working-class labor movement began demanding higher wages based on the argument that men working outside the home were the only wage-earners and therefore needed a “family wage” to support their dependents. Although unrealistic for much of the population even at the time, especially the working class, this ideal “exerted powerful influence on their conceptions of what family life should be like” (Cherlin 2014: 48). Despite the unrealistic nature of achieving this goal today, men in the sample highlight how institutions function to perpetuate the ideal and support men’s attempts. These men have seen themselves and other men prioritized in the

workplace through the duties put on them and deference given to them, like Brian's interactions with soldiers under his female supervisor. Current prioritization of fatherhood in the labor market is a continuation of the ideals developed during the family wage labor movement and echoes through society still today. Fatherhood wage premiums, where fathers earn more than their non-father counterparts, have increased at the same time the motherhood penalty decreased among high earners (Glauber 2018). As such, the pattern of overvaluing fathers and undervaluing mothers remains, perpetuating long-standing gender inequalities in paid work. This was highlighted recently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., between December 2019 and May 2020, lockdowns and office closures resulted in employment reductions across the country. Consistent with the fatherhood premium, fathers fared far better during these layoffs than other workers, being much less likely than mothers, non-mothers, and non-fathers to be laid off during a COVID-19 outbreak and post-outbreak periods (Dias, Chance, and Buchanan 2020). While these patterns could be a result of seniority and internal policies, seniority is affected by things like taking time away from the workforce to have children, which is already an aspect of the motherhood penalty (Gough and Noonan 2013). A prioritization of fathers is present during and prior to the COVID-19 period in the U.S. prior to (Glauber 2018; Gough and Noonan 2013), something that is not lost on the participants in this study, but no longer makes sense to many.

Though men receive benefits and rewards for their masculinity, both monetary and social, the same norms that benefit them can also be harmful, physically and emotionally, adding to the potential strains they take on. Not long after the shift from individual to family incomes, displays of heterosexuality through female sex partners and marriage became normalized as part of the hegemonic ideal. As the gay population became more visible at the turn of the century in the

United States, men turned to open displays of heterosexuality to prove they were “real” men (Kimmel 2011). Women became props for men to display their heterosexuality and masculine achievement (Quinn 2002; Schrock and Schwelbe 2009). For Elias’ friends and Theodore’s coworkers, dating multiple women showed others that they were “real” men and through these behaviors they achieved masculine performance.

This is especially evident through Elias’s explicit account that he felt his masculinity was in question because he did not engage in those same displays, occupying a subordinated masculinity in those social situations (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Meanwhile Theodore’s achievement of a mature heterosexual norm through marriage and family (Eck 2014) provided him with superior masculine achievement to those who dated around and “hunted” women at work. According to Lamont (2015) many older men express having behaved in what are considered traditionally masculine behaviors, like dating multiple women and frequent casual sex. As they age, they grow to prefer emotional attachment and commitment, and expect it of others their age. Alternatively, Eck (2014) argues that instead of growing to prefer emotional attachment and commitment, older men become beholden to new masculine expectations, described as a mature heterosexuality. Commitment becomes expected and marriage itself is proof of their masculinity. Regardless of which version of heterosexuality men feel compelled to achieve, a strong hegemonic ideal of heterosexuality displayed through their relationships with women remains prevalent.

Women are tools through which men achieve the norm of physical protection as well. Men place their physical bodies in harm’s way to demonstrate and achieve masculinity, by being bigger and more physically capable than other men. William also connected these ideals to men doing the “hard jobs,” manual labor like construction, mining, and military service. Historically,

women were reduced to support positions in the armed forces which researchers have attributed largely to benevolent sexism, where women are treated as less capable than men and in need of men's protection, and as such, only represent a fraction of war deaths (Bailey 2021; Glick and Fiske 2001). According to the National WWII Museum, during WWII, more than 200,000 women took on auxiliary military roles, six million worked in factories to support the troops from home, and three million worked with the Red Cross. Many women became nurses, caring for injured soldiers just off the front lines indicating a willingness and desire to protect their home and country alongside men. It was only in 2015 that the Pentagon ruled women were officially allowed to occupy combat positions in the U.S. military (Chappell 2015). At just over 17% of the armed forces, women now occupy more of the U.S. military than ever in history (Robinson and O'Hanlon 2020). The masculine protective role which places men in harm's way is a product of male power and decision making. Men have been and continue to place themselves and their gender in harm's way at disproportionate rates and are key actors in the perpetuation of this norm.

Regardless of personal investment in the hegemonic norms, all the men in the sample discuss one or more of the components of contemporary hegemonic masculinity as relevant today, a masculinity that heralds from decades ago (Smith et al. 2015; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 1993; Donaldson 1993; Trujillo 1991). Across the men, approximately similar emphasis is put on physical competition, protecting and providing for family, and emotional control when describing masculine expectations. In contrast, the women in the sample place greatest emphasis on norms of emotional control. Although some women bring up other components of masculinity, like providing for the family, emotional control is centralized as a masculine requirement that is problematic and challenging for men.

Emotional control is central to how the women in the sample understand men's violence. Like the men, they acknowledge the impossible norms of family provision, heterosexuality, and physical and social dominance that men are expected to achieve. However, they emphasize the way expectations of emotional control make it difficult if not impossible for men to cope with these pressures. For these women, the strain of being unable to meet these standards and the way each one positions men to perceive violence as acceptable explains why men participate in violent crime at disproportionately high levels compared to women.

While the other aspects of contemporary hegemonic masculinity are challenging to achieve, even for white men for whom they are the most accessible, expectations of emotional control leave men unable to seek help when they struggle with the demands of masculinity. Femininity creates space for women, by expecting them to express emotions (Gilmartin 2007; Gilmartin 2006; Erikson 2005), to seek help and support from one another, an idea echoed by the women in the sample. When the expectations women face under emphasized femininity, which requires women to comply with the patriarchy, become too difficult to manage, women are allowed to experience and express those frustrations (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Although a promising 13.4% of men sought out mental health treatment in 2019, far more women did (24.7%) (Terlizzi and Zablotzky 2020).

While women do report experiencing mental health issues more than men, there is a bigger gap between who experiences mental health issues and who seeks help among men than among women. In June 2022, 32.8% of women reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression compared to 24.5% of men but only 17.1% of men had received mental health care in the prior month compared to 28.8% of women (CDC 2022). Not only are men under equally impossible expectations but they do not access the means to expressing the frustrations and stress

that come from the demands of hegemonic masculinity in healthy ways. Men are therefore less able than women to engage in coping mechanisms under General Strain Theory (GST) that would not involve deviancy or violence when seeking to cope with the negative emotions caused by the strain in their lives. Though white men have sufficient access to mental health treatment (Yearby 2018), the white men in this sample, like Jake and John Doe, describe men as unwilling to get help due to the confines of masculinity.

As masculinity is perceived to be under fire from other segments of society, men struggle to find their place and determine what the new expectations for their behavior are. Theodore's descriptions of coworkers "hunting" women at work is a long way from approaching women in a social situation. However, Jake expressed serious concern about the way he and his friends are perceived when they do so, fearing being labeled a "creep" or worse, referencing the "Me Too" movement. Being called a "creep" may not seem especially damaging, though it is certainly insulting, but being labeled by women as harmful or undatable would be damaging to his sense of self and his masculinity. Being successful with women, even successfully speaking to a potential romantic partner, is important to the heterosexual male role (Kimmell 2011; Schrock and Schwelbe 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Quinn 2002; Connell 1987). Recent movements, like "Me Too," have made achieving masculinity through obtaining women difficult for men, in part because it seems as though men do not fully understand what is and is not appropriate behavior at this time. Jake speaks about approaching a woman in a social situation to talk to, which is very different from the Harvey Weinstiens of the world, using power to coerce sex from women.

Women's voices gaining strength and impacting high ranking figures like Weinstien apparently make it seem to these men as though men are losing control of the social and political

hierarchy, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, men still occupy most of the U.S. Congress, House, and Senate and high-ranking business positions, and as such, they still wield more power in our society than other groups. At the same time, women are gaining ground, representing 15% of women in the largest public corporations (Bushholz 2022), 24% of the U.S. Senate, 28% of the U.S. House, and 27.3% of Congress (CAWP 2022). These record high proportions of women in office are alternatively record lows for men, though nowhere close to their proportion in the population, 49.5% (U.S. Census 2020). Men still hold most positions of power in the country meaning they still make the majority of the decisions that affect all people in society, men and women alike. Still, it seems as though men are, or at least feel, more vulnerable to changes directed by women as they have lost some amount of power over the past few decades.

Despite the challenges of traditional masculinity, participants believe expectation changes towards more equal gender relations are taking place and are generally good. Many men describe the hegemonic masculinity norms as frustrating, unrealistic, and outdated, though they are not convinced the old expectations are gone or know what the new expectation is. They know that hegemonic masculinity is being critiqued by some segments of the population as women and people of color seek equal treatment. Though laws are written to be gender- and race-neutral, social institutions have normative ways of functioning that continue to prioritize them as men, especially as white men, over others. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity traits remain rewarded and prioritized above subordinated masculinities and femininity. According to many of the participants, in doing so, they also prioritize and reward violence.

The hegemonic expectations placed on men outlined in this chapter, some restrictive and harmful, are discussed by many of the participants as encouraging aggression and violence.

According to these men and women, expectations for physicality, dominance, and being emotionally restricted to feelings like anger combine such that violence and establishing dominance are valid coping methods for negative emotion and strain. Anger interrupts cognitive processing which makes them less likely to access healthy coping skills (Jakupcak et al. 2005; Agnew 2001). It is no wonder that General Strain Theory (GST) presents failures to achieve masculine goals as being particularly likely to result in deviant coping (Agnew 2001) when achieving hegemonic masculinity encourages aggression and violence, which often overlaps with codified crime.

Pressures on men to resolve problems through physical means and to be dominant, combined with anger creates situations ripe for violence. J.E. Sumeru's (2020) study of men's attitudes towards violence finds that

if men are taught that they must at least be ready and willing to engage in violence, we have already created manhood in a way that makes men's violence more likely no matter what an individual man intends. Likewise, if we have already trained men to see other men as necessarily and automatically violent, we again have created manhood in a way that makes men's violence- or at least their ability to accept, justify, excuse, and enact violence- more likely regardless of the intentions of any individual who identifies as a man. (p. 93)

Sumeru's (2020) concludes that violence is inherent to masculinity which makes people who identify as men more likely to engage in violence than non-men. As Messerschmidt (1993, 2014) argues, violence is a means of achieving masculinity when other means to do so are not available.

In other words, "violence is always a tool that men can use to demonstrate to themselves and others that they are, in fact, really and truly men" (Sumeru 2020: 51). Not all men are violent, but all men are under the same hegemonic masculine pressures as they are encouraged to

fulfill gender norms ascribed to them at birth. Learning healthier, more peaceful ways of coping is possible and clearly, many men must as not all men commit violence, but the underlying social norms of men's competition, violence, and aggression are acting on them and controlling their behavior, regardless of their personal adherence to these values, like non-violent Elias who felt ashamed for not participating in the culture of violence around him. The women and many of the men discuss the ways that expectations to be emotionally invulnerable make non-violent coping less available for men, furthering the likelihood that men engage in violence.

Traditional men's roles as breadwinners, patriarchal figures, who are physically capable and willing to protect their family while maintaining emotional control are clearly still alive and well today. Although becoming more complicated as gender roles shift, collide, and have seemingly begun to overlap in some respects with social and economic changes, traditional masculinity is alive and well and continues to impact men's ideas about themselves, other men, and the women in their lives. This model is framed by the participants as encouraging violence and aggression on the part of men. Many of these ideals produce negative outcomes or consequences, including violence, when taken to an extreme or valued above all else. Fourteen of the twenty men talk about ways in which masculinity has harmful consequences, and five of those fourteen specifically label those issues "toxic" masculinity, discussed in the following chapter.

IV. THE WHITE MALE UNDER FIRE: TOXIC MASCULINITY AND RACE

Expanding on hegemonic masculinity as presented by the men and women in Chapter III, this chapter also examines the way whites understand their racial position and the convergence of whiteness with masculinity. Doing so further explains the tensions men experience today that is both a product of masculine norms and societal conversations on race. Many participants, particularly the men, identify what they believe is a type of attack on white men by other segments of the society. Even the participants who do not believe white men are being oppressed or losing privileges identify a perception on the part of other white men of a negative shift in societal attitudes towards white men. This perceived shift lays the groundwork for understanding the participants' perspectives and explanations of white men active shooters in Chapter V.

Hegemonic & Toxic Masculinity

All the participants describe some aspects of masculinity as harmful or challenging to men and those around them, and some specifically use the term “toxic masculinity.” There is some debate about the benefit of using the term “toxic masculinity” in academic research. The term made its way into popular culture in the early 2000s, around the same time as hegemonic masculinity. Although hegemonic masculinity was introduced to academic audiences earlier (Connell 1987), masculinity studies and research on hegemonic masculinity exploded and became more mainstream throughout the 1990s (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). According to Google Trends, which tracks word searches from January 2004 to present, hegemonic masculinity was searched for far more than toxic masculinity before 2016, indicating greater use of the term among Google users worldwide. It was not until June of 2016 that toxic masculinity became a regular search term, arguably reflecting regular use in academia and popular culture alike.

Though used across academia (Elliot 2018; Veissière 2018; Kupers 2005; Sculos 2017; Parent, Gobble, and Rochlen 2019; O'Brien, Hunt, and Hart 2005; Harsin 2021), some scholars have raised concerns about the essentialism of toxic masculinity and its use in academic settings (Elliot 2018; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Toxic masculinity has been broadly defined as an expression of masculinity that is harmful to all people in society, men included, often expressed through extreme versions of hegemonic expectations of dominance as winning at all costs, heterosexuality as homophobia, and patriarchy as misogyny (Parent, Gobble, and Rochlen 2019; Veissière 2018). While useful to identify and separate aspects of masculinity that are harmful from ones that are beneficial, toxic masculinity also positions negative characteristics of masculinity as something men are victims of, instead of a social process by which men actively engage in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and the gender hierarchy (Waling 2019). Toxic masculinity can be used in this way to marginalize and label some men as particularly bad, positioning them as outliers responsible for the problems of patriarchy and leaving the everyday, routine actions of other men unnoticed. As Connell (1987) posits, all these men (and women and others) contribute to hegemonic masculinity and perpetuate the privileging of masculinity over femininity in society, not just the ones who are accused of wrongdoing (see also Harrington 2021; Messerschmidt 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In short, the term toxic masculinity distracts from the social processes men engage in that perpetuate patriarchal hegemonic norms and the devaluation of other genders, regardless of individual behavior or endorsement in the system.

Understanding that the term toxic masculinity is problematic and limiting to the discussion of masculinity as a hegemonic process, many of the participants used the term “toxic” or “toxic masculinity” when discussing expectations and perspectives of men in society. I believe

it is important to address what about masculinity they believe is worthy of labeling toxic or harmful. It is also important to note that while the men¹ point out aspects of masculinity that they believe are negative - ones they arguably do not believe they engage in or contribute to - they do so from within the same system and gendered perspective that they are identifying as harmful. Toxic masculinity cannot be separated from hegemonic masculinity as they are currently defined. The participants frame these traits and issues as the problems of other men, not themselves and “good” men, simultaneously resisting and perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, they exemplify the strength of hegemonic norms and the socialization of masculinity.

Problematic Masculinity.

The men and women in this study use toxic masculinity to describe a range of behaviors and attitudes that fall within a broad system of norms that follow from hegemonic masculinity and are harmful to the self and others, consistent with academic definitions (Scolus 2017). When asked about what he believed society’s expectations for men are, Steven (28) reported “I definitely saw people throughout high school and through parts of college um.. who engaged in what we might refer to now as ‘toxic masculinity.’” When asked what he meant by the term, he clarified that toxic masculinity, as a “generalized definition,” is:

harassment based on somebody else's definition of what a man should be. Of what they think should be masculine. Um...sort of.. I guess it would be something that takes the air out of whatever situation it's in. Whoever's engaging in toxic masculinity. Basically, they take all the space for themselves. Whether that's to harass somebody, whether that's to dominate the space and, and.. and to not allow anybody else uh.. sort of entrance to the space, if that makes sense.

¹ The women participants were less likely to separate certain masculine characteristics as toxic or bad, instead discussing masculinity generally as harmful to men.

Toxic masculinity is based on “somebody else’s definition” of what being a man is – a problematic definition of masculinity where acceptable types of masculinity are twisted into something poisonous. This does not create space to view the overarching norms and pressures of hegemonic masculinity as harmful.

Other men in the sample echo this idea - that toxic masculinity is when their unproblematic masculine ideals and expectations are twisted and taken to the extreme and the men who push them take all the social space available. When there becomes only one way to behave or one way to be based on a rigid adherence to hegemonic norms, individuals and certain behaviors are considered toxic. Emotional control is of particular importance to understanding toxic/harmful masculinity for these men and many of the women.

The perceived harm caused by expectations to be stoic and limit their emotions leads James (28) to describe severe emotional control as unhealthy for men. Speaking of men generally, he says that they are not “as emotionally healthy as they should or could be” and attributes much of this to the ways in which “men aren’t given permission in society to talk about their feelings to- to seek help.” Additionally, when men do seek help, they are “seen as, as weak or demeaned or laughed at.” James clarifies

I'm not saying that like, ‘woe is me, I have the worse end of the stick’ but um.. I think many women in society it's- it's long been acceptable for- for them to like, ‘oh I'm seeing a therapist I'm going to a counselor’ um...but men don't do that as much. Um.. and they aren't.. they aren't encouraged to do that as much. You know, like, ‘wow it seems like you're- you're really not dealing with this well, you should maybe talk to someone about that’ instead it's, you know...they're- some are driven to violence.

James echoes prior arguments laid out by the men and women in this sample about the ways men’s expectations incentivize and encourage violence. Holding negative emotions inside could

encourage men to lash out physically in line with other masculine expectations when under high levels of stress and strain.

Morgan (39) also believes emotional suppression and the associated stoicism is harmful to men, physically and emotionally. He says it is “pretty toxic... it’s an expectation of me as a man um.. to- to maybe calm folks down in a situation that is getting intense or passionate.”

Morgan comes to this perspective as one of a few male teachers in a school, and thus positioned by others as the one who can remain calm when children are potentially in harm’s way and will break up fights, embodying emotional stoicism and the masculine protector norms. To behave as a man “should” and achieve masculinity and the associated rewards, Morgan must push down emotions that he may want or need to express and put himself at risk of harm. Even non-violent men are encouraged to put themselves in violent situations to achieve masculinity.

The connection between strong hegemonic adherence or toxic masculine traits and violence is not new (Smith et al. 2015; Pepin 2016; Gallagher and Parrott 2011; Quinn 2002; Amato 2012). Emphasizing the limitations of the term “toxic masculinity,” research suggests that contemporary hegemonic masculinity incentivizes violence even when not considered “toxic” (Sumeru 2020; Dagirmanjian, et al. 2017; Messerschmidt 2014; Messerschmidt 1993). When asked why he thinks men commit more violence than women, Brian (30) responds “I don’t know. Maybe men are just.. worse at processing emotions and dealing with trauma than women.” Based on prior discussions of masculine expectations in Chapter III, participants do not believe men are “just” worse at processing emotions, but that they are not taught or provided with the tools to process those emotions under hegemonic masculinity. Trevor (38) believes that,

[men] don't go out and seek mental health help for their problems so they're just trying to deal with it themselves which usually leads to self-medicating which is drugs or alcohol. Which could lead to that [violence]. So, I would say that's probably the reason why

because they don't seek out mental health treatment or seek out health in general. They try to take care of it themselves.

Unhealthy coping mechanisms like drug and alcohol abuse may further lead men to violence or aggressive behaviors in response to stress but the inability or unwillingness under hegemonic norms to seek healthy ways of coping with these emotions that is described as initiating this chain of events. John Doe (20) echoes this idea, arguing that masculine ideals like emotional control are not only difficult to achieve but such ideals teach men aggression. As such, men's anger and violence are normalized as they try to fit into the ideals of the hegemonic man.

Although all members of society are influenced by and are deferential to hegemonic masculinity, white men are the only ones capable of achieving or nearly achieving the hegemonic norm. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity is white masculinity. As whiteness is valued over all other racial groups (Nayak 2007; Duster 2001; Keating 1997), the ideal man is a white man. White men are also situated best to achieve the hegemonic norms as they have the most access to the means to do so: wealth, education, and institutionally provided power. As such, white men are also uniquely situated to embrace and utilize what they describe as toxic masculinity, as part and parcel of hegemonic masculinity.

For Rick (33), masculinity and whiteness today are tied together through former President Trump who was running for reelection when we spoke. President Trump has been found to use racially coded language, tap into white racial fears to mobilize white political power, and his actions have been called toxic in public discourse and academia (Harsin 2021; Jardina 2019; Lamont et al. 2017; Sanchez 2018; Konrad 2018). Rick laments,

It just seems like there's this like, wounded masculinity need to put on a real tough guy ... I can't separate it from the rise of Donald Trump and the way that he sort of governs, and the way that people wanted that sort of leadership as like, the tough guy persona.... To

be like, the, like I guess like the Marlboro man cowboy again, that like, doesn't care or openly brags about... assaulting women

While he personally, like many participants, does not feel he was raised with this version of masculinity and does not seek to embody it as an adult, he believes that other white men perceive masculinity this way.

For Felix (33), who would like a group attachment to other white men, a way to meet and share life experience with those who share his social identity, this perception of whiteness combined with toxic masculinity makes finding such a group impossible. He explains that “to the extent that like white male affinity groups exist in our society, I think they tend to be very toxic and very harmful.” As someone who does not believe that white men are oppressed in the United States, he believes groups that fight against perceived white male oppression have “gone pretty far off the tracks.” At least, the white male affinity groups he says he has heard of,

always seems to be sort of associated with kind of toxic masculinity and racism and I think it's because the people who join that group have a misperception that they are the oppressed class.

Felix is describing what researchers have identified as an emerging segment of white men who believe that they are oppressed (DeKeseredy et al. 2019; Kimmel 2018; Kimmel 2014) as society changes socially, economically, and structurally around them in ways that does not defer to their identity as white men.

As though these men are having a conversation, James (28) describes how he believes white supremacy and men's issues are intimately linked. He says,

I think white supremacy and.. toxic masculinity go hand in hand.
But we have.. we have men that can't quite cope with the idea.
They won't recognize their white male privilege.. and they certainly don't believe it exists.

For the men and women in this sample, “toxic” masculinity and white identities are intertwined so closely that many of them struggle to separate them, even though they bring up the terms. This is unsurprising, as the hegemonic man is undoubtedly also a white man, hegemonic in race and gender.

The toxic masculinity the participants talk about is at most an over-exaggeration of the hegemonic masculinity they described in the previous chapter, characterized by physical strength, social dominance, patriarchal family structures, heterosexuality, and fatherhood entrenched in the nuclear family. It is a privileged role, but not a role devoid of stress and strain. These norms ask men to be perfectly in control of their bodies and emotions, who do not cry or fail, and whose anger is righteous and justified. This conceptual, idealized man is arguably not healthy. He is emotionally stunted, frequently at risk of physical harm, less willing or unable to seek mental health treatment, and an authoritarian in the home where his wife and children are wholly dependent on him for financial support and survival. It is men, like Harold and Charles describe, who get in physical fights and competitions with friends as children, men like William describe who defend the nation and the family, and men like John Doe’s father, who pushes himself constantly to provide for others, neglecting himself.

The participants outline these expectations as alive and well. The requirements and responsibilities they describe create strain and stress in their lives and the lives of other men, at times becoming too much to handle. Though the participants as individuals mentioned feeling some freedom to achieve masculinity in healthy ways, society is still deeply entrenched in masculine figures as dominant under the hegemonic patriarchal norm. White masculinity in particular is heralded above others. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity is white masculinity.

The middle class, breadwinner family ideal, the American Dream has always been far more attainable for white men than any other racial group.

Being White and Recognizing Race

Hegemonic masculinity (and thus toxic masculinity) is inherently white masculinity in the United States. As whiteness is prioritized over other skin colors and masculinity over other genders, white men are the top of social hierarchies. This is one of the reasons it is surprising that white men also are the most common active shooter. Despite the role the violence, or threat of, plays in masculinity, receiving the bulk of social advantage means that white men should rarely need to enact violence to assert their status. One explanation may be in the privileges they experience. White men have historically sought to reenforce white men's hegemony, excluding and subordinating men of color through physical violence and racist stereotypes (Messerschmidt 2014; Nevels 2007). As such, the maintenance of white men's hegemony may be one way to interpret active shootings on the part of white men, and prior research has theorized that white men commit these shootings in part due to their privileged status (Kimmel 2014; Lankford 2016a). In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine how white men and women think about their racial identity, their place in society, and what they believe society thinks of and expects from white men. Along the way these individuals grapple with white privilege and their own white habitus, particularly within the context of what some believe is an attack on white men.

Recognizing Their White Identity.

Being a man brings its own set of challenges and benefits as outlined in the previous chapter. Being a white man brings additional benefits and some additional challenges people of color do not experience, though their lives are challenging in other ways. U.S. society was

constructed to prioritize and accommodate white men which frequently confers a lack of doubt and criticism. Consider again President Trump and his numerous scandals. Despite clear wrongdoing and missteps other presidents could not have gotten away with, he achieved the highest office in the country, arguably the world. As a white man, and a rich one, President Trump has lived his whole life in a world built for him and people who look like him.

When asked about their identity as white men, the men in this sample echo this idea, often referring to benefits of whiteness as a form of automatic respect or generalized acceptance. Elias (33) noticed that when he approaches strangers in public, such as to ask for directions, he feels “like they reciprocate the politeness that I show and there’s kind of- it’s almost like the starting point, like my default with that is a default of respect” which he is not confident is extended to men of color. Having experienced something of the reverse to this, Elias became aware of how he is treated as a white man, not just a man.

When he was younger, Elias spent time in Africa and though he mostly worked in a diverse city with a large white population and did not think too much about his race day-to-day, he distinctly remembers a trip he took with a friend to her majority Black town. She sent him alone to the store for dinner ingredients and Elias became very aware of his whiteness, the ease in which he typically navigates the world as a white person back in the United States, and developed a greater understanding of how people of color are treated. He recalls,

I don't know if anyone in that store had ever seen a white person come in that store because white people there don't go to the townships. They just don't feel safe going there and there's a lot of weird racism mixed into that. So I think I was a little bit strange walking in there anyways. But just walking down the aisle and trying to pick out what I wanted, I remember looking through, sorta like, these like wire shelving units where you- there's like little gaps in between them. And I can remember looking through the gaps and seeing these two young children staring at me. And those kids watched me.. the whole- everywhere I went in the store,

they were not in the same aisle as me, but they were always hiding behind something staring at me - they were probably eight years old, both of them. I think it was a brother and sister. Um.. and I had this moment where I had heard these stories growing up about what it, what it is like to be Black in America and to be, you know, for instance, going into a store and always being kind of watched. That was the first time in my life I had ever been watched (laughs). Like, and it was.. the woman who was up running the cash register, it was the customers, it was these kids. It was like, six people total in the store, but I remember feeling really vulnerable.

In the United States, Elias does not have to think about his race. He is treated as the standard and says he does not think twice about approaching someone in public or occupying any space he wants. Though he lives in a very white area and his feelings of comfort may be different if he lived somewhere with greater diversity, his daily life is not negatively affected by being white.

This is a common theme among the men in the sample. Even those that describe benefitting from privilege as white men and the way their race has affected their lives acknowledge that they rarely think about being white. Instead, they consider their identity as a white person only when confronted by racial difference; when in a room with people of color, in a majority minority neighborhood, or when world events or politics force them to, like the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and riots in Summer 2020 following the death of George Floyd.

Sixteen out of the twenty men said they do not think about their race without being confronted by it. The following are a few of their responses to the question *under what circumstances, if ever, do you tend to think about your race?*

It just - I just don't think about my race. I think about race but not my race.
(Charles, 80)

I just don't think.. about bein' white. I don't, really don't think about it. (Theodore, 69)

when I'm filling out forms and they ask me what ethnicity I am (Trever, 38)

About my own race? I really don't. (Hooker, 59)

in general, I don't really think of my- my race. (Frederick, 25)

Among the women, four in the sample expressed the same which generally fell along an age line, where the older women in the sample were more likely to say they do not think about race.

Andrea (48) says “Honestly, I don’t really ever think about my race. Um..(clears throat) and I don’t really think about other people’s races, to be honest with you” and Martha (66) says “it’s not something I think about one way or another ... I don’t think about being white or not white.”

While Kathy (55) expresses the same, saying that she “never really thought of it in terms of my identity,” though later she identifies when being white has benefitted her in some ways throughout her life.

Catherine (60) says the following “I don’t know that I have whatever would be considered a white identity. I- I don’t know that I’ve thought about myself in that way. I don’t know that white people *do*” [emphasis in original]. Even as someone with a last name that creates some confusion about her racial identity, Catherine does not typically think about being white. Instead, like many others, she thinks about whiteness when confronted with a racial “other.” This is echoed by the men:

I think like, most- uh- this sounds bad but I think like most white people I don’t think about my race when I’m the minority in the room.... I’m only aware of my whiteness when I’m among- when I’m in the minority, right? (Mitch, 32)

the answer that kind of free associatively leaps to mind is whenever I'm in- whenever I am in a room where I'm a racial minority. I'm always very conscious of it, um... and less so when I'm in a room with more white people than not white people. (Felix, 33)

it never occurred to me to talk about my race as part of my identity. Cause that's not something that feels important to me...I find myself thinking ... consciously thinking about my race when I'm around somebody.. who doesn't look like me. (Elias, 35)

the only time I think about my r- the times I think about my race is when it's thrown at me, right? And when I'm like, put on the defensive about it. Or when I'm actually working with other, you know, groups.. uh mainly African Americans (William, 54)

For many of these individuals, thinking about being white is deeply connecting to thinking about being not white. For them, and they theorize for most whites, their whiteness exists in comparison to the "other." Similarly, their white privilege exists, by definition, because others are not privileged. To understand the struggles of minority groups, whites must, at least on some level, think about their own position as white people in a system that prioritizes white identities and light skin. How they consider their own race compared to others looks similar across the participants:

You do kinda compare their kinda life stories with your own. Um... and you realize um basically how being a typical white male in America that- that you haven't had to deal with things that other people have dealt with (Harold, 80)

I don't think about myself in terms of race unless I'm comparing my- my experiences to others, I guess. (Frederick, 26)

I mean, well, it's not all the time, it's not constantly thinking 'I'm white so I must do x, y, and z.' But when it comes up in the news. When, when the police shoot someone, black or white, cause- cause they do tend to shoot a lot of people. They, they shoot a lot more people of, uh, black people and uh, uh Hispanic people, than they, proportionately, than they shoot white people but they shoot a lot of people generally. (Steven, 28)

A lot of the time I think when I actually uh have like a moment when I consciously think about my race is actually in my privilege. Um, for the most part. I know that uh, as of recently with like George Floyd hap- or with the George Floyd scenario that had happed, Breonna Taylor, um, most recently the uh, atrocity in Georgia with the um, women in the salons. (John Doe, 20)

Frequently. More frequently than I'd like. Um.. and probably less frequently than I should. ... I thought about it a lot of course over the past few years with George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and- and all the other Black individuals who have died at the hand of police. (Arnie, 30)

Um.. typically.. when um.. I gotta think about the exact- there's a couple exact situations. With the whole new- with the BLM movement and everything um.. it almost- it feels very um.. it feels very privileged and not in a good way. (Jake, 25)

I think about it [race] every day because, so I'm a home inspector. So when people buy a house, they pay me to go and look over the house ... And every day I think, uh, I couldn't do this job if I was.. Black or maybe a different race just because there's such a societal, uh.. not maybe fear? Distrust of uh... Black people ... I feel like cops would get called on me a lot. (Rick, 33)

Nearly all the respondents compared themselves to people of color in one way or another when discussing being white. Theodore originally says he does not think about race, but he later talks about the different ethnic groups he has worked alongside, saying that these workers made him realize “that white culture is different from Black culture. It's different from the Asian culture. It's different from the Polynesian culture.” Outside of his workplace, Theodore says he “really didn't think too much about it because I tried to treat people the same way all the time,” but that, “I mean, of course I guess if I was Black it'd be a different situation.” In doing so, he acknowledges that being white has affected his life, at least in terms of how he perceives the world.

The way participants discuss race highlights how whiteness is understood in contrast to non-whiteness. Theodore's claim that being Black would change how he thinks about race reveals how individuals who espouse racial blindness simultaneously understand racial difference. Similarly, they also may be more aware of own ability to draw upon racial hegemonic norms that privilege whites (Sumeru 2020) than they claim. Like the ability to draw on masculinity, regardless of an individual's personal endorsement of the system, those who fit the hegemonic racial norm can always use the privileges associated with it to their benefit.

White Privilege.

Being white and being a man collide when it comes to societal expectations. The expectations laid out in Chapter III can be generally understood as white male expectations. As previously discussed, these expectations are challenging, if not impossible, to achieve. However, even though this feels true to many of the men in this sample and is accompanied by stress and strain when they fail to achieve these goals, they also discuss privileges they feel are associated with their position as white men.

One of those privileges is the privilege to not consider race. James (28) says that his whiteness “afforded [me] the ability not to have to think about my race much” growing up and he can choose even now to not think about race. When Elias (35) said that he does not think about his race very often, he said “I can think about it when I want the intellectual exercise to think about it. Like, that almost feels like a privilege ‘cause I’m not forced to.” Like Elias, one of the women, Arlene (60) says she has been thinking about race and privilege more in recent years. She is involved in a book club that exclusively reads about and meets to discuss racial issues, working to confront their racial biases and understand their white privilege. Though on one hand, she says she feels somewhat embarrassed that she did not do this work as a younger woman, Arlene feels society is requiring it of her and other white people today.

Feeling as though society is requiring or forcing people to think about racial issues was expressed by many of the men and women as they reference Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, George Floyd’s death, and the Kyle Rittenhouse shooting, all of which took place just prior to or during the interview collection period. Jeffery (63) says he used to be someone who never thought about race or social issues but over the last few decades, he began educating himself more about race and privilege. He says about being white,

It’s fertile ground. I mean, we were- we’re planted in the right garden for getting ahead....It’s time to be honest to yourself that..

you didn't get ahead because [of] your good looks or because you were smarter or because.. uh, you know.. it's because you were white. I mean, you have to be real, you have to be honest with yourself. You were white in America and America.. was built on white supremacy. And I don't know how else to put it.

Jeffery wants to see white men acknowledge their privilege and “should understand that they are lucky,” to be aware “that they're privileged,” and to “have some less entitlement.” Jeffery was not born with financial advantage but was still able to go to college and improve his situation. He attributes his success to being white as much as to his own hard work; being white served him and gave him access to opportunities people who are not white do not have access to like good schools and a foot in the door when it came to good employment. In his perspective, his hard work was recognized due to his racial advantage.

Brian (30) brings up a similar idea while describing how he manages feelings about his privilege. He says,

Thinking back on my life it's.. it's pretty apparent that I, you know, growing up as a straight white male, I joke about that all the time. About the lack of hardship that that entails which I think is just kind of.. a way for me to deal with that almost feeling guilty about it... I don't want to sell short anybody's whose busting their ass out there, but I mean, yeah, I think between race and gender, I mean look at the wage gap. Some folks have to work so much harder and so much longer to get to where other people are just based on.. the color of their skin.

Like others, Brian does not want to disregard the work that all individuals do, including white men. People around the country work incredibly hard and that work should be acknowledged. But for men like Brian, and others in this sample, society also needs to recognize and reckon with the idea that the results of hard work are not the same across race and gender (McNamee and Miller 2009). The American ideal of meritocracy, where hard work is rewarded, is not being met.

For people like Mitch (32) and Andrea (48), who were born into poverty and experienced additional disadvantages in their youth such as physical abuse and food insecurity, it can feel odd for them to think of themselves as privileged. Today as successful adults, the two are opposites when it comes to their perception of white privilege. In direct contrast to one another, Mitch talks about privileges he sees in his life while Andrea does not believe being white contributed to her success.

When asked how important being white is to her, Andrea says, “It’s not important to me. I don’t feel like it has opened any doors at all to me.” Abused by her mother, removed from the home, and split from her siblings to live the rest of her teen years in foster care, Andrea did not have a lot of doors open to her. She says:

I had people in high school that their parents didn’t want them to hang out with me because I was a foster child. And I’ve never been to juvie, I’ve never been violent, I’ve never done anything to anybody. I was in foster care because I was physically abused and neglected. But there’s a stigma associated with that. Whether it’s your fault or not. So.. So I don’t.. I don’t see that as a color thing. Because that color thing that people associate all those things with, as a white person.. I still had all that stuff associated with me. So.. um.. I feel for them as people the-the people that are in those situations where they’re poor and they feel forgotten and their school programs are not as good as if they were in a more affluent area. Cause I- I was there and I kinda felt the same things.

She says the discrimination she felt as a foster kid means that she “kinda felt the same things” as people of color, indicating that she believes stigmas from poverty and criminal offending are often racialized (Dixon 2015; Cammett 2014; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997). Growing up in a primarily white area, Andrea may have been the most stigmatized person in her immediate surroundings, putting many challenges in her way that she needed to overcome to succeed.

Understanding that disadvantage can affect anyone, like Andrea, Steven (28) uses a foot-race metaphor to describe how privilege advantages whites:

I'm not saying there aren't white men who are out there who are in dire straits and don't need help - there definitely are. But in terms of- I guess the best way to put it is the starting line? For- for white men is further forward. There are things that they don't have to deal with that men of color, specifically Black men, do have to deal with.

Jeffery and Steven describe white privilege as being set up for success from birth though disadvantage can affect anyone of any race as they age. For people like Andrea, who have had difficult lives, being called privileged does not make sense to them.

Jake (25) understands racial privilege in terms of his own physical safety. He describes an “unearned immunity” he feels he has as a white man. Referencing Black Lives Matter protests over the killing of Black men and women by law enforcement, Jake describes feeling almost guilty even though,

it's nothing to do with me as a person or my friend as a person like they have literally nothing to do with this. But.. you still have that feeling of like.. unqualified- like qualified immunity that you didn't.. that you don't.. that you're just given. There's no reason for it. And it's.. even worse cause you can't- as an individual it's very difficult to do anything about it. It's kind of sitting here and realizing that it'll be fine. Nothing's gonna happen. Just because of the color of your skin or your race.... just because you're a white male, you're fine, you're never gonna have an issue. No one's ever gonna come up to you in the street, no one's gonna come after you just because.. you feel safe I guess.

He says this realization that he has inherent privilege to safety due to his skin color is uncomfortable and,

completely unfair, it makes no sense whatsoever when you actually logically think about it. I kind of - I don't dislike white males, it's just- just the idea of it, I- I highly dislike because it's completely unfair.... never have to worry about anything stupid happening just because I'm not a white male. And sometimes it almost feels like I could get away with some things because I am a white male.

Being uncomfortable with this unearned, and at times undesired, privilege and thus their identity as white men is not something these men are accustomed to. The men in the sample express discomfort over ideas of privilege. White men have historically appeared quite comfortable with the way the world operates, as it was set up by and for them. To elaborate on his privilege, Jake describes a specific situation where he believes his whiteness is the reason he was not fined by the police:

like- every- the entire world jaywalks. Nobody cares. So I've walked across the street, literally in *front* of an officer. Nothing. Um.. I don't know what race he was.. I think he was Arabic of some kind. Um he walked across the street, the exact same time I did, and he was stopped. And given a ticket for jaywalking. And I don't know if it's because of that but.. I was not stopped. Why wasn't I stopped? That kind of thing. [emphasis in original]

Not many people have, or are aware of, such clear examples of racial privilege in their own lives, where engaging in identical behaviors results in very different outcomes. However, Morgan had a similar, if not even more explicit experience. At the Department of Motor Vehicles, Morgan (39) witnessed a white worker turn away a Black woman for not having her car insurance card. He says the conversation between the two women became heated and the Black woman before him left without getting what she needed. He was next in line for the same worker.

I'm like 'oh shit I don't have *my* insurance card' um and okay I'm like I've been waiting here for an hour, I'm not gonna go home and I was called next and I went up and um.. 'so I heard your conversation with that woman, I don't have my insurance card so what do I gotta do?' and she said 'Oh! Well.. do you have your insura- do you have your um, insurance policy on your phone, on your app?' I'm like 'yeah? did she?' and the white woman sa- 'oh I didn't ask her' like- so.. why not? you just asked me so you- it's good enough for me to show you my insurance card on my app but you didn't think to ask her? And she said 'oh she was arguing with me' she's arguing with you because - and I- I said this, I kinda confirmed I said 'maybe she was arguing with you because you weren't working with her to come up with a solution because we've all had to wait here for an hour through no fault of your own

but we don't know what she's going through. Maybe she had to take a day off work or maybe she had to find childcare. So now she wasn't able to renew and maybe she had the app on her phone.' and like, that's an instance where, and I-I didn't say that to the woman but I'm like disparate treatment. Did she accommodate me because I'm a white man? Did she.. give her some hell because she was a Black woman? I don't know. Um.. but I was just like, so flustered [emphasis in original].

Morgan says that looking back, he probably should have brought up the disparate racial treatment he received. Instead, flustered and stressed, Morgan accepted the treatment because it made his day easier. Though he thinks about this incident today and feels somewhat guilty, he did not want to have to go back to the DMV another day and wait around for another hour or longer.

Should Morgan have not overheard the conversation between these two women before him, he would not have realized there was differential treatment taking place or assigned that treatment to race difference. Through historical housing practices and white segregation from people of color, whites do not interact with people of color very often (Denton and Massey 1993) and are often uncomfortable when they do (Avery et al. 2009). This can make identifying potential privilege difficult, as Felix (33) explains the diffuse privileges he feels:

I think that [being white] like, shaped my life in various ways as I was saying about my gender, I think that it's-it's meant that I haven't had to face.. some of the barriers that my non-white friends have had to face

But he could not specify where or when those privileges were enacted.

For many, like Frederick (26), sexuality is another identity that he rolls into his privilege,

I understand that I have had this privilege of being a white, straight cis man who... has.. whose gender or identity or race has not made it harder for me to succeed.

James (28), who is not a straight man, says that his minority status as a gay man is very different from the minority status of people of color, though both identities are vulnerable to discrimination. He says,

I could have always considered myself a.. a white cis-hetero male or could pass as a white, cis-hetero male. And, and be in the most privileged group of society. And.. even though I've- I've known in my heart of hearts that I've- I'm...gay, uh.. there is still a day where I have to make a choice.. to come out and identify and- and join a minority group. I have to give up privilege.... like, the second someone who is Black, Asian, Latino...Native...anything uh...is born, it is, it is... like, head to toe on them and...not something that they can choose to, like, take off or, or hide, really.

Though James can hide his minority status, there is no way to conceal being non-white. Mixed-race individuals, even those who present as white, frequently encounter members of all racial groups questioning their racial identity (Norman and Chen 2020). Being gay but being a white man, James can choose to disclose his minority status or maintain a cis-hetero presentation. He says that because he passes as a heterosexual, he hears conversations in public or in locker rooms about the morality of homosexuality or people using the phrase “that’s gay” in front of him. He says that “people would not have said the things that they said out loud if they- if they knew I was gay.” His ability to hide his minority status grants him a unique perspective. James benefits from white, ci-hetero male privilege while simultaneously experiencing that privilege, at least in part, as an outsider.

Not every man in the sample expressed white privilege as explicitly as these men. Like others, Theodore (67) says that he had not thought about being white very much before being asked as part of this research.

I never thought about it. Did it give me some, maybe some advantages here and there? Probably. It probably did. Some advantage somebody whose Black may not have....

And whether bein' white gives us advantage or not, I could[n't] tell ya, it probably does.

Despite seeing advantage, at least as a possibility, Theodore seems to have a hard time verbalizing why race might be of relevance to non-whites. Still, he says he knows “a lot of Black guys and I know how they, it's just- it's just a different way of thinkin' about [race]. You know they- I know it's constantly on their mind. But it's not constantly on mine.” One of the advantages Theodore alludes to what Elias and James previously mentioned, the ability to not think about race. Theodore, Elias, and other whites do not have to think about race because society and social institutions were developed and function with whites as the default. In this way, seeing racial differences and inequalities as structural can be challenging for whites.

Charles (80) says that he feels minorities have a lot to deal with in this country, but they should not let that get them down and that they “can overcome that.” He says he has trouble separating outcomes based on race and economic status, especially in his volunteer work with the department for children and families. He says,

the majority of the families are minorities. I mean, the vast majority are- are minorities who are there. Um.. I see uh.. uh I- I always ask myself ‘is that because of race or because of economic status?’ And it's kind of hard to separate the two in their case because they are both minorities and they are low economic status.

Charles believes all people, but especially young people, need to learn to fail while still being loved and supported or they will not learn how to succeed in life. He is concerned that youth today are not being taught this lesson generally but sees this as particularly problematic for minority youth given the economic disparity he sees.

As an example, he describes a 17-year-old he met with during his volunteer work who spoke three languages. Charles was very impressed with the young man's linguistic abilities and encouraged him to apply himself in school, telling him that his ability to speak so many

languages would be incredibly valuable to employers. Charles said he just shook his head in response. This, among other interactions, has led him to think that:

whites learn at an early age that they can do things. They learn at, at an earlier age and that, the things they can do are.. much more open, broader than a lot of the minorities get the chance to.. like I was talking to my granddaughter and this poor girl in the fourth grade 'I'm gonna be a welfare mom' that was her narrow window that she was looking at. And I'm sure.. that there was a white girl sittin' right next to her where her parents were told you're gonna go to college, you're gonna be, can become a doctors, can become a lawyer, can become a truck driver. And then this kid didn't see that, that expectation wasn't set on her.

Charles describes attitudes towards wealth and success as an inherited trait, something whites hand down to their children like wealth. The Black girl he references from his granddaughter's classroom "didn't see" that she could achieve occupational success outside of raising a family on welfare whereas young white girls, like his own daughters and granddaughters, were always presented with options. Similarly, for the young, multi-lingual man being told to apply himself to school, getting a higher education might seem like a pipedream.

Anthony (80) does not see any advantages that come from being white and talks about his work as a wedding photographer. He says he had a blast at these weddings and never cared about the race of those around him. As an example, he says, "I danced with Black girls," but also says that he probably would not marry a Black woman. He clarifies, "not because of that," that being skin color, but because "the kids suffer. That's the danger. Two adults wanna do their thing? Hey great. But when- when the kids – cause you're not A, you're not B." Here Anthony uses what Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls the "anything but race" rhetorical move, where white individuals use anything but racial difference to explain and minimalize race-based beliefs. Bonilla-Silva attributes the disapproval of interracial unions is a consequence of white habitus. Whites, he says, "do not have much contact with blacks or with people in interracial marriages" and thus

reject them due to presumed problems that will occur within these relationships (Bonilla-Silva 2003:123), like the self-identity of potential children. In many ways, these opinions make logical sense: how could relationships between groups who rarely if ever interact be successful?

White Habitus.

In the United States, whites live in a society that preferences white skin, making it difficult for them to understand the lived reality of people of color, as described in part by the participants. Through what is close to white racial isolation, whites develop white habitus: the racialized socialization that creates white racial attitudes, behaviors, tastes, and racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003). This socialization occurs through segregated neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, ultimately living in racially segregated, different worlds (ibid; Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2007; Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006; Massey and Denton 2003). None of the men in the sample claim to live in diverse areas and many explain that they were raised and currently live in very white places. Only one woman, Lollipop, currently lives in a diverse, urban neighborhood where she is the racial minority. This is in part due to my own living situation at the time of the interviews and where my professional and friendship networks are located. I spent much of my life in Northern New England – the whitest part of the United States.

As such, the participants tend to be like Elias, who says he can go “full days, full weeks without seeing somebody who doesn’t look like me.” He lives in a small town in the very white state of Vermont. Hooker, who now lives New England as well, grew up on the outskirts of a large U.S. city. He describes “a very diverse community” and clarifies there were a lot of different ethnic groups but that it was mostly “white Anglo-Saxon. Uh.. maybe protestant or Jews or, or whatever, but.. uh.. it was the Germans and the.. Irish and the.. Jewish and the..

English and the- the.. Ger-and uh, Spanish.” While ethnically diverse, the groups Hooker describes are all Western European and generally considered white. Like the others, Hooker also grew up in what was essentially a racially segregated area inhabited by whites.

The women expressed similar sentiments as the men in the sample. Arlene (60) grew up in a very white, somewhat rural community in New England. She says her parents were not racist but describes them as afraid of difference. She realized recently that she had taken on those fears herself:

I think I used to see.. it-it wasn't very conscious. I used to see people of color and I would have an automatic response of fear and now I am trying to develop this automatic response of love, or connection or something other than fear.

Raised and having spent her adult life in a very white section of the United States, her experience with people of color was limited. Her beliefs and attitudes towards minorities were shaped by other whites around her and institutions she interacted with, not by people of color. Working to undo those misconceptions and automatic reactions has been difficult but she is glad that she has begun that work.

Unlike the others in the sample, Mitch (32) grew up in a majority Black area of a city, not a majority white community. However, like the others, Mitch still claims to only think about being white when he is the racial minority in the room. He says that most of his class when he was young was Black, but “when you're young, you don't think about it.” It was when he went to college that he realized that his experience growing up was not common for whites. Mitch believes that for a lot of young white people, their first real introduction to minorities is at college.

James (28) echoes Mitch, describing his entrance to college as the first time he “truly really felt like, confronted with.. like, the fact that there are so many other people um.. that were,

are- are different than my-myself.” As a college youth, it was uncomfortable for him to encounter racial diversity in the context of his racial inexperience. He says, even now, “it’s something that I’ve never had to.. think about because it- it never like, affected or impacted me.” Like many whites, James has unintentionally maintained a segregated lifestyle. Historical housing practices have made it easy for whites to live, work, and function day-to-day in primarily white spaces (Massey and Denton 1993; Bonilla-Silva 2003). Throughout his college years and his time on the track team with a diverse group of athletes, he still never really interacted with people of color. He says the team would spend time together outside of practices and meets but even when they held team parties or dinners,

we never mingled...if you kind of just watched generally what happen is, the majority of the time, a lot of the uh.. the white athletes would hang out together and a lot of the Black athletes would spend kinda more time together around each other. ... Looking back, I now know that it's probably just because.. you know.. they haven't been ..uh.. it- it wasn't their job to.. try to sit with.. the- the white athletes and the white students. It- it was our job. Like, I should have made, uh... a bigger effort to...to sit with them and- and make friends with them.

For James and the other younger men, they would have had to actively fight against a segregated system they were taught no longer existed to integrate their lives. For people like Charles, Anthony, and Harold, all 80-year-olds who grew up during the Civil Rights Era, segregation was purposeful and racism overt in public spaces. Even if racism was not present in their homes, they would have been very aware of race relations and the segregation of whites and Blacks occurring around them. Such widespread socialization is difficult to combat.

Charles provides some insight into the way that segregation continued as matter of routine practice, even after it was legally abolished. In the Air Force, Charles describes working alongside many people of color:

actually, there were quite a few Blacks and Hispanics, some Orientals, but not in the pilot - not in my field. They were the maintenance guys, they were the support guys, the admin guys, the medical guys. Um.. they fixed the airplanes. They loaded them with bombs, but they didn't fly 'em. At- at that time. Now, all that has changed. I'm going back many, many, many years. All that has tremendously changed, over the years.

When asked why people of color were not pilots more often, Charles responded

the biggest limiting factor was to become an officer you had to have a college degree and be a college graduate. So that was the first step that- that started weeding them out. Uh after that, once they got in the Air Force, there was nothing official that- that did that.

The barrier of college education is an example of a race-neutral job requirement that restricted Black advancement in the military and the private sector. Just as there were not many minorities who were officers, there were not many women. Women and minorities were support staff to the white, college educated, officers. Of course, there were exceptions to this rule, as Charles points out, describing a Black general he knew. Regardless, Black men and women who became officers during the mid-1900s were the exception, not a norm. Charles's experience highlights how major institutions, like the military, were set up to segregate and prioritize whites over people of color.

Even as laws precluding discrimination in employment and college admission allowed for change, the historical patterns of prioritizing whites continued through the patterned and repeated process of socialization within social institutions (Habermas 1976) meant that the practice of discrimination continued. Well-meaning, seemingly non-racist individuals would carry on discriminatory behaviors as a matter of routine. As U.S. society shifted away from Jim Crow era segregation and law, color-blind practices which created alternative explanations for racial difference permitted racism to maintain its stronghold in American life. America shifted to

explaining racial differences away through cultural difference, equal opportunity over equity, and the minimization of modern forms racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

At the same time as society began shifting to individual and cultural explanations for racial differences, whites began to move out of cities, taking their accrued wealth and social capital with them. The system they had set up centuries prior that supports whites over others continued to move forward in a new era where identifying racial difference became synonymous with racist. Racism moved from overt prejudice to systemic patterns of difference.

Racism is in part participation in the inequitable racial distribution of power and resources. Through a constellation of historical events and trends, racism was both directly and indirectly defined by the dominant culture and by the courts, through seminal cases, as a matter of racial separation rather than the racial subordination that is at its definitional core (Vaught 2009: 564).

One major issue, education funding, has profound consequences on differential life outcomes by race. As public-school funding is largely based on property taxes in the United States, white children end up going to the best schools and receiving the best education (Vaught 2009). Due to this unequal and inequitable system of education funding, white children have a better chance of getting into and going to college, thus increasing their earning potential, generating more wealth, and continuing the cycle that further widens the wealth gap between whites and people of color. Greater inter-generational wealth means whites are better able to help younger generations accrue wealth through assisting with college loans, down payments on homes, and leaving behind greater inheritances (Asante-Muhammad et al. 2016; Shapiro, Meschede, and Osoro 2013). Color-blind ideologies, white habitus, and “race neutral” laws permit whites to see the world through an individual lens, where personal choices and individual responsibility explains racial differences in wealth, success, and opportunity, not systemic factors (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Color-blind ideology, especially in a “post-race” world following the Civil Rights Act of 1964,

have created a system in which white advantage and minority disadvantage is explained through individual attributes and white privilege is indirect and diffuse. As such, when called into question and others claim white men benefit from unearned privileges, it can feel unfair and unjust, leading to accusations of reverse discrimination and the beliefs that white men are the ones being oppressed.

Targeted White Men

That white men have enjoyed centuries of privilege and control over society is becoming a mainstream topic of conversation, much to their chagrin. Society appears to be reckoning with white male privilege and the way powerful men's poor and sometimes criminal behavior has been used to obfuscate the greater issue of hegemonic masculinity, such as the case with Harvey Weinstein and the "Me Too" movement. These incidents challenge society's expectations of gender dynamics and how men and women should interact. At the same time, Black Lives Matter protests created conversations around white privilege that many whites seem unprepared for, as research finds whites are generally uncomfortable in mixed-race conversations (Avery et al. 2009). Efforts to destabilize white male power challenges hegemonic masculinity norms and the power structures our society has established and functioned on for centuries.

Jeffery (63) says that despite all the privileges he sees men have and that he has personally experienced as a white man, a lot of men today feel like they are the victims of social change. He says,

the ironic thing for me is even though you know, white men are in the most privileged sector in the- in society.. how many of us.. ahh, I'll just speak for white men even though I can't um, I can only speak for me but how many white men feel like they're.. they are.. victims right now

Rick (33) has also noticed this and explains that when white men claim to be victims, he believes they are taking critiques of white men's group advantages as individual criticism. He says that although society generally sees and treats white men as the default identity status, deferring power and privilege to them,

there's starting to be some pushback and some critiquing of that, uh, sort of inherent starting point. So, um...in politics, I feel like a lot of people feel like being a white male is now being, not made fun of, but like, the inherent privilege of that, is being threatened in some way... I'm hearing from the conservative movement, it seems like they're feeling.. targeted? Or harassed? For being a white male.

He continues,

I do feel like there's an imagined, and maybe it's real, but I have no firsthand knowledge of it, conflictual relationship against white men as like a.. pushback against men being the default.

Though he has never felt that his identity as a white male has made him a victim and does not feel victimized or targeted by society, he acknowledges that other white men do feel that way. The prioritization of men, particularly white men, for centuries is not over, but the men in this sample are keenly aware of the ways in which conversations have begun to frame white men as part of major social problems. Rick has not seen these issues in his own life and says he surrounds himself with like-minded, more liberal-leaning people. As such, he attributes this feeling to politics and generally to conservative-minded individuals.

However, another self-identified liberal, Felix (33), says that he also feels as though white men today are being pushed aside in some ways. Felix adamantly does not think white men are being oppressed nor does he think they are victims of society but says his participation in this study was motivated by the focus of recruitment on white men. He says,

That's one of the things that interested me about the invitation to speak with you is that it- you know I think it's like, would- it's- it's

a helpful thing to be able to speak about white maleness in a way that isn't about prosecuting the other um.. but there aren't a lot of spaces like that that exist in our society that I'm aware of.

Though Felix supports women and minority voices taking up more space in the social sphere and does so “without any qualification,” he says it can be “painful and awkward” at times for him to embody those ideals of inclusion. He has “been chastised on occasion for like, interrupting women sometimes and I like, really feel terrible when I'm told that I've done that and I really try hard not to do that.” The expectations that he feels white men have today are to take up less space and give room to historically marginalized groups and says he does his best to meet these expectations. He believes these changes are “are generally good” and says that he does not “resent it in any big way.” Still, no one feels good when they are accused of hurting others. For white men like Felix, conversations about the ways white men have benefitted from historical systems of power and accusations that their existence oppresses other groups can be difficult. While not necessarily accusing them as individuals (though that does occur) to be told they are, through an accident of birth, responsible for and perpetuating a system which harms others, particularly when they struggle through society themselves, feels unfair.

Like Felix, Mitch (32) is very open in talking about privileges he has experienced as a white man. Having grown up in poverty to become a successful college professor as an adult, he believes that transition was made easier by his identity. But, like the others, he says,

I think there's this sense that we're squeezing white men out. I think uh my father-in-law is constantly beatin' the drum that he's being discriminated against and bought a house 30 years- 35 years ago for 50,000 dollars and that house is worth 300 grand now. So if we're squeezing them out, sign me up. Um, but I do think.. uh there is some sense that we have.. forgotten about the white male. And I think you saw that a lot with the last elect-2016 election. That we've spent all this time and energy focusing on.. people of color, focusing on women.. and we had forgotten about.. um, a pretty sizable proportion of the country, right?

Hearing these complaints from other white men, Mitch says that as a white man himself he has “*always* sort of done well, and.. you know, I don’t know that.. when the country does poorly, white men do.. worse than any other ethnic group” [emphasis in original]. Mitch is describing white male dominance and power as still relevant today, even as other social groups try, or seem to try, to decenter white male voices to focus on the needs of others. Attempts to remove white men from Black, queer, Latinx, and women’s spaces do not remove their voices from society generally or even from systems of power.

Exemplifying this victim/power dichotomy, Frederick (26) sees two archetypes for white men today:

there's this idea of white men... in the political sense, being conservative, incredibly conservative, and sometimes, this caricature of white men of being like.. undereducated, um, unintelligent, just kind of gross. So I think that there's this... yeah like I said, bi-modal.. idea set of almost apolitical successful rich white men and then there's this idea of conservative, undereducated, men.. and I think white men are seen in our society as.. one or the other or both.

To emphasize the first archetype, the caricature he described, Frederick explains,

a friend sent me a photo of the million-man mega march? I think is what they're calling it in D.C. and it was a photo of this.. uh.. older white guy, um who is like, he had his mask down, like beneath his chin, and he was like, you could see the spit like, coming out and he had a very angry face. It just like evoked, in my reptilian brain this idea of ‘this is gross and I don't like that’ um and that’s... for better or worse why I said that I guess. This idea of.. that is the archetype of what some people think or what our culture thinks white men are. One of the archetypes.

Frederick’s visceral reaction to this image explains what the men in this study are describing.

They believe, and have described, white men as being thought of both the successful, privileged,

wealthy men who run society and as the poor, angry, and unintelligent man – an identity that inspires hate and anger in return.

Brian (30) also identified a rich white man ideal, describing “rich, old white” men as the ones being targeted as “the problem,” intentionally or not removing himself and other young white men from these accusations. Similarly, Steven (28) argues that white men are responsible for the situation they find themselves in and the problems they are being accused of. He says,

part of society, maybe half, maybe bigger, that would say that white men have caused a lot of the problems that historically we have faced as a society. Now, I would say part of that would be because white men, for the most part, disallowed anyone from taking place in the decision making that happens in a society. Um.. that a lot of the, a lot of the pro- and a lot of the problems we do face are the result of.. uh colonialism, led and sort of uh, executed by white men, for the majority.

To Steven, it is not necessarily unfair to blame white men for the problems in society today because of the privileges and power men have held for centuries. Even though white men can be considered responsible for many of society’s issues and perhaps for their own frustrated expectations, as for Felix, it does not feel good to be on the receiving end of those accusations. Regardless of the realities of history and modern society, the feelings many white men have of being unjustly accused of harming others are very real to them.

Though they represent a minority in this sample, five men expressed personal feelings that white men are in some manner victims of society today. William (54) describes feeling that

today, you know, masculinity gets a really.. you know it’s painted with a- with sort of a dark brush.... And I think there’s a- sorta social push um.. that really sort of.. it-it says masculinity is bad, right?... while I can understand sometimes the concerns I think sometimes it goes way too far and.. and it really does seep into be- belittling.. and crass stereotyping and.. you know, like men are knuckle-draggers. Or.. (clears throat) have it very easy- they don’t suffer (chuckles), they’ve not had to work for what they’ve earned. If everything’s been given to them. I mean I’ve encountered that *so*

many times. And I just like.. you know, that's part of the dehumanization process, when you don't look at the full life of another person.

William previously describes men struggling with what being a man today means because women are taking on more traditionally masculine roles. Though not against that change per se, his concern is in the way that masculine roles “don't exist” anymore which he argues is problematic as “roles give people *meaning*” [emphasis in original]. William believes white men are being pushed to the back burner of social issues and that the concerns and problems white men face are seen as less important, even trivial to the rest of society. For William, this is dangerous, dangerous to men's health and well-being. As he puts it, “if you care about fairness, and you care about equality, you know, then you also have to care about men (chuckles). I mean we're 50% of the population, right?”

Williams' concerns for men stem from what others in the sample describe as expectations of masculinity that have been constructed for men primarily by other men. Though all people in society perpetuate these hegemonic norms (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), the power white men have held historically means they could technically have instituted change for themselves. In some ways, the hegemonic male expectations men described in the previous chapter that are unrealistic and often harmful, like the expectations to be physically combative and emotionally stoic, can be understood as a product of their own making. However, part of the strength of hegemonic values is in how widespread they are and how real they feel. Despite being a social construction, some of the men framed men's hegemonic roles as a natural product of biology and thus unchangeable. Even the most powerful group in society is controlled by these norms as they exist as part of social practice and routine behavior, put on them by others and by themselves.

Explaining how men feel unjustly targeted when called privileged and accused of oppressing others, William also returns to emotional stoicism, describing how men are conditioned to avoid being vulnerable:

a lot of guys feel they have to go it alone, right? Cause they're just not gonna broadcast and they're not gonna signal or.. you know, they've.. they just want- they wanna grow up, life the- live their life, perhaps raise their families, you know, and things and not be thought of as... uh (chuckle) horrible or.. you know, they're not the oppressors. I mean these are people going to work, struggling, they have their own personal issues. Um.. and yet there's a message from society oftentimes, especially the more politically heated.. rhetorical side of it that, you know, things are bad because of you (laughs), right? Things are unfair because of *you*. That you're- you're the oppressor, right? You-you-you've got the unearned privilege, I guess that's the common one now, right? I mean, most of the men I know.. did not come from privilege (chuckles). You know. And didn't get a break. Um.. so yeah. That's why I'm caught cause there's such- it's such a great time to- to be alive and to be a guy, right? There's so many options and time that you have now that you.. you know, our predecessors didn't and yet there's this sort of.. nasty rhetorical, political side of it too that I think is very, very damaging. [emphasis in original]

Again, he describes masculinity as confusing, with unclear expectations for men today despite general agreement across the sample that men are still expected today to achieve the traditional hegemonic norms. Still, William says it is a great time, the best time even, to be a man as feminist movements have expanded the home and work possibilities for men, enabling men to be more present with their families, explore arts and philosophy, and allowed men more freedom in what it means to be a man. He says the best thing about early feminism is that it “challenged the silliness of role expectations, right? And it did so for-for men *and* women” [emphasis in original]. Despite the good these changes have meant for himself and other men, he says that for men

there's this other side of it where.. you're just expected.. to shut up. To not have an opinion, right? To, to take it, right? To sacrifice

things that are meaningful to you, or your viewpoints, right? Because if you're a guy, there's gotta be something wrong with- if you're a *masculine* guy especially, right? Then there's gotta be something wrong, you're- like I said, a knuckle-dragger, a troglodyte. You know, um, you're not forward thinking, right? I just think that that's a damaging type of.. understanding, right? It *uses* men's suffering, right? For political purposes. [emphasis in original]

For William, part of how men and masculinity are under attack today is through silencing them and what he calls the automatic exclusion of white men from various spaces.

Similarly, when asked about what society thinks of white men, Theodore (67) expresses feeling that white men are “kind of looked down on” specifically, that “if you're a white male you're automatically a racist” and says a lot of that negative view is unjustified. He says “there's racism out there” but “I seen it goin' both ways.” The negative perception of white men is a form of ‘reverse racism’ to Theodore. He says that society needs to

stop portayin' white men in such a negative image all the time. Not everybody- not every white guy out there is a bad guy. Or not all.. they're not stupid or they're not.. sometimes you see, if you watch a tv show, the husband of the family sometimes he, he's portrayed like he's dumb. I'm.. or he's just over the top redneck, arrogant, whatever. It's like, these, some of these reality shows like Redneck Island- I won't watch even 'em cause that's just pure stupidity. These guys are out beatin' their chest, swillin' beer, doin' all sorts of stupid stuff.

The men in this sample describe the rest of society looking down on and making a joke out of white men. Potentially in part due to their privileged status, white men are now the one group others feel safe making fun of. Echoing William, Theodore says that white men are just going about their lives like everyone else and argues that most men are not oppressing people. He hopes someday

somebody changes- flips the script on a negative connotation of white guys. Not all of 'em are.. bad guys. We're not all bad guys.

There are bad guys out there but.. most of us are just tryin' to work and make a livin'.

To the men in this sample, being born white men not only provided them with privileged, yet difficult norms to try to achieve but has positioned them as society's punching bag. William describes it as being "popular" to discriminate against white men today and has heard colleagues openly say they will not support hiring white men. Though he supports diversity and affirmative action, he is astounded that people feel so free to discriminate publicly against white men in a way that they would never against any other group. It is doubling frustrating for white men because, as Anthony puts it "I didn't have any choice... eh.. you know, my mother father got together nine months later here I am." Being born white or nonwhite is not a choice. Being discriminated against for something they did not have a choice over is frustrating and upsetting.

Discussion

Many of the participants linked hegemonic masculinity norm to "toxic" versions of masculinity, both of which foster angry and violent men who act in ways that are harmful to the self and others. Though not all men are angry and violent, even the ones who strongly adhere to hegemonic values and try to embody them, research finds men who more strongly endorse hegemonic values are more likely to engage in antisocial, negative, and/or violent behaviors (Dagirmanjian 2017; Schrock and Schawlbe 2009). Men who express the more toxic values of homophobia, dominance, and misogyny have a propensity to seek out, read, and engage with content with which they disagree and to respond in a hostile manner (Parent, Gobble, and Rochlen 2019). Research on 'toxic masculinity' finds that stronger adherence to masculinity norms makes men less likely to seek medical and mental health treatment (O'Brien et al. 2005; Kupers 2005) and increases the likelihood of them to react in anger and respond with physical

aggression to fear (Jukupcak, Tull, and Roemer 2005; Cohn et al. 2010; Shcermerhorm and Vescio 2021). In short, men who place emphasis on men's dominance and the devaluation of women and homosexuals also act to enforce heterosexual masculine dominance. The enforcement of this dominance occurs through whatever avenues are available to the men at the time given the social situation. Given that hegemonic masculinity normalizes men's dominance as a matter of practice, harmful or toxic behaviors are an expected consequence of the norms established for men and masculinity.

The challenges they face to meet expectations of masculinity are made more difficult by their racial identity. As white men, they describe feeling like they are targets of societal animosity, both warranted and unwarranted. Many of the men understand, sympathize, and at times agree with accusations that white men as a group have oppressed other groups within society and created a current system of inequality. At the same time, they express frustration with these accusations of wrongdoing as individuals trying to support themselves and their families.

At the same time, many participants express experiencing or having benefitted from white privilege. This does not mean that all white lives are easy, indeed several of the participants were born into situations of poverty, abuse, and neglect. Social disadvantage, like advantage, can compound. Being born into poverty, going to schools with low funding, not having access to healthcare, and many other disadvantages make life and success more challenging. In the United States, Black babies are more likely to be born prematurely than white babies (Yang, Collins, and Burris 2021; Kramer and Hogue 2008), white mothers are less likely to die due to complications resulting from childbirth than women of other races (MacDorman et al. 2021; Mogos et al. 2020), and white children are less likely to live in poverty than Black and

Hispanic children (Thomas and Fry 2020) in the United States. As such, white children, even before birth, have fewer disadvantages than minority children in U.S. society. Later in life, Black and other minority children and adults do not have the same opportunities, proportionally, as white children (Anderson 2016; Asante-Muhammad et al. 2016;). As Jeffery says, they are not planted in fertile ground.

Some of the men openly discussed differential treatment based on race. Morgan and Jake each described a specific incident where the same circumstances resulted in very different outcomes for them and the person of color involved. Though Morgan and Jake are both uncomfortable with the unearned privilege they experience as white men and denounced the system that prioritizes them over others during the interviews, neither took it upon themselves to bring attention to the discrimination they perceived. To confront white privilege would have inevitably caused a conflict between themselves and the individual involved. For Morgan to have called the worker's actions "racially disparate" would have been the same as calling her racist, and as such a bad person, instead of a comment on her job performance. As such, their stories not only highlight current forms of privilege and discrimination but also the way that well-meaning whites contribute to the perpetration of unequal treatment. Particularly as individuals, whites have little incentive to actively engage in the difficult work it would require reconstructing the system to be more equal for everyone because the current system benefits them.

Though several of the participants openly discussed white privilege, one of the barriers to discussing racial issues is getting white people to talk about being white as opposed to talking about being not white. All but one of the participants live and work in primarily white spaces and as such, many of the participants rarely if ever think about whiteness and most do so only when

confronted with those who are not white. Their white habitus, the attitudes, tastes, and behaviors they developed through white socialization constrain their ability to see and understand racial difference, having rarely truly engaged or interacted with people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2003). This difficulty engaging with race and difference makes it difficult to speak to white people about their racial identity and how whiteness affects other aspects of their lives.

Regardless of their personal feelings about race and whiteness, many of the men in this sample describe feeling as though white men are being treated and portrayed by others negatively. Within the sample there are those who are aware of but do not personally agree with this feeling of white men's victimization and others who personally feel like the targets of negativity. Arnie, who is very open to talking about his privilege as a white man, crosses the gap between those in the sample who push back on concepts of white men as victims and those who see men as targets by society. He says,

I think there are two sides to it. I think that a lot of people think that white men are the victims in society at this moment. We are the people who are quickly put to be blamed for a lot of situations and I think that there are a lot of people who believe that um.. white men are the perpetrators of a lot of really bad things. And.. your question isn't which is correct um but the answer is both are absolutely correct.

Arnie he finds himself frequently frustrated with the ways gender controls his interactions at work and how gender expectations seep into all aspects of his life which conflicts with his identity as progressive and an advocate for women and minorities. Though he says he does not necessarily feel like he is targeted individually as a white man, he has been told he needs to behave differently than his female colleagues. Told explicitly by female and male colleagues that he should not be in his office alone with a female student, Arnie was confronted with his race and gender identity in a manner he was unprepared for. He says,

I *really* hate that I can't do my career the way that females can. And I'm just tryin' to separate the identity cause I don't know how to merge them. Um that- that I have to *really* act so very differently and separately from the way that my female colleagues do.... each time I talk about [my female friends] and someone's like 'oh you can't- you can't have female friends because that's gonna be- your wife and people are gonna be like you're cheating' and like the fact that that's a *thing* drives me so very nuts. Because I feel like my friendships are also being impacted by it. So it's not only the work that I do but it's my friendships [emphasis in original]

Frustrated by the ways gender relations are impacting his life, Arnie is experiencing very real strain. Knowing you are a white man and people who look like you have done terrible things to others in the past is one thing but having his work conditions altered due to what feels like distrust in his personal ability to behave appropriately is deeply frustrating. Though seemingly minor issues, being told to be careful in his interactions with female students or that his wife might think he is cheating when he knows she will not, these issues are very real to the individuals who experience them.

Through a strain lens, Arnie, and men like him, are experiencing the loss of positively valued stimuli (Agnew 2001). Arnie values his female friends, his position at work, and ultimately his ability to act freely without considering his identity during his interactions. His identity as a white man was never an issue before. The ways white men's behavior has been drawn into mainstream conversations, conversations about the way whiteness and masculinity operate in society, has made being a white man more complicated than they are accustomed to. Though it is not easy being anyone, the changing expectations for white men are confusing and frustrating, and to many of these men it seems like they are being met with more suspicion and distrust than ever before, despite still being the "default" identity many of the men in this sample pointed out.

People of color in this country have faced this type of suspicion when going about their daily lives since birth. Young men are followed around stores (Schreer, Smith, and Thomas 2009), job applications with names associated with non-white cultures are given less attention and Black applicants receive fewer callbacks (Pager 2009; Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009), the phenomenon “driving while Black” causes fear, anxiety and anger among the Black population (Harris 1999; Bell et al. 2014; Jefferson-Jones 2021), and Blacks are killed at disproportionate rates by law enforcement (Washington Post Data 2022). Blacks are stereotyped as being hyperaggressive and dangerous (Chavez and Wingfield 2017), such that even Black police officers are susceptible to racially profiling people of their own race, taking on the preferences, beliefs, and behaviors of the organization they entered (Wilkins and Williams 2008).²

It is important to recognize and understand racial discrimination, profiling, and other ways in which minorities are disproportionately affected by the color of their skin. The men in this sample generally describe racial inequalities and recognize white privilege. They do not necessarily think white men have it worse than other groups, to the point that some indicated feeling as if speaking about their concerns as white men more publicly would be a problem, and some have experienced such situations. There is a feeling among this sample that white men are in a period of societal reckoning which it is uncomfortable for them and difficult to navigate. At times, it feels to them like they are being targeted and singled out as individual white men for things they have no real control over, like the privileges afforded to them by their race and

² As the percent of officers of color increases, this relationship changes over time, and racial profiling decreases (Hong 2017).

gender by society. Many of the men feel like this reckoning is a way of invalidating their experiences, fears, and difficulties.

These men do not disagree that white males have had a monopoly on positions of power and created the systems and institutions that control U.S. society and confer these privileges. Many also acknowledge that white males continue to control most of society, and some argue that white men must answer for their role in modern racism and sexism. However, they personally, and most men like them who do not occupy political positions or control industry, are subjected to society in the same way that other demographics are. The men in the sample generally do not like, idealize, or want to be the hegemonic ideals that they described as being expected of them. But their personal beliefs and desires do not protect them from feeling pressured to engage with and conform to those norms, which foments frustrations and stress. Managing those strains is difficult given masculinity norms around help seeking.

Benefitting from white privilege and constrained by masculine norms, many men find themselves caught between social change and power that benefits their lives. The men in this sample espouse equality and seek to uplift the voices of women and people of color. At the same time, they defend themselves from perceived accusations of wrongdoing based on their identity as white men. In doing so, many of these men resist the current social order while subverting efforts to change it by defending themselves as individuals, perpetuating ideas and norms of hegemonic masculinity and whiteness.

Anyone can sympathize with feeling singled out and being accused of being a bad person, but these men will go on to express a unique danger that comes from doing so to white men based on this perceived targeting of their identity. William, who researches violent men, warns against persecuting men. Referring to the January 6th riot in Washington D.C., he says that

it was caused by “a lot of politically disaffected males. Having politically disaffected males is never a good thing for a society (chuckles), right? Uh.. cause they turn to violence.” And Theodore, outlines what he sees as a problem with accusing and discriminating against white men in particular:

there was a Black guy that wrote a book years ago, I can't think of his name. He researched the white middle class. He said I want- he was gonna research the conservative, white middle class. He wrote a book, I can't think of the name of it. When he got done, he went back to people he said ‘you best leave these people alone.’ He said "you will push them into a corner" he said ‘when you push them into a corner, they're gonna come out shootin’. You might wanna leave ‘em alone.’ And as far as I can tell, a lot of ‘em have not done that. They're pushin’ and pushing. I'm not sayin’.. comin’ out shootin’ is the right thing to do, it's not but.. there's a lot of people who would. And.. white males (chuckles) that aggressive nature.

Theodore specifically notes that there is something about white men that may be more likely to “come out shooting,” whether literally or figuratively.

Across the sample, conversations of men’s violence often turned to discussions of white men’s violence without prompting. Though this no doubt occurred in part due to the order in which topics were discussed and the identity of the individuals participating, most pivoted to white men’s violence. Typically, the topic of white men’s violence came as a direct response to questions about men’s violence and involvement in violent crime. As discussed in Chapter III the participants attribute much of men’s violence to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity that men feel pressure to achieve. Expectations for large physical size, dominance, and leadership encourage men to engage in aggressive and at times violent behaviors when competing with one another for masculine status. In the following section, I examine the way white men and women describe the intersection of white identity and masculinity as a contributing factor to active shootings, and why white men are more likely to engage in this type of crime.

V. ACTIVE SHOOTERS: IDENTITY AND PERCEIVED CAUSES

At this point, the participants have communicated their perspectives and beliefs about masculinity, violence, and race through the eyes of white men and women. Many of the participants have explained how hegemonic masculinity encourages violence generally. While hegemonic masculinity can be best understood as white masculinity, the participants explain white men's violence in more detail when asked about active shootings, called mass shootings in the interview question as a colloquial term for these types of incidents. In this chapter, I will explain the intersection of all three as understood by these everyday men and women and the ways in which white masculinity explain white men's propensity for active shootings. This chapter focuses on the second part of the final research question: how do white men and women explain white men's shootings? With an initial focus on participant perspectives on explanations for shootings generally with white men's identity as common shooters explained later. The participants mention similar causes when asked about white men, but most deviate to explain white men's shootings as a convergence of their identities as white men and emotional strain.

Introduction

The first few participants to mention white men when asked about violence generally give insight into the ways race and gender interact to produce violence among white men. Though it was not until the end of the interview script that white men were connected to active shootings, Morgan (39) brought up white men just prior to questions of violence when he was asked how most people resolve conflicts. He says that because white men are raised not to show emotions and to compartmentalize, they lash out after tension and strain compound over time.

Though he believes these tensions manifest more often as verbal violence than physical violence, there certainly are physical consequences.

Kathy (55) jumped immediately to white men when asked about men's violent crime generally, also referring to how men cope with negative emotion. She says,

I think maybe a lot of it is up-upbringing and just getting.. getting upset when.. when you don't get your way. Or when you're proven wrong or women.. um.. or feeling like society is.. goin' against you because you're a white male and its usually white males that do mass shootings and- and all that kinda stuff. And I-I've never really looked into the reason.. reason why other than.. you know you- you think that they'd be the group that *wasn't* angry and frustrated if they're the ones that are supposedly having all of this privilege, being male and being white and all this privilege. But I- I guess there's a lot of frustration there. And just.. few avenues to take, to take it out

Kathy and Morgan both express ideas that the way men, especially white men, are socialized to suppress emotions and are not taught healthy coping mechanisms contribute to white male violence. Similarly, Felix argues that white men in particular have been taught that they "should lead, should dominate, should conquer the pressure," expectations which encourage violence through the domination of others. These three describe men as being socialized to be dominant at all costs and when they cannot achieve the expectation laid out for them, the expectation that they be unemotional contributes to compounding strains of this nature. White men are primed to cope with their negative emotions by externalizing their problems through anger.

The opinions of these participants echo Michael Kimmel's (2014) argument of aggrieved entitlement. Through his interview study with white men in Men's Rights groups, Kimmel argues that white men are subject to a particular type of strain that can only affect the privileged. As the top of the social hierarchy, men have been taught that they will succeed financially and occupy positions of authority, whether in the family or workplace. Being faced with the reality of

a global economy and inflation salaries have not kept pace with, white men feel they are losing out to other groups. Due to their privileged status throughout history and the roles they are socialized to achieve, they feel entitled to respect, authority, and financial success (Kimmel 2014). Combined with hegemonic masculinity norms that restrict emotional outlets to expressions of sadness or frustration to anger, white men are uniquely exposed to feeling strain of this type and coping with the emotions that come with it in unhealthy and harmful ways.

Aggrieved entitlement can be understood as a type of strain under General Strain Theory (GST), where individuals experience the loss, or perceived loss, of valued privileges. Although this study is not a test of GST, the emphasis placed on strain that result from failures to achieve masculinity goals frame white men's experiences and the expectations placed on them as unjust and high in magnitude – both of which are important to deviant coping (Agnew 2001). GST argues that experiencing many strains at once has a compounding, additive effect and strains typically result in negative emotions. Particularly when that negative emotion is anger, deviancy and criminal coping become more likely (Agnew 2001). Agnew himself says that “although many types of goal blockage may lead to delinquency, the failure to achieve monetary, autonomy, and ‘masculinity’ goals are of special importance” (2001: 325). The goals listed by Agnew (2001) that are most likely to lead to delinquency are all goals of masculinity: monetary goals, such as being a breadwinner for a family and having career success; and autonomy, being an independent person able to care for oneself and one's homes relate to the masculine norms of financial success and independence.

Recall that the men in this study expressed feeling pressured as men to be independent and financially successful in Chapter III. White men in this country have always been able to attain some part of this ideal. At the very least, they had social power as part of the dominant

race and gender. Even when perceived as unrealistic, the men in this sample feel pressured to achieve hegemonic norms. As the ones in power, even the most disenfranchised white man was generally able to succeed over people of color and women. Perceived changes in gender and race relations are altering this dynamic for white men today.

Strains perceived as unjust and high in magnitude are predicted under GST to be more likely than other strains to result in deviant behaviors like crime and violence (Agnew 2001). The injustice of society feeding a dream and expectation to white men that it generally cannot fulfill feels unjust. Regardless of how unattainable the American Dream has been for most people in U.S. society since the birth of the nation, white men have generally been able to achieve it or some semblance of it. At the very least they have been better off than others, socially if not economically as individuals. As that dream has drifted farther away through economic changes, civil rights legislation, women taking up more and more of the workforce, and a globalized economy that eliminated many of the well-paying jobs for those with high school degrees, white men are finding it harder and harder to achieve the success they were promised. Kimmel (2014) argues that these feelings of disenfranchisement, of white men's privileges slipping, results in anger, hatred towards groups perceived to cause these issues (like women and minorities), and violence.

The last topic of discussion in the interview script is a continuation of discussions of violence, asking the participants to provide their perspective on the perpetrators of active shootings, their identities, and possible motivations. This was purposely placed at the end of the interview to avoid adding content bias to the participants' previously discussed responses regarding the expectations of masculinity, whiteness, and violence. In the previous chapters I have confirmed that white men are the majority of active shooters and that the demands of

hegemonic masculinity are largely unchanged from Connell's (1987) original formulation. Additionally, the men and women in this sample have described white men's identity as being the target of animosity from other parts of society. White privilege and hegemonic masculinity brew a unique and strong set of strains for white men.

The expectations of masculinity for financial and familial success, and to be dominant over other races and genders are becoming harder to achieve, resulting in feelings of aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel 2014), and thus, the entitlement to fight back to offset these perceived failures. Theodore described this in one way through his argument that white men will defend themselves and their home from perceived threats. Do not push white men or they will come out shooting.

Perceived Motivations for Active Shootings

Theories about the causes of active shootings fall into a few categories. These rarely look at the identity of the shooters as white men as more than a fleeting thought, and most often these explanations come from the media as mental illness and bullying, notably homophobic bullying (Lankford 2016b; Metzler and MacLeish 2015; Kimmel and Mahler 2003). When asked why they believe shooters commit these crimes, the participants in this study echoed similar themes initially. Nearly 100% of the participants discussed mental health in some manner when asked about the causes of shootings. Again, there was no statistical relationship between shooters with a diagnosed mental illness and harm found in Chapter II. The following discussion of the participants perspectives on mental illness is included in this analysis only because of how prevalent such explanations are in the public sphere as so many participants brought it up.

Mental Illness.

All twenty of the men and nine out of the ten women discussed mental health when talking about shooters and potential motivations. When participants mentioned someone having “snapped,” “losing it,” “crazy” or made similar comments, they were asked a follow-up question about the potential role of mental illness. Depending on their original statement, this could be “So do you think the shooters are mentally ill?” or “So they snapped, is that caused by a mental illness or something else?” There were no questions in the script about mental health or any other potential cause. This was done intentionally to avoid biasing participants towards specific shooter explanations, like mental illness. Although 96.7% of the respondents talked about mental health in relation to active shootings, only three of the participants believed mental illness alone explains active shootings.

Instead of mental illness being the only explanation for active shootings, Morgan (39) argues that mental illness is a factor through the feelings produced by aggrieved entitlement, though he does not use that term. The strain of the injustices they feel about real or perceived lost privileges and the conversations regarding white men’s privilege and oppression are isolating and potentially cause spiraling mental health. He says that

I think the mass shootings are a product of mental illness, which are a product of these delusions.. that white men and boys.. have because they are made to feel.. like society is telling them they’re inadequate. Or they’re not deserving. Or that they’re the victims.

He does not describe a specific illness. Instead, he refers to the anger and frustration these feelings produce. Like Morgan, very few of the participants believe mental illness is the only cause of active shootings even though they thought it likely plays some role. Andrea (48), who is very open about her own anxiety issues, says that people, even those with mental health struggles, do not wake up one day and suddenly choose to shoot. Instead, framing shootings as a

cry for help, she thinks that mental illness of any kind could contribute to shootings because some people need help and do not know how to get it. As a nurse, she says,

I don't think that as providers you can- we can kind of decide what level.. like, they're - cause you know, when you do the GAD7 and-and-and (clears throat) uh.. when you're doin' all those tests and stuff.. you can't look at it and go 'well they're only mildly anxious so that doesn't explain it but this one was severely anxious and that explains it' like I don't know if you can.. you know.. pick a.. pick a number.. or a.. diagnosee [patient]. And- and place it on that.

Ava (24), working on her clinical psychology degree, says she also thinks mental health plays a role but, like Andrea, does not believe a specific mental health condition can explain active shootings. She says that instead,

There has to be some intense anger or pain happening, or hatred. Um.. and it could be because something that personally happened to them or it could just be ha- be having extreme views about a particular group. Either way they need to be in treatment.

From this perspective, shooters may need counseling or therapy to learn how to manage strain and the resulting negative emotions, they are not necessarily diagnosable with a mental illness. Instead, they could be in a lot of pain or experiencing intense anger from various negative life circumstances. Ava says that society needs “general mental health support” and so increasing access to therapeutic resources could go a long way to reduce shootings. Speaking from a patient's perspective, as someone who has been in a residential facility for mental health treatment, Jake (25) says about active shootings:

I feel like most of the time.. at least almost every instance that's been in the news.. the- they um.. the person committing the crime- the um, committing violence is just-has had some sort of mental-needed mental help of some kind.

Like the others, Jake does not refer to a specific diagnosis and refers to needing “mental help,” not necessarily intensive psychiatric treatment, like residential care. He also says that the shooter

could be just a kid dealing with problems at school who does not have a healthy outlet or someone to speak to about their issues. He says over time everything they are going through in their lives “kind of boils up and eventually just explodes.” Jake is describing a type of compounded strain and a lack of healthy coping mechanisms, in line with General Strain Theory (GST). The specific strains do not appear to be as important as the individuals feeling them to the participants in this study.

Like Ava, Jake, and Morgan, for many of the participants, being mentally ill is not necessarily clinical. They refer to a more generalized need for help coping with negative life events for these individuals. The participants frame the shooters as normal people who are going through a hard time or have had a difficult life and are struggling to manage it. In fact, some of the participants explicitly pushed back on clinical mental illness being a cause, like Jeffery (63) who began explaining active shootings through individuals having a “sickness.” When asked to clarify he said,

I’m almost talking more about societal sickness.... I didn’t mean to go to mental illness. I think that’s a canard. I’m bipolar and I have never wanted to shoot anyone, okay? It’s got nothing to do with violence. Except if somebody happens to be.. you know.. If somebody’s in a psychosis or has moved over to a psychotic state then all bets are off but.. generall- in general mentally ill people are not violent.

Similarly, John Doe (20) who says, “it’s almost like prejudice is a mental illness. You have to kind of cope with it and that you can kind of unlearn some habits, but it will always still be there.” Echoing these men, Arlene (48), a therapist, says,

Well, statistically it’s very rare for someone to really have a major mental illness and go out and shoot people, like have a psychosis. Um it’s more a kind of an antisocial personality.. well not even that. Most- most people.. are not.. clinically diagnosable. Um, with some kind of major mental illness. Whether.. that being said. I think people who end up being.. shooters, like mass shooter or own

guns.. probably have some mental health stuff going on that they're not looking at. Like, anxiety or something.

According to the Center for Disease Control, 20% of the U.S. population – around 66.9 million people – sought mental health treatment in 2019, the last year of shooting data collected for this study. A similar percent of the population, 19.5% experienced anxiety within the two weeks prior to being surveyed and 4.7% report regular feelings of depression. Further, just under 11% (10.6%) of physician office visits in 2019 mention depression (CDC 2020a; CDC 2020b). These are all statistics that underrepresent the true prevalence of mental health issues in our society, as many people do not seek help. As such, mental health generally, anxiety, and depression being common in the U.S., it makes sense that mental illness is not seen as a valid way to explain these events by most of the participants.

Like the others, Harold (80) and Arnie (30) do not believe mental illness necessarily explain shootings, but they may contribute. Both men describe mental illness as a lack of empathy. They argue that any mental illness that may drive these shooters is a result of underdeveloped or disregarded empathy. Arnie clarifies,

I think that, the reality is that.. there's some kind of mental illness component to.. that kind of.. I'm gonna put it in quotes 'psychopathic behavior' I mean I know it doesn't quite rise to psychopathic behaviors in the absence of, you know, without any understanding about empathy and things like that but I -I certainly think that that yeah, yeah. I would think that would be central.

And Harold says,

I think... um...mental illness plays in it. I think having a, a um... an upbringing that... that doesn't create any kind of... um awareness of um.. sympathies and empale-empathy with other people's lives, they uh, they seem to be... when they do, you know, tell you about these people they- they- they're a lot of times loners.

Both Harold and Arnie believe that life circumstances create a person who cares little for the lives and feelings of others. While there may be a clinical diagnosis for this, neither Arnie nor Harold specifies anything beyond Arnie's "psychopathic behaviors." These men imply that it is negative life events that produce this. Morgan, who works in special education says,

they're raised in an- in environments where they're not allowed to show emotion. So they are 'oh that goes into the back of the head' it's like traumatic events, they get triggered, they can't show the emotion- all of these events.. build up- and look, I'm not a doctor, I'm not a psychiatrist, I don't know what I'm talking about but I would i- but I- I'm a special education teacher who works with students who m- some of whom have serious social, emotional uh, disturbances. Um.. and I know - and some of them have histories within their childhood of experiencing trauma.. neglect.. and when you can't deal with it.. it kinda just gets put into the compartments in your brain and over years of all of that.. um that toxic stress.. it absolutely I- it- it can foment mental illness. It can compound and- and -and we know with certain mental illnesses. There are behaviors.. you know, unpleasant behaviors attached with them that can cause real harm to people. And I- I think some of that manifest in - with like some of this mass gun violence.

Again, Morgan is not referencing a particular diagnosis that he has worked with or would attribute shootings to. The men and women in this sample describe mental health and mental illness on the part of active shooters as contributing to shootings, but not required. Even those that believe mental illness is a factor in these shootings do not believe that the shootings are only based on a type of mental illness. Some other explanation, like ideology or anger generally, must also be present.

Felix (33) questions the mental illness narrative. While Felix does think part of the explanation for these events is mental health or "psychological demons," he believes it is equally like that those demons are combined with ideological leanings that promote violence to correct a real or perceived injustice. James (28) echoes Felix,

there are a lot of other issues that those people are dealing with. Um...and they definitely need some, some counseling but uh..I, I do think...I do think if you.. stoke fear enough with someone you can- you could drive them to violence.

And Frederick (26) says,

I'm not a psychologist (laughs) but it seems to me it would be some sort of mental issue whether...it was they were born with it or it happened because of trauma in their life. So they started with that and then were fed...li-lies by our society.. about what is gonna- what is happening in our society and what should.. and then they made the leap to what should be done about it.

Once again, ideology and failed expectations are brought to the forefront of this issue. These men and women argue that failed expectations, strains, and violent or retributive ideologies convince the shooters they are victims of society and use violence to rectify that wrong.

Steven (28) sums up what most of the participants describe:

Is there a mental illness component? Sure, maybe? I think- I think it could play into it but the vast majority of people with mental illness will never do something like that. So I think using that as a scapegoat is.. is.. a - just pushing off this violence on mental illness is- is unproductive, it's uncoduciv- unproductive, it's not going to accomplish a goal. There – we- we definitely need more mental health services in the country, we definitely need more attention paid to that but to- to just hand wave away this violence as all happening because of mental illness is- is- is not going to solve anything.

The dissenters in the group are Theodore (67), Charles (80), and Anthony (80), all of whom are among the older participants. Though age does not appear to affect most responses, it does seem to have had a slight effect on perspectives on causes of active shootings as these men deviated the other 27 participants.

Like previous participants, Anthony (80) believes mental illness plays some role in these incidents but says that ultimately active shootings occur because society is not punitive enough

when it comes to violent offenses. He believes the death penalty is the only way to stop murder as severe punishment deters from serious crimes.

Both Charles and Theodore also believe mental illness is the cause of shootings but unlike the other 28, do not believe there is another co-occurring cause, like a lack of deterrence. Charles says that it all comes down to mental illness. Trying to avoid stigmatizing a huge segment of the population, he says,

I think mental illness runs the whole spectrum. I have known people that have been.. diagnosed as bipolar or.. schizophrenic or schizo-affective or any of those kinds and.. they were totally, utterly nonviolent. But they were mentally ill. So.. and I'm sure there's, people that are mentally ill that are very violent.

For Charles, anyone that shoots someone is mentally ill, whether they commit mass murder or not. Though Charles does believe violence is appropriate if the home or family is threatened, violence for violence's sake is unacceptable.

Theodore (67) says that “when you look at some of the mass shooters, a lot of ‘em are mentally ill.” After reading an article about a psychologist who interviewed the man who committed the Aurora, CO movie theater attack, he says that even the psychologist was frightened of the shooter. He believes that sometimes people who are mentally ill hide their illness when out in public such that only those closest to them, like family members, would be able to identify potential violence. Due to this, Theodore blames the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting on the shooter's mother, who purchased the gun. He says, “you don't take somebody who's got that kind of mental illness¹ and buy 'em a gun and teach 'em how to shoot.” Theodore does not think the crime would have occurred if the shooter did not have easy access to a gun. Interestingly, instead of a mental health argument, Theodore more convincingly argues

¹ Theodore does not clarify what mental illness he means or believes the shooter to have.

that access to guns might be more explanatory to these incidents. Perhaps it is not mental illness but access to guns that causes such violence.

Gun Access.

Access to firearms, particularly the ease of access, was an issue for a lot of the participants. As outlined in Chapter II, any gun can be used to cause great harm in an active shooting. Most active shootings are committed with a handgun (63.91%), followed by a rifle, then shotguns. Neither the type of gun used nor the number of weapons a shooter brings with them have a significant effect on the number of victims based on the analysis in this study.

The interview script did not contain any questions about guns outside of asking about shootings. If guns came up at any point in the conversation, it was brought up by the participant though I may have asked clarifying questions based on their initial responses.

Four of the women and eight of the men, 40% of the overall sample, discussed concerns regarding gun access in the United States. These individuals believe that guns are too easily accessible in the U.S. which makes committing shootings relatively easy for anyone who wants to cause widespread harm. Elias (35) says

I feel like there's guns everywhere. And I can't help but feel like.. it's.. it's just so - you have to have somebody who wants to be violent to another person first but maybe that's the place to start but like, if you're somebody who has decided that I am going to murder other human beings, it's not difficult to get your hands on a tool to do it. So the fact that there are like, more firearms than people in our country.. um.. is.... fearsome to me. Because you just can't- the irony is everyone is arming themselves to the teeth because they say, you know, 'an armed society is a safe society' you know that's the NRA.. uh, slogan, but at the same time um.. you know, an armed societ-society means that unsafe people will be able to more easily be unsafe. So.. I think that's like kinda perpetuates itself. So I do wonder is some of it is just the easy access to firearms that we have for people that want to hurt people.

Ava (24) believes that U.S. society needs “just less gun access all around. Like why can we easily buy an assault rifle?” Like mental health, though none of the participants believed gun access was the only cause of active shootings, the apparent ease of access to firearms makes shootings a realistic method of committing violence for many people. For Jeffery (63), gun access is not the only cause of active shootings, but it is the primary cause.

I think it's the availability of guns. I mean, ultimately, cause, cause everything else is a relatively.. you know, it's the second amendment and how.. how we.. um, how we've taken it to an extreme the way we look at it. How important it is to us. It's, it's that and the availability of guns because everything else about.. all those other.. um.. you know, supposedly civilized countries is the same.

Catherine (60) says,

I definitely think that the guns themselves are somewhat of a problem I mean I know people are 'oh you know guns people, people kill people' that's true but people- a person with a knife isn't gonna kill as many people as a person with a semi-automatic. I do think people have the right to bear arms. I'm not suggesting that we don't let private citizens own guns but I think that we need to get much better at our laws

Ava and Catherine both bring up semi-automatic/assault rifle firearms which always seem to surround active shootings, particularly in the media coverage of these incidents (Moore 2018).

However, most firearms are semi-automatic, even handguns. Theodore (67), a gun-owner, describes his problem with the semi-automatic/automatic weapon ban argument:

I mean I know they [the shooters] used AR-15s and they call them assault rifles. You know, if you're unfamiliar with guns, an AR-15 is not an assault rifle. An assault rifle has a, what's called a selector switch on it, you go from semi to full automatic. And those are illegal. Even though you, with the right machinist you can convert one. But, most machinists won't do that, ah it's like, one of the guns I have, if you know what you're doin' you can um.. oh one of my cats just showed up. You see 'im? (Laughs) that's our tom cat. He decided it was time to do that. But um, you can file a certain piece

in it and you can make a .22 rifle fully automatic. It's just, most people don't do it though. 99% of the people don't do it.

Theodore is describing what he believes is the primary misconception about the definition of assault weapons which is how the firing mechanism works. However, in his description he admits that it is not difficult to reconfigure a legal semi-automatic rifle into an automatic assault rifle. Just like most people will not commit a shooting or murder innocent people, he argues most people will not turn their semi-automatic weapons into automatic ones. This distinction does not seem to matter much to participants like Catherine, who was clear that she was talking about semi-automatic firearms.

It does not appear that the firearm debate is going away anytime soon, given the prevalence among the sample and the media (Moore 2018; Knoll and Annas 2016; Metzl and MacLeish 2015). Although analyses in Chapter II show that the harm and number of victims is not determined by the type of weapon used, it is an easy argument to fall into when a shooting occurs, especially as automatic weapons, should they be configured, have the potential for greater harm than semi-automatic or manual weapons. That said, like Catherine points out “a person with a knife isn’t gonna kill as many people as a person with a semi-automatic.”

Gun Culture.

Guns, like drugs, have a market. If the people keep wanting them, they will continue to permeate our society. Most Americans like and own guns (Kelley and Ellison 2021). Guns and the myth of the independent militia has a strong hold over American culture. Taking a deep dive into the National Rifle Association’s (NRA) culture, author Scott Melzer explains,

U.S. gun culture [is] historically confined to white men. In many ways the gun culture has been exaggerated, but regardless of whether it was real or constructed afterward to sell stories and

products, it continues to shape American culture and masculinity. Guns, masculinity, and freedom are intertwined and still resonate with Americans today (2009: 28)

Though few of the participants in the sample own guns themselves, the way American culture is gun culture in many ways is not lost on the participants. Jeffery echoes Melzer's (2009) argument, describing how America was founded on guns and on whites owning guns:

it's our original sin almost right? You know we came in armed into this continent and wiped out the.. Native Americans and, and enslaved Black Americans. You know, we were armed and they weren't. I don't know. I, so it starts way but it just, we.. the second amendment I think was um.. was either a big mistake when it.. was written. Or.. it's been.. analyzed and um.. interpreted and uh.. the pervasist way possible. And it gets worse all the time I mean.. I, I just think it's too big of a part of our culture.

Gun culture and access go together for a lot of the participants. Both men and women participants talked about guns and gun culture. Regardless of their personal opinions about guns, all the participants who talked about guns argued that guns are likely part of the problem, either through access, culture, or weapon power.

Mikayla (24) brings up guns during her interview because she has taken a great interest in gun laws during her time at law school. She says that while she is pro-gun, she knows that the culture of guns in our country has racist origins and today works for whites and against people of color. Referencing the book, *The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America* (2021) by Carol Anderson, Mikayla says that the argument that U.S. citizens need guns to protect them from the government is a recent way to justify gun access and not the original purpose. During the time the second amendment was included in the bill of rights, she says it was clear to everyone that guns were intended to be used by whites to control Blacks. Mikayla explains

It was because that at the time, like the- slavery was understood to even like, breed insurrection. That was- like people said that all the time. There's written documents of like, white men saying like 'we

understand that slavery is doing this. we will continue to do it.’
And, these violent slave rebellions, it was so, so many and then..
people were like, ‘well we need guns, like if you want to control
this’ and so they established these slave patrol militia groups that
would go around and like, shoot up groups of Black men, take their
stuff and take their guns and.. it’s like we are still doing that.
Literally the police going into minority neighborhoods, what is
that?

Further, her research into current gun laws and the ability to apply self-defense in court has revealed to her a disturbing pattern. She finds that Black defendants who use firearms to protect themselves in the same manner as white defendants have to work harder than whites to convince juries that they feared for their life. She says that “a lot of the time it’s a white man saying that, you know ‘you would feel fearful of this Black man too,’” at least that is the subtext. The white men win but “Black men lose because they’re just so often seen as very dangerous and just inherently a violent group when.. they’re not.” Mikayla says racial stereotypes merge with preexisting ideas about who has the right to own and use guns collides and majority white juries to disadvantage Black defendants. She says,

Especially when we’re grabbing jury members from our American population like what do we expect? And so it’s just a repetitive cycle of the same thing happenings. And it’s horrifying because Black men can *never* do the same things [as whites] [emphasis in original]

According to Michelle Alexander, American society has not come as far from slavery. Alexander (2011) argues that following the American Civil War and the emancipation of slaves in the South, white America found new, legal ways to enslave, discriminate against, and control Blacks. Mikayla’s research shows her similar patterns of discrimination and prejudices produced from centuries of anti-Black and pro-white propaganda. Guns are white men’s domain and America is a white men’s nation.

Arnie (33) echoes Mikayla's research. He says, though he says he does not have data to support him, it feels to him like white men can more easily get away with carrying firearms, which in turns makes guns easier, as a white man, to use.

I think part of it is.. that white men have a freedom to.. carry guns without any.. presumed difficulty. I mean look at Charlottesville and North Carolina. You have white men coming on- North Carolina, great example. Right? Coming on a college campus where they are not allowed to be with assault weapons and yet there they are standing and no police interference. But that's like a national trend. That's a national trend where white men are able to bear these arms.. uh.. too freely. And.. too freely- I don't know- you know, freely. They're able to bear them freely. In a way that Black men can't even walk down a street. And so, the idea that- that Black men could have that same kind of freedom.. is so far beyond my imagin- scope of imagination that I imagine it's true for many Black men which would then just make them more cautious in their use of guns. It's-it's - when you have something so freely available to you, it becomes easier to wield it improperly. And without caution. Maybe? I don't know.

The combination of gun culture and white masculinity makes Arnie think that there is likely a component of irresponsibility when it comes to gun use. This is easy to imagine when it comes to young shooters, several of whom took guns they have easy access from their own homes or the homes of relatives. The easy access of firearms and American gun culture make guns seem like a realistic, if not an easy, way to solve problems for those who have access.

According to some participants, American culture is not just a culture of having guns but a culture of celebrating guns, describing gun violence as inevitable. Lollipop (31) argues,

We celebrate gun culture too. And that's a big part of it...I'm surprised there aren't more shootings. Like it's weird to me that there aren't more. Like it's so easy to get a gun, just get one and you're instantly on tv. This is America, what do we think is gonna happen? That's gonna happen.... We gave them the guns, we rewarded them for shooting, we made them famous when they were. People get book deals for less.

Echoing the idea of a celebratory gun culture, Rick says the following: “maybe what it means to be a man in our society, to some, is being re-articulated as... being like a paramilitary, like a militia member... and like, having access to guns and gun ownership.” Rick has seen what he describes as a militarization of masculinity in recent years where men seek masculinity through aggression and the hypermasculine ideal of the military man.

Mental illness, gun culture, and gun access are all discussed across the men and women in the sample, and all are couched in the hegemonic masculine norms discussed at the top of the interviews and in Chapter III of this study. Regardless of where individuals fall when it comes to these debates, one thing that is clear is that shooters are mostly white men and at a proportion equal to their representation in the population (using the 2020 Census). Only one of the participants disagreed with this assessment. All women and 19 of the men were unsurprised that white men commit the majority of active shootings.

“Bet It’s a White Man”

Men are responsible for the majority of violent crimes in the United States in any given year (FBI 2021) and overwhelmingly responsible for active shootings, the type of shooting where “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (ALERT 2020: 3). As stated in Chapter II, between 2000 and 2019 men were responsible for 97% of all known active shooters. White men made up 57.7% of those men, and 55.4% of all shooters, which is disproportionately greater than their representation in homicide offenses and much closer to their proportion of the country.

Out of the 30 participants in this study, only one pushed back against the focus on white men as active shooters. Charles (80) argued that there is no difference between an active shooter

and a gang member who commits homicide. Specifically, he references shootings that happen regularly on the southside of Chicago, a largely Black community. Although Charles initially stated that he believed me to be correct about the type of shooter in question being mostly white men, he follows with,

there's an awful lot of violence that goes on. Just- what does Chicago have? Chicago has 20 people killed on a weekend and 60 or 70 injured on a weekend. They're not whites, mostly males, but they're Blacks. And that's New York. You don't read about that, you don't hear about it. ... So I- I don't.. I.. intuitively think that you're correct that its mostly males. I don't believe that you're correct that it's mostly whites that are doing it.

After reminding him that the topic in question was a specific type of shooting, Charles doubles down on violence committed by other racial groups. The following is an extended excerpt from that portion of the interview immediately following the previous quote:

Researcher: So, considering specifically shootings like Parkland and Las Vegas and there have been a few around DC and places like that. Specifically, that type of violence, that's where this racial component seems to come in. Um so that- that's kind of why I'm asking for this-

Charles: What's the diff- let me ask you, what's the difference between that type of violence and the violence that I just mentioned in Chicago or New York or Portland or.. a, any of those kind of situations. What- what- how do you classify the differences of violence?

Researcher: Well for mass shootings there's a fatality count but this is part of what I'm ask-

Charles: No I- but I'm just saying for those 20 odd people killed this weekend, this weekend and every weekend in Chicago with 50 or 60 injured. That's a mass shooting. Or mass *shootings*. What's the difference in that? [emphasis in original]

Researcher: What do you think? Why do you think they're si-

Charles: No, I don't think there's any difference. I think the difference is- is- is in what we- we explore. In our visceral reactions to them. If it's happening in my neighborhood or a neighborhood like mine, I

pay more attention to it. If it's happening in somebody else's neighborhood... . . . I don't pay much attention to them now. I don't.

Researcher: So you don't think there's a- a difference in what drives like, school shooters as compared to like, street shootings in Chicago. You think that they're largely driven by similar factors?

Charles: . . . the specific triggers may be different but the internal human reaction I think it quite the same. 'This is my only - this is the only way to get even. This is the only way I can rectify the situation.' Whatever that caused that situation 'this is the only way I can rectify it.'

Researcher: So, they are driven by very similar things? It's not - like you said, they're not different to you.

Charles: I think the internal reaction of the people.. is the same.

Charles becomes more agitated the more I try to clarify and redirect back to shootings like those in schools where I reference Parkland, FL and settings like the Las Vegas massacre. His reaction is, I believe, an example of one of the challenges that face those seeking to address active shootings when it comes to the identity of the shooters. The resistance of white people to discussing differences in violent behaviors when one form is more often committed by whites is one potentially one of the biggest barriers to understanding and preventing these crimes.

Given that the participants in this sample expressed feeling like white men have become social targets for all of society's problems, it is understandable that white men might react this way to questions positioning them as primary offenders of terrible crimes. Charles also makes important points about the way society responds to different types of violence and what types of violence is considered worthy of investigation. Active shootings nearly always make national news, but homicide in Chicago is rarely reported outside of that community which means fewer eyes and fewer resources are ultimately put towards helping a community in need. That said, the United States is a wealthy country that does not need to pick and choose which problems to

address. It is a false narrative that we can only deal with one social problem at a time. Homicide, gang violence, drug addiction and overdose, sex trafficking, and more are all types of crimes and social issues that are deeply important to study, understand, and work to reduce and prevent. Doing so does not mean that we need to ignore active shootings nor does the study and investigation of active shootings mean that other social problems are unimportant or ignored.

The only other participant to disagree with me did so in the opposite manner as Charles. Anthony (80) says that “it’s not mostly” but all the shootings of this nature are committed by white men. To create space for participants to disagree and to get their full opinion, like Anthony and Charles, I did not provide data with my question about white men active shooters. The question posed to the participants states “the majority of these shootings are committed by men and primarily by white men. Why do you think that is?” Of the 30 participants, three of them, two of the men and one of the women, teach or taught in public schools, where shootings are considered common enough to have preventative drills.

A schoolteacher from Vermont, Elias (35) says that he and his colleagues talk about school shootings with some regularity. Elias says about white male shooters,

if there's a school shooting, you can get away with assuming that that was a- a teenage, or a preteen boy. ... And at least.. for me as a teacher in my state, like, the school shooters always look like my male students. Like, I.. I wish we could just.. kinda pick people out and stop them before the bad thing happens but.. it.. seems to be white boys, so I don't know.. (laughs) you almost start to feel like it could be anybody and it could happen anywhere. And like, that's unsettling.

Being in a very white state, Elias is not the only one who is aware that his students look like the typical school shooter. He says, “I've heard teachers before look at each other and say like, ‘this one could be a shooter.’” Elias quickly clarifies that this is always said in a joking manner and

that if any teacher seriously believed their student would commit such a crime, they would report their concerns. But Elias and his colleagues see certain behaviors and,

we think like, 'you're just a little bit too comfortable mistreating people.' Those jokes are, in my experience, are always made about male students. Or at least I've - I don't even want to call them jokes because often teachers are horrified to say it, but those comments, um, are always made about male students. ... we've all had male students where we've been like.. 'keep an eye on that one' (chuckle) 'because, you know, he- he.. he feels like he could be dangerous.'

What Elias is describing is not funny and at no point did he make light of school shootings, but he is revealing how laughter and humor about the potential danger to his colleagues, himself, and their students can make it easier to manage. Elias is not the only person to laugh at what might seem odd moments in our conversation. Most of the participants laughed or chuckled talking about difficult topics like race and shootings.

Kathy (55) was a teacher when the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School occurred. Though she recognizes that such shootings must have occurred before then, she says it feels to her like they are more common. About the shooters, Kathy says that "we just expect it to be a white man" and that "you'll hear about a shooting and you're like 'oh I bet it's a white man.'" This conditioning is so strong she says that it does not surprise her to hear that white men are most of these offenders. Currently working as a teacher outside of K-12 schools with non-traditional students, the potential for active shooters in her work does not seem to impact her day-to-day the way it does for Elias, who frequently does active shooter drills.

One of the difficulties for teachers is preparedness. Elias says doing school shooter drills is stressful but also extremely important. As someone who "can kinda freeze up in stressful situations those drills are really important," but his current school is not as prepared as others he has worked in, and it worries him. While he wishes schools did not "have to be ready" for active

shooters, he does think they need to be. His students are overwhelmingly white, which statistically means his students are also more likely to be involved in a school shooting at some point. Despite knowing the potential danger and even identifying potentially violent students, it appears teachers and schools are struggling to understand these shooters like the rest of the country.

Facing Injustice: "This Is My Last Resort"

As the white men and women in this sample seek to explain what drives white men to commit active shootings, most participants spoke of some form of the violence as a last resort to seeking justice for a perceived wrong combined with previously discussed components of masculinity. Nineteen of the 30 participants described shooters as seeking some kind of justice and 17 believed there was something of a "last resort" in the shooter's minds.

Trevor says that he believes shooters "perceived they had no other alternatives" to "get even" or "rectify the situation," regardless of what specific trigger or situation they are reacting to. He says that

the more opportunities people have.. the less violent I think they'll become. The fewer opportunities, you cage an animal, that animal is- is uptight, he's fighting for survival, or he thinks he's fighting for survival whether he is or isn't. Pick up a puppy, a little kitty cat, and you hold them, and they're gonna fight to get out of your hand. They don't know you're not gonna hurt them, they think you are. So if you- if you constrain 'em if you, if.. the opportunities aren't there, that's going to lead to physical action.

Trever references the song "Last Resort" by the band Papa Roach, and communicates some of the lyrics. Released in 2000, the song opens as follows:

Cut my life into pieces
This is my last resort
Suffocation, no breathing

Don't give a fuck if I cut my arm bleeding
This is my last resort

Though he says it does not make sense to him as someone who is very non-violent, he describes violence as a means for people who feel they have no other voice to be heard.

Similarly, Felix presents shootings as a last resort for people who are in pain. For him, the choice to commit a shooting is a constrained choice. He says,

It's still a choice, in one sense, but.. they can't see that sesh-second option, or there is no way they could take that second option due to, like the trauma they experienced as a kid or a mental health issue they've had since they were born.

Though technically, the shooting is decision is a choice they made, choosing deviancy as a way of coping with strain, some choices are constrained in the individual's mind such that they do not see an alternative. Healthy coping like seeking help from a guidance counselor, therapist, friend, or family member is available to everyone but not everyone may see that option.

A last resort means to resolving an injustice overlap for some participants with issues like bullying or job loss motivate these incidents, especially when it comes to explaining school shooters. For example, Elias says "I think a lot of these kids have just been singled out and bullied for so long that they feel that the only way they have of.. retaliating" and that "they decide that their only option is to come to school with a gun." Though Elias does not blame bullying per se, bullying may drive someone to seek justice for the way they have been treated. Being bullied and "singled out" to the point of isolation are strains that limit healthy coping under GST as the individuals would not have friends or trusted adults to get help from.

Theodore theorizes that school shooters "feel that that's the only resort because nobody else will help them," but attributes shootings in public spaces to adults with mental illnesses. About school shooters, he questions "are they truly mentally ill like these guys who just..

randomly start shootin'?" But for Elias, seeking justice through a last resort of violence feels like the "common link" between school shooters and other active shooters, saying that

what justice means to an angry teenage kid.. can be different than what justice means to, um, an adult who feels like their country and their race is under threat. ... But I do think in both cases they probably feel righteous. They probably feel like they're enacting justice.

Elias believes that seeking justice makes violence even more appealing than it might have been already. He says that if one fights "against injustice, then it's not violence, it's courage. Right? It's not violence, it's bravery. It's justice, it's- it's- it's the voice of the people." Fighting against injustice, real or perceived, gives people meaning from this perspective. Instead of victims, they become heroes. Likewise, William says that focusing on anger or if "you're focused on this sense of resentment and you're focused on retaliation, you're focused on revenge - those are very different emotions, right? Those are, you gotta go out and exact justice, right?" William and Elias frame revenge and justice seeking as a mental exercise one goes through to empower themselves. William calls it a "mental trap" people can fall into when they fail to see a way out of a bad situation.

Likewise, Jake (25) argues shootings come down to how people cope with strain. He says, "I think there's probably no outlet." The shooter may not see an alternative even if one is technically available. Alternatives to violence, healthy ways of coping with strain, are only available if someone has been taught them. Brian (30) describes shooters as individuals

who have been hurt so much or.. maybe abused or.. bullied their whole lives or just people who are coming from a place..within themselves of just.. anger and frustration and maybe hate who, you know, the.. the whole world has never shown them kindness and their way of coping with that is lashing out.. with the same violence that they experienced

Similarly, Mitch (32) and Andrea (48) describe shooters as being angry, desperate, and hopeless. They connect these individuals to those who commit suicide. Among active shooters between 2000 and 2019, 35.1% took their own lives (see Chapter II, Table 1). Andrea says:

when you start to not care about yourself, it's really easy not to care about other people. So.. if you're at a point where you're like, 'I don't have anything left to live [for], I'll go shoot twelve kids in my high school' and what do you have to lose? You already feel like you've lost everything.

And Mitch echoes

the active shooter doesn't see any end in sight. But I think there's you know, I forget who said this.. but the people that would jump off bridges to kill themselves always found out about halfway through like, halfway down they were like, 'maybe this isn't so bad,' but by then it's too late. And I think a lot of this is- I think a lot of its hopelessness and desperation. They don't.. they don't see getting better. And nothing indicates that it should, right?

He describes these individuals as being so angry and hopeless that they “just wanna see the world burn.” Andrea and Mitch describe shooters as being willing to target anyone they come across because they want to take their pain out on those they perceive to have hurt them. The difference between them and someone who commits suicide appears to simply be the willingness to use violence against others, something the participants throughout this study describe men being socialized to. Even if they reject certain aspects of masculinity, men know that they can always enact and utilize hegemonic norms for their benefit, including physical aggression and violence. (Sumeru 2020; Messerschmidt 2014; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 1993; Connell 1987). Although none of the participants condone the actions of shooters in any way, there is a kind of empowerment they communicate through using violence as grievance management.

White Women on White Men Shooters

Although the women's perspectives on shooter motivations overlap with the men's perspectives frequently, the women present an alternative perspective on white men as shooters as the feminine counterpart of white masculinity. None of the women in the sample were surprised to learn that white men are responsible for most active shootings. Like some others, Mikayla (24) brought up white men shooters before the question about them in the interview script. When asked why she believes active shooters in commit these crimes she said,

So at least from my understanding, I think a lot of those kinds of um shootings tend to be white men. At least the school shootings tend to be. Um and so.. there was this New York Times article um, that I have thought about for *years*. Um, it's-it's called "The Boys are not All Right" and it was like my first like, oh. Hm.. there's actually, there's a pattern here. And there's a reason here. ... in my opinion, I think a lot of the school shootings tend to be from men who want to show that they're strong. And show that they're powerful. I think that a lot the men who are the perpetrators of these violent uh, shootings, tend to be bullied in school or at, kind of like the bottom of the food chain. They aren't super popular, they don't have a lot of friends. And you know, as a man.. not being at the top and not having all of those friends and- and being seen as a popular person, it- you know, is.. it runs a f- against the expectation that you are those things and that you are at the top and so, what- how can you then show that you are powerful and that you have this under control? Well, have a gun. It's scary. And it causes people to look at you and.. and.. fear you. And I think that if men don't feel like a little feared, then they have to do something to show it. [emphasis in original]

Mikayla began thinking more deeply about the way race and gender intersects to explain violence after reading that article. Identifying common themes described previously by the participants of male dominance and leadership, Mikayla argues that white men who fail to achieve these expectations are under unique pressure to assert themselves as dominant. Wielding a gun establishes individuals as the "top of the food chain." From a certain perspective, a gun is a quick fix for those who feel they are stuck at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The power

guns give the wielder, their ability to control life and death, repositions them as the most dominant individual in any social setting.

For Lollipop (31), the expectations for dominance among white men that come from each other, and media messaging encourage shootings. She argues men are emboldened through cultural messages of heroism:

I don't think it's impossible but I think it's very unlikely that we would see a woman do like a mass shooting like- like that we've seen. I don't think women are emboldened by their families and society and their friends in the way that young men are to commit stuff like this. ... men, more than anybody else because they're overrepresented in media, feel that they are very special. Um, the way that they are like, 'I'm Harry Potter' or 'I'm Frodo' or - you could just like- any of that "I'm the misunderstood" - or like even better would be, 'oh like I'm the misunderstood, nerdy guy in school that's - that the girl turns down but I'm gonna get her in the end' and I feel like that stuff is like what- like if I think about a mass shooter I think about like a young, scrawny, white guy who has isolated himself.. um based on his ideas of like, who he is as like this, you know.. he thinks he's a protagonist and that the world is a movie or a video game.

Clarifying that she is not blaming video games or movies directly, Lollipop believes that lonely young men isolate and may begin to view themselves similarly to a character they play in video games or idealize in movies. The amount of underdog stories where the hero uses violence to rectify wrongs against them and establish themselves as dominant and righteous might in some ways legitimate their own aggression as an appropriate method of solving their problems.

Echoing Lollipop's thoughts on how men are emboldened in U.S. society to engage in violence, Ava (24) says

I think that there is privilege involved and maybe some of those men feel invincible. Maybe they feel like they *can* get away with something like that. Um.. maybe they don't have a fear of law-enforcement the way that let's say a Black man would have. ... they might feel like society's been on their side, even if it's like a subconscious thought. They can take power- they can take it.. like

and on themselves to maybe make a solution to their issue. They can exercise their power because they have power. [emphasis in original]

Particularly in terms of gun violence, whites historically have been the ones to wield this power freely (Anderson 2021) and it is expected of men to use or at least be willing to use violence as a part of hegemonic masculine norms (Sumeru 2020). Lollipop previously discussed men's violence as rewarded. About shootings, she reframes the question 'why are white men committing mass shootings?' saying, "Why would that person not do it?" For her, violence is integral to men's gender role. As a legitimate means of proving one's masculinity, all men can use violence to assert masculinity, and are typically rewarded when they do so.

Using aggressive displays of masculinity including violence to take back power, to take back masculinity, is echoed in the literature on male violence as well as in these interviews (Harsin 2021; Sumeru 2020; Stroud 2012; Amato 2012; Jakupcak et al. 2005). Unlike some of the others discussed, Martha (66) had not previously thought about why white men are the most common active shooters. She says,

Martha: a lot of them are white men and.. ah who knows? That I cannot answer you. I do not know. I don't know why white men.. are feeling emasculated (chuckle) enough to.. to uh.. feel as though they have to go in and- and shoot a whole bunch of people. That I do not know.

Researcher: Do you think that's a way of reclaiming masculinity?

Martha: Uh, that was the only thing that came into my mind in thinking about it, you know? It's like, uh.. in-and I don't know - I cannot think why they would feel though they were emasculated. It- that doesn't make sense to me.

Though she claims that it does not make sense that men would feel the need to compensate for feeling emasculated, it was the first and only thing that came to her mind when considering why active shooters are most often white men. Perhaps masculinity and crime are so interwoven in

our society that for women like Martha, the only thing that she can connect to extreme violence is masculinity. As a woman, and an outsider to masculinity, Martha sees men benefit from privilege even as some men in the sample express feeling persecuted for their gender. For individuals like her, it is difficult to understand why men might feel emasculated even if they recognize that men are facing difficult societal expectations.

Though GST is a criminological theory that rarely appears outside of academia, Catherine (60), like some of the men, provides a strain-based argument for violence among men without using the language of GST. Echoing Agnew (2001), Catherine says that “I don’t think two or three things going on is gonna make *anyone* snap like that. It’s an ongoing, long-term problem” [emphasis in original]. Presenting stressors or strains that build up over many years as likely to cause these violent reactions Catherine describes the same mechanism to violence predicted by GST. Compounded strains over time can produce deviant coping, especially when non-violent or non-deviant means of coping or relieving the negative emotions from strain are not available.

When asked about white men specifically, she says that she thinks active shooters are more middle-class people. So I don’t know if it’s um, you know they kinda they’re expecting for things to be better than they are and so it’s part of what makes them angry. And men of color aren’t in that situation but that’s just a guess and probably classist.

Acknowledging that her views are possibly classist, or even based in racial stereotypes, Catherine addresses a reality of the United States: whites are more likely to be middle class than people of color (Asante-Muhammed et al. 2016). Whites are therefore most likely to remain middle class or move up through the class system. As upward class mobility has become harder to achieve in the last few decades, whites are more likely to experience strain resulting from the failure to achieve better financial positions than their parents compared to other racial groups.

Violence against a society that they perceived to have wronged them is one possible avenue for rectifying their feelings about this economic situation and for men, doubles as a means of reestablishing masculinity they may feel they have lost for failing to achieve financial status and the breadwinner ideal. Andrea (48) says the following about shooters:

generally they're outcasts. You don't see the- the guy whose the star football player whose datin' the high school cheerleader whose parents have tons of money and who went to, you know, Italy for vacation, shootin' up schools. I haven't seen a single one of those. You see the kid that- that doesn't have a ton of friends. That um.. doesn't feel valued, doesn't feel heard. You know they- they have a lot of similar issues. So.. I- and I think it- it does, I think, it comes back to.. 'I don't feel valued and- and how do I - How do I get there?'

Though Andrea couches her argument in young shooters being outcasts and wanting to feel valued in a manner that is seemingly gender-neutral, the things she describes as valuable lean towards the masculine achievements, particularly of the white, middle class ideal: financially well off through their parent's income, the star football player is physically dominant, having lots of friends makes a person socially dominant over someone who has few or none, and heterosexuality is performed through dating a cheerleader. Of course, these are merely examples of behaviors that function as masculine achievements. She uses "guys" at first instead of a gender-neutral term and does not say shooters want to be popular or athletic generally but specifies actions that are part of a gendered, masculine performance.

The young man who commits an active shooting, as described by the men and women in this sample, appears to be concerned about feeling valued as a man, not as a person generally. Andrea expresses concerns about how society treats men when talking about shootings. She says typically conversations about shootings "comes back to the whole, are we supporting guys enough? Are we treating them like valuable people with valuable feelings and valuable

opinions?” Masculinity, it’s norms and goals, not necessarily men, are central to understanding these acts of violence for most of the women and many men. There was no question among the women in this sample that white men, commit most active shootings, and all the women discuss masculinity and what it means to be a man when trying to explain why they believe these shooters are who they are and why they did what they did.

Aggrieved White Men

The white men in the sample provided a variety of explanations for why white men might be more likely to commit active shootings compared to other men. Age did not influence these explanations nor did political leaning. Although neither Charles nor Anthony, both 80, provided an explanation as to why white men are more likely to commit such acts, they disagreed entirely on whether it was true that white men commit these acts.

Trevor (38) said he had no idea why white men are more likely to commit active shootings though he theorized that men generally might be more susceptible to committing shootings because they generally access mental health supports. 35-year-old, Rick also did not have an explanation for why white men commit more active shootings aside from potentially having greater access to firearms. Hooker (59) had not considered that active shooters are mostly white before and, similarly, says “I couldn’t even.. try to guess ... I couldn’t tell ya. Don’t even have an opinion on it.” Most of the men and women in the sample did have some ideas about why white men are the most likely to commit active shooters. As white men, the men’s perspectives are incredibly important to understanding this type of violence from the inside.

Thirteen of the twenty men in the sample discuss masculinity explicitly and nine of those identify the privileges white men have benefitted from for centuries as potential motivating

factors for active shooting. The idea that lost privilege is tied to violence is the basis for the theory of aggrieved entitlement, where feeling entitled to certain privileges but being denied them fosters anger (Kimmel 2014). White men in this sample describe white male shooters as entitled to violence through their identity and that they are exposed and reacting to perceived or real losses.

Steven (28) describes an idealized manhood he believes these shooters adhere to; a manhood constructed around physical defense of home, country, and way of life. The preservation of their way of life is so important to them that “they are willing to engage in violence to prevent it changing” and that those who want change are “worthy of violence.” Perceived or real changes to the American way of life, the white, suburban American Dream lifestyle, are a white strain. White men, who constructed the American way of life and believe the American Dream should be within their reach are the most likely to feel this kind of strain. This strain manifests as aggrieved entitlement, where white men fail to achieve the lives they believe they are entitled to and were promised by society.

The privilege associated with being white men is hard thing to lose: employer preference, social rewards, and political power among others. Jeffery argues that these shootings are motivated by an

overwhelming sense of privilege and where that leads you to go in your mind, right? ... there's got to have been a lot of entitlement in their thinking. Uh, you know, 'I'm entitled to this and I'm not getting it' or 'I'm entitled.. to this and therefore I should be able to just.. go do what I want' I don't- I don't know. I think it's more.. I, I think the pathology ha-goes something like, you know, 'I'm entitled, I'm privileged.. you know, but maybe I haven't experienced the kind of.. privilege that I think I'm entitled to' right? 'And so I'm going to therefore commit backlash.'

The ways that white men have benefited from their privileged race and gender identities can make them feel entitled to continued privileges, even as society shifts around them. Especially for those men who do not occupy especially privileged or empowered positions in society, men who are just doing as they have been told they should, raising a family and working hard, can easily feel unjustly targeted as privileged and oppressive to others.

Michael Kimmel's (2014) study of white men in Men's Rights groups finds that these men, largely white men, feel angry towards society generally because they feel they have done everything they were told to do. They got married, had kids, worked hard to support them, and still found themselves getting divorced, paying alimony and/or child support, not seeing their children as much as they would like, and/or having problems keeping a job. These issues they face are very real and difficult to manage. However, instead of seeing these problems as structural issues, like changes in a globalized economy, they believe they are under attack as white men (Kimmel 2014; Coston and Kimmel 2013). The men in this sample describe similar attitudes and beliefs, either their own or from men they know, even historical precedent.

Arnie (33) makes the same argument using historical power dynamics. He argues that how those in power actively oppress disadvantaged groups directly applies to white men shooters. He describes some men he knows personally as being afraid of changes occurring around the country. They are concerned about immigrant groups they believe are coming to take something from them, "whatever it is" he says, and feel the government is overtaxing them. To Arnie, what he calls a perceived attitude of "'wait a minute, I could lose some power in this moment'" seems persistent, and those experiencing that strain punch down the social strata at those with less power than themselves. This serves to help them hold on to what power they do have by limiting the access of others. Similarly, Elias, who say a school shooter is typically "an

angry kid who has an easy access to a firearm” with a poorly developed frontal lobe who want revenge or justice, he also acknowledges the role that whiteness and privilege may play. He thinks that for those shooters who are not in schools:

it's a small minority.. but like.. there's 330 million people in our country and a small minority is still a lot of people, who want to um.. fight. And I feel like there's - they feel like there's something worth fighting for, some.. I don't know, the future of our country is at stake. ... they tend to target people who don't look like them.

Seeking justice is the common thread for Elias. He says,

I think what justice means to an angry teenage kid.. can be different than what justice means to, um, an adult who feels like their country and their race is under threat.

Both the young man in the school and the adult man in public think they are rectifying a wrong, fighting injustice. That injustice, real or perceived, creates strain on the individual. The more injustice, the more strain they feel, the less they are capable of coping with it under General Strain Theory (GST). This is a common theme among the men in this sample. Fifteen of the twenty men in the sample discussed themes relating to justice, or injustice, surrounding active shootings.

GST predicts that failing to achieve masculinity goals are of particular importance to strains resulting deviant or violent coping compared to goals associated with femininity or that are not linked to gender² (Agnew 2001). Discussing the role of masculinity in violent behavior, John Doe (20) says,

I think that.. like, stressors that um.. kinda like poke and prod at a man's masculinity actually- or could definitely be um, uh, to a great on-switch for violence. ... each of these, you know, white men who can be very accurately labelled as domestic terrorists um.. they feel that probably some of their.. uh privilege was

² I have previously presented monetary and autonomy goals, which Agnew (2001) does not assign to gender, as intimately tied to masculinity.

stripped from them ... they could rationalize it was- just by not realizing that it was their privilege that was stripped from them. They just think it's an aspect of their life or their freedom that's being stripped from them

John Doe describes the same thing Kimmel (2014) identifies about aggrieved entitlement. These men feel that their masculinity is under attack such that they are losing cultural ground and social status. Seemingly, they convince themselves that their existence is threatened, and they need to rectify their situation by targeting those responsible. All people who are not them or other white men who suffer the same losses, are responsible for their pain.

Frederick (26) describes how this happens from his perspective. He believes people who commit these shootings think that "they're helping someone whether it be themselves or their community or whatever they believe to be their community." He says he thinks that it is true, but he also hopes it is. It is easier for him to understand the harm they caused if they did not do it for selfish reasons. He says that he believes that they follow "a bad moral philosophy" but believe that "the ends justified the means." For Frederick, being a white man is an integral part of this.

He thinks generally these shooters

are part of a group that emphasizes white men and their presence and importance and the necessity of aggression. I think, the group they're part of really forces, or.. I guess emphasizes is the right word - the importance of white men and what they do. Um.. and then they are fed lies and misled.. by the group of people they've surrounded themselves, into believing that what they are doing is both possible and right to do. ... that person, the perpetrator, would then take in these lies and believe, wrongly, that the only way to help people, or to help the people they care about is.. to shoot a bunch of people.

Not denying that white men have difficulties, previously having said that he knows plenty of white men whose lives have not been easy, Frederick describes the way that whiteness and white masculinity are treated by some other groups as harmful. Feeling like a target could drive them

to seek out other white men who validate their feelings and redirect their frustration and anger towards others.

The emphasis of hegemonic masculinity on negative traits, like dominance and aggression, and how whiteness and white men are prioritized over other groups can persuade disaffected white men that violence is a means of handling their problems. Baked into their identity as men is physical dominance over others. Studies of white men provide support for this argument, finding men in extremist groups, like white supremacist organizations, are manipulated through real pain and strains they experience in their lives, and politically mobilized using their belief that men's status loss at the hands of women and minorities has caused the harms they have experienced (Coston and Kimmel 2013; Kimmel 2014; Johnson 2018). Felix (33) claims that this idea that white men are victims is "mistaken oppression" and extends this belief to white male shooters. He argues that they are victims of a false narrative, motivated by,

a feeling.. a mistaken sense of.. repression- of oppression. You know? Um.. the Elliot Roger kid really seemed to feel like he, he was being oppressed. Um..the- the- the guy um... who shot up a mosque in New Zealand felt like he was – his- his.. identity group of white men were under threat from- from Muslim[s].

Combined with a sense of entitlement, as described by Jeffery (63),

this whole entitlement privilege thing, you know. If you don't, you know, it's like.. You're entitled to this, you should do what you need to do to get it, you know, don't let somebody take it away from you

James (28) brings together these arguments, claiming white supremacy, not just white identity, plays a role in these shootings. Research finds white supremacist groups promote white masculinity and the disaffected white male (Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Ferber 2000) in the way Frederick mentioned and feel entitled, through the color of their skin, to the subjugation through violence of other demographic groups. Similarly, James argues

I think white supremacy and... toxic masculinity go hand in hand. But we have.. we have men that can't quite cope with the idea. They won't recognize their white male privilege.. and they certainly don't believe it exists. But at the same time, they're doing a lot to stop... anything from, from harming their ability to- to have and harness that power.

Though it is difficult to know what many mass shooters were motivated by specifically, as a number die during their crime, there have been a few clearly motivated by white supremacist ideology, including the shooting at the Holocaust Museum in 2009, a Jewish Community Center in Kansas in 2014, and the Tree of Life Synagogue attack in 2018. Some of the shooters were decidedly not motivated by white supremacy. For example, though Felix may be correct that Elliot Rodger felt oppressed, the news articles analyzed for this study indicates that oppression would have stemmed from a lack of sexual achievement, not from a perceived white racial oppression.

As discussed, white masculinity is hegemonic in our society and has been since the country was founded by white men, largely on the backs of Black and Indigenous people. Today, society is reckoning with the way racial privilege affects white populations and disadvantage racial minorities at the same time as feminism resurged in a fourth wave. The fourth wave is defined by the use of technology to build stronger female-to-female relationships, communities, and a broader reach for their messages that generally target patriarchy (Zimmerman 2017). Though patriarchy is a system which holds up men above others, it is not men themselves that are the targets of these feminist waves. However, that nuance is easy to lose in the world of social media where quips and comebacks are favored over open dialogue and men can feel like they are being treated as the problem instead of part of the solution.

This may be in part why many of the men in the sample reported feeling like others and at times themselves feel under attack as men in Chapter IV, a topic that some returned to when

asked about shootings. Mitch (32) and William (54) argued that there is likely a component of targeted white masculinity to these shootings. Mitch describes the reactions on the part of men to perceived attacks on masculinity as a charged rhetoric, what he calls a “from my cold dead hands” type of ideology. From his perspective he sees these men as worrying

about losing their stake in dominance. I r- I think that’s what it seems to come back to and it’s any way we can.. short change other ethnic groups and genders, right? I think.. um.. never blatantly racist, right? Never the ‘n’ word, never uh, a slur. Always cautious about them moving into their territory. ... These guys are- they are concerned about um.. their way of life as they understand it.

He knows men with these beliefs and says that they express being willing to fight to preserve their way of life, their white way of life. For Mitch, it is a very real possibility that those men will act on those threats. He says,

those are the people I worry about, you know, God forbid they ever- if there’s ever actually like a real or perceived threat in the area, like I know that they’re gonna be on the news.

William echoes Mitch that white men feeling targeted is likely a cause behind these actions and further argues that it is the emasculation of men that causes a lot of the problems generally. He says “it’s no secret that it’s gonna be males” when asked about white men shooters and that men are

gonna act out violently cause that’s what males do so you should really pay attention to that. And you don’t have t- you don’t have to, you know.. demasculate them. You have to show them what.. good, healthy masculine models look like, and what they do and, you know.

Ultimately, William argues that as a society, people need to take better care of each other. When men are pushed, he says violence is the expected outcome. Like Theodore’s (63) description of

the middle-class white men being pushed and taking up arms against intrusion, William describes what he sees as white men being targeted and emasculated, which fosters violence:

if men.. feel alienated, isolated, targeted, right? If white guys start embracing that.. type of narrative and so forth, especially if they truly, honestly feel it.. and-and perhaps even a- have justification for it in their own lives, you know, that's not healthy ... men.. you know, especially if they're under stress- a lot of stress, or they're.. they feel extremely mistreated or.. (sighs).. I don't say this lightly- they're not like exactly.. you know (sighs) thriving in other areas either (chuckle) you know? Um it-it's easy for them to justify violence, right? How do you get back at people? Well, you know, if you don't have the means you're not gonna sue 'em, right? And.. if you feel like your voice isn't going to be heard.. that's closed off and if you're.. you know, sort of feeling like you're being singled out anyway, well that just increases alienation, right? Uh.. so you, you know.. and that's not an excuse, trust me, it-it's like you can see how perhaps some of 'em think like, well if the last option here, right? It is.. violence.

The combination of being under a lot of strain and not having resources to cope with those strains in a healthy way leaves violence as a justifiable means of rectifying a perceived or real harm. William is describing General Strain Theory (GST) in different words: masculine goals and expectations that are not met puts pressure on men, causes anger, frustration, and other negative emotion. Without a healthy way to release those emotions, react in violence. He goes on to explain that white men are socialized to view and use violence as a coping mechanism. While most white men, like any other group, are nonviolent, he says:

White guys pretty much control violence. Um.. and they're not controlled by it. And.. .. go to some degree to regulate it, you know? Um but - but there are, you know, like it- in any other group, there are people that are predisposed to it, there are people that are like little ticking time bombs, you know?

Like Theodore's earlier comments about white men being willing, able, and just needing enough of a push on their "fragile egos" to commit violence, William and Mitch talk about white men like they are dormant volcanoes whose potential for explosion or violence is generally

unquestioned. William claims white men “control violence” and all the men in this sample speak about white men’s violence as an inevitability. White men are allowed and expected to be violent. They are socialized to believe that violence is their right, particularly in the face of a threat. Steven notes how media contributes to this message, Arnie the ways in which history develop and mythologizes this norm, and many others describe a societal narrative where white men are heroes and protectors of their communities and country.

Of course, though white men may in many ways control violence, violence is committed by all types of people. Violence is committed by all groups in our society at varying rates, but white men are uniquely likely to commit active shootings (see Chapter II) and have historically used violence to preserve their social position (Anderson 2021; Onwuachi-Willig 2019; Messerschmidt 2014; Nevels 2012). James describes this as a “toxic combination of- of fear, hate, and guns.” The combination of lost privileges, fear and hate, and perceived injustices are woven together by the men in the sample to explain white men’s shootings as motivated by race in a way that is not part of the identity of men of color.

Discussion

Hegemonic masculine norms of social and physical dominance and leadership, breadwinner ideology and patriarchy, and emotional suppression all come up for the men and women in this sample when seeking to explain white men shooters. As with conversations about men’s violence, norms around men’s emotions take a lead among the sample as particularly harmful and likely to result in violence through the way men are taught and expected to maintain emotional control and solve problems independently. When all other forms of help seeking have failed them or been unavailable to them within the context of masculinity, the participants

believe white men are conditioned to resort to violence. This violence is wielded to make others submit to their authority, reassert white men's hegemony, and, in their minds, fight against societal injustices they perceive to have caused their pain.

Many of the participants said or alluded to the belief that men are less likely to seek mental health treatment, meaning men generally have fewer healthy coping mechanisms to deal with strain than women. At the same time, the participants present shooters as people who feel they have no other option than violence to manage their pain, framing healthy coping mechanisms as generally unavailable, or perceived to be unavailable, to those individuals. Though GST argues that masculine goals are of particular importance to deviant coping, there is no explanation as to why that is the case (Agnew 2001). I argue masculinity goals are important to deviant coping because masculinity is characterized by autonomy and emotional repression, which limit admitting the need for and ability to seek external help. In this way, masculinity itself produces deviant and potentially violent behavior, consistent with arguments that masculinity is achieved through violence in situations where other forms of dominance are not available (Messerschmidt 1993, 2014; Sumeru 2020). Achieving masculinity as an underdog, perhaps someone with anxiety or who struggles with social activities, is more difficult than for other men who have a leg up on them through their life circumstances, like wealth or good looks and popularity. These men who feel emasculated or that they have not achieved their expected masculine presentation can always utilize violence to reestablish their masculinity, and if physical size or strength is limiting, white men especially have been socialized that bringing a gun will work.

Studies of firearms find that men use weapons to compensate for lost masculinity (Scaptura and Boyle 2022; McDermott et al. 2021; Stroud 2012), that violence is a means of

proving their masculinity, especially when their gender performance is being questioned (Schermerhorn and Vescio 2021; Sumeru 2020; Smith et al. 2015; Messerschmidt 2014; Galligher and Dominic 2011; Kupers 2005; Messerschmidt 1993). Threats to masculinity, masculine strains under GST, are especially likely to result in deviant coping, like violence (Agnew 2001). Participants, average U.S. citizens, may not often consider the ways men and women perform gender but are entrenched in the systems and socialized to the ways in which gender is performed and achieved.

Military, macho men, and firearms certainly play into the masculine expectations and hegemonic ideals discussed in Chapter III like social and physical dominance over others. Like Mikayla says “you are at the top and.. everybody else is beneath you” when bringing a gun somewhere like a school because it that person “the only one there with the thing that determines life or death.” As some participants mention, those life-or-death instruments that create this power dynamic are easy to get, making problem solving through deadly violence or the threat of deadly violence a realistic avenue for most men.

Though most men will not commit gun violence or use guns to harm others intentionally, the number of guns in the country makes it relatively easy to obtain one if motivated. Pew Research Group reports that 40% of the country has a gun in their home, and those guns are owned mostly by men (36%) over women (22%). Most gun owners are also white. Proportionally, more white homes (47%) have a gun in the residence and 36% of whites own guns personally compared to 37% of Black homes and 24% Black gun owners³ (Schaeffer 2021). People of color certainly have guns and access to guns, but white homes have significantly more

³ Black respondents are traditionally less trusting of research, academics, and scientists so there is likely some amount of underreporting occurring.

guns, meaning white men have greater access to firearms compared to other demographic groups. At the same time, whites perceive gun violence as less of an issue than people of color. Only 39% of whites believe gun violence is a very big problem compared to 82% of Blacks and 58% of Hispanics (ibid). Arnie mentioned that the easy access of firearms may make it more likely for someone to wield the weapons with less caution and perhaps there is some support for this. If whites perceive guns as less of a problem when it comes to violence, perhaps they take gun safety less seriously, making access easier for those with bad intentions or emotionally frustrated teenagers in their homes.

Additionally, there is emerging evidence that men's conformity to masculine norms of violence, dominance over women, and risk-taking are associated with gun ownership (McDermott et al. 2021). Guns and masculinity have been linked together throughout research on gender, gun ownership, and attitudes towards guns (Scaptura and Boyle 2022; McDermott et al. 2021; Hayes et al. 2021; Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2020; Witkowski 2020; Stroud 2012). Men use guns to compensate for lost physical prowess, either through accidents or aging, to protect women and children, and to defend against dangerous others, typically people of color (Stroud 2012). White men who are concerned about their position as men are more likely than other men, including other white men, to respond aggressively to perceived threats. These same men also perceive guns as an attractive means with which to respond to these threats (Scaptura and Boyle 2022). Guns provide users with power over life and death, making them the most powerful person in the room. For men who feel they are powerless or need power when threatened with societal change, carrying a gun compensates perceived lost status, privilege, and power.

Further, Cassino and Besen-Cassino (2020) find that men who score higher on sexism scales support more gun access and states with higher male unemployment have higher gun sales. The authors explain:

When some men are unable to fulfill the demands of hegemonic masculinities because of loss of income or some other perceived deficiency, they invent a perceived threat in order to justify their role as a protector and gun owner. As such, when economic conditions or other factors lead more men to be unable to meet the demands of hegemonic masculinities, they double down on other masculinities that they are better able to attain, leading to increased gun purchases. (Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2020: 20)

Job loss is of course a very real threat but reactions to that threat are not equal across identities. The authors find gun sales increased in states where married men, but not married women, had higher unemployment levels (Cassino and Besen-Cassino 2020). For men, whose societal expectations include being a family breadwinner and having career success, unemployment is a huge blow to their masculine achievements. White men, for whom the breadwinner ideal was always the most realistic will arguably react more intensely to this kind of threat.

Finding that white men are more reactive to threats to their masculine status, Scaptura and Boyle (2022) argue that "not only are white men who face economic losses susceptible to threats, but white men who are economically privileged may have high levels of stress when hierarchies are seen as unstable" (359). With more to lose, threats to status and privilege are felt more intensely than among those who never had the same perceived advantages or status. White men as a group have the most to lose as society pushes slowly toward race and gender equality. The most to lose with relatively easy access to firearms, as Lollipop said, "I'm surprised there aren't more".

VI. CONCLUSION

Active Shooting Incidents and Offenders

The first part of this study in Chapter II finds most active shootings in the United States are committed by whites (57%) between 2000 and 2019. This is statistically greater than their commission of homicides during the same period and relatively proportionate to their representation in the population, using 2020 Census data and 2010-2019 Census estimates. Further, white men are responsible for 98.8% shootings committed by white Americans, 55.4% of all shootings in this time. Clearly, white men are responsible for active shootings in a manner that is uncharacteristic compared to other kinds of murder.

Many of the participants in the latter part of the study were not surprised that white men commit most active shootings but had not known or considered the whiteness of shooters before. This is unsurprising, as analysis in Chapter II also revealed that the race of shooters continues to be of importance for media coverage when the shooters are Asian, Middle Eastern or Other. White, Black, and Latinx shooters are far less likely to be racially identified in media stories which could contribute to the overall lack of race data available on shooters.

Shooters and Mental Health.

Though the interview participants initially bring up issues of mental health and gun access to explain active shootings, few of the active shooters had a reported mental health diagnosis, though this certainly begets additional research. The measure of mental health is one of the limitations of this study, based on two articles per shooter that were analyzed for additional information like mental health. This resulted in just over 600 articles which is a strength of the study, as it covers the entire population of active shootings between 2000 and 2019. It is very possible that some shooters had or have diagnosable mental illnesses that they

did not seek help for. Of course, as many of the shooters died during the incident, it would not be possible to post-shooting evaluate them for their mental health status.

It is also possible that some shooters had diagnosed mental health disorders prior to the shooting that were not reported, despite the media attention given to mental health in these incidents. Mental health was questioned in media articles pertaining to 68.39% of the shooters but an official diagnosis was only reported for 8.85% of shooters. This reflects arguments in prior research that the media speculates about mental health as a scapegoat for these crimes without any real evidence (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). However, given the scope of this data was broad and there is likely error in these values, further, in-depth analysis of shooter mental health is an appropriate and welcome avenue for future research.

Shooters and Guns.

Despite media and political narratives of certain guns, like semi-automatic rifles, causing these incidents through their capability for causing harm (Moore 2018), most active shooters between 2000 and 2019 used handguns (63.91%). A person's ability to commit a shooting with mass casualties is not dependent on access to a semi-automatic or automatic rifle, despite the ability of such weapons to fire more rounds of ammunition more quickly.

Chapter II confirmed prior accounts of shooter demographics based on less accurate definitions. Based on the highly variable statistics across shooting categories, shooter demographic identity is the most reliable characteristic we have to understand and possibly predict these incidents. Of course, this is not to say that white men should be preemptively assumed to commit horrible acts of violence. However, understanding white men's expectations and strains that are unique to them should help us understand why these shooters did something so incomprehensible.

White Men and Masculinity

John Doe said early on in his interview that it is not “easy being a man but it’s definitely not nearly as hard as some people make it out to be.” This quote sums up many of the participants’ responses to the expectations white men face today. The participants describe white men as being under a unique set of pressures from society and each other to achieve an antiquated ideal masculine presentation. Difficult, stressful, and at times harmful, these expectations are unique to white men in that they combine hegemonic masculine norms with balancing new social dynamics set forth by other demographic groups. At the same time, white men continue to sit atop the social hierarchy, benefitting from both race- and gender-based privileges society bestows on them.

These privileges have caused other groups to take a critical look at whiteness and masculinity in recent years, fostering aggrieved entitlement in many white men (Kimmel 2014). As other groups seek to equal the social playing field, white men feel under attack and any lost privilege, however small, is upsetting. Working hard to try to achieve the expectations laid out for them, these men feel they are under attack for doing what is expected from them. The expectations of hegemonic masculinity tell men to be independent, socially and physically dominant, to be heterosexual and create families that they provide for financially, and to be emotionally controlled. To achieve these things requires men to be competitive with other men and other demographic groups. The demands of hegemonic masculinity are incongruous with the changes other genders and people of color are seeking.

Hegemonic Norms.

The men and women in this sample describe masculine expectations they feel are placed on men today in line with traditional hegemonic masculinity that heralds from decades prior, informed by centuries of masculine performance (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2014; Elliot 2018; Vessi re 2018). Despite many of the participants reporting that they believe these expectations are unrealistic or out of date, there are persistent expectations to be a financial provider, a heterosexual, patriarchal family man, independent, and in control of their emotions. These expectations are difficult, if not impossible to achieve, and damaging to those trying to embody what being an ideal man means in U.S. society.

Though not possible to truly embody the entire hegemonic masculine ideal (Messerschmidt 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987), the individual expectations are most achievable for white men as members of the dominant race as well as dominant gender. However, being most achievable also places those expectations just far enough out of reach to cause greater strain when white men fail to achieve them. Though men of color face alternatively difficult expectations (Bryan 2019; Lease et al. 2010), meeting the hegemonic norms is less expected of them and often wielded against them, producing strains of a different nature (Hill 2022; Curry 2017). Failing to achieve hegemonic expectations does not produce the same strain for those who are not expected to achieve it as it does for those who feel they ought to.

White Masculinity.

The demands of hegemonic masculinity that the white men and women in this study outline are expectations based on what they describe as an antiquated norm that promotes violence through limiting emotional outlets and encouraging dominance through physicality. Combined with a racial identity entrenched in social privilege and an entitlement to violence,

when experiencing high levels of strain from either perceived or real threats to their position in society, white men perceived as vulnerable to grievance management through retributive violence. This is a unique set of circumstances affecting white men due to the privilege and social hegemony they have experienced as a social group.

The jobs white men have reliably been able to attain and support themselves and their families, like factory and machine work, no longer exist. There is more competition for work across the paid economy as women and minorities participate in greater numbers than in the past (Cherlin 2014). Even though white men continue to benefit from white and masculine privilege, the advantages they have always had over others feel like they are disappearing, as people “freely discriminate” against white men according to some participants. Though white men have certainly experienced individual disadvantages throughout U.S. history, as a group they have always maintained hegemony in a way that feels it is being questioned and, from their perspective, attacked today.

General Strain Theory (GST) argues that strain occurs when expected outcomes from set goals are not reached, and goals relating to masculinity are especially likely to result in deviant coping (Agnew 2001). The hegemonic ideal is an expected outcome, at least in part, even for the men and women in this sample, despite simultaneously describing the hegemonic norms as unrealistic. Despite the impossibility of truly embodying all aspects of what hegemonic masculinity means for their time, white men have been pressured to pursue these ideals for centuries.

As the economy changes and minority groups within society push for equality across gender, race, and sexuality, white men have been slowly losing the ability to meet these hegemonic outcomes. Most families now require a dual income as wages have not kept up with

the price of goods and changes in the economy have eliminated once reliable jobs (Desilver 2018; Cherlin 2014). These economic changes and social pushes for equality are threats to men's concept of themselves as men and their ability to achieve masculinity as they threaten the current social order (Kimmel 2014). As the men and women in this sample do not believe that hegemonic masculine expectations have changed to keep up with a changing society, white men are pressured to achieve unachievable ideals. The gender expectations they feel controlled by are based on an antiquated system and create a disconnect between them and the greater society. The men in this sample describe feeling they are still expected to pursue a masculinity laid out by their predecessors who lived, worked, and achieved masculinity in a different society than we have today.

The United States has changed greatly since the mid-20th century, but white men still occupy the highest level of social privilege in our society. Due to this privileged position, they have far more at stake and more to lose as equality nips at their heels and threatens to overturn the current social order. As such “any attempt by sexual, gender, or racial minorities to challenge inequalities can be defined as simply an attack on men, one that men should dismiss and/or oppose” (Sumeru 2020: 89). Even those white men who fight for diversity and inclusion feel the strains of their identity as white man. They feel these issues are threatening to them on some level, especially when conversations in the public sphere surround the harms white men have caused society. This unique strain, a combination of failing to achieve hegemonic masculine ideals and the feelings of injustice at being targeted by society for its problems while also being the most privileged group, are unique to white men.

Aggrieved entitlement could be felt by any individual or group that feels they are losing privileges they are entitled to. However, white men are exclusively *losing* privileges. Other

groups, like white women, are positioned to both lose privileges and gain equality, status, or new privileges. White men only face lost privilege and power, which can feel oppressive and unfair. Though most white men do not occupy overly privileged positions financially, they have always been able to claim status and superiority over other groups through the hegemony of white men generally. For example, though whites generally are wealthier and more advantaged in U.S. society than other groups, there are still many whites in poverty and just making ends meet, with little access to good education and employment opportunities. The 2020 Census reported 15,942,000 non-Hispanic whites live below the poverty level. While this number reflects a lower proportion of whites in poverty than other racial groups, 8.2% compared to 17.0% of Hispanics and 19.5% of Blacks (U.S. Census 2022), 1.59 million people in poverty is a considerable number and almost half of all people below poverty in the country. For those whites, being called privileged is confusing and frustrating. Consider Mitch, though he discusses himself as benefitting from white privilege, he did not feel privileged when he and his family struggled with financial and food security in his youth.

Feelings of entitlement to privileges being given or taken away breeds anger and frustration. Though anger is a potential catalyst to violence (Denson et al. 2011; Baumann and DeStano 2010; Vazsonyi and Belliston 2007; Jensen-Campbell et al. 2007; Jukupak, Tull and Roemer 2005; Agnew 1992), Kimmel's (2014) study of aggrieved white men claims that most men dealing with aggrieved entitlement, like people generally, are not violent. However, with enough anger, nothing left to lose, and no other perceived way to prove or reclaim their masculinity, violence could well be the outcome as framed by the men and women in this study. Sumeru (2020) argues in their study of white men that all men can enact characteristics of hegemonic masculinity if their masculinity is threatened. Unlike aspects like the breadwinner

which require a well-paying job or patriarchal families which require a wife and children, violence requires nothing but the individual's person, and so violence is always available to them.

According to the white men and women in this sample, white men are constrained and pressured by hegemonic ideals like emotional control and physical competition, normalize violence, and feel unjustly targeted for their identity as white men and the privileges they personally did not step on others to get. As these strains compound, the frustration and anger these men feel builds up and they need to find ways to cope with these negative emotions. Agnew argues men are more constrained in their methods to cope with these strains as women react to strain internally while men react in anger (Agnew 2001; Broidy and Agnew 1997). This is echoed by the participants in this study, claiming men are less likely to seek mental health help or talk about their emotions than women, and more likely to struggle on alone. Having greater access to firearms, and greater legitimacy to use guns, gun violence is an accessible coping mechanism for white men. As Michael Kimmel writes about school shooters specifically "it was not because they were deviants, but rather because they were over-conformists to a particular normative construction of masculinity, a construction that defines violence as a legitimate response" (2010: 134) to perceived threats. Participants frame violence and gun use as a socially acceptable coping mechanism for white men and a socially unacceptable coping mechanism for women and other men.

Active Shootings, White Strain, and Aggrieved Masculinity

The men and women in this sample believe that white men active shooters are under considerable amounts of strain, such that the shooting is the individual's "last resort" to get their

problems heard or rectifying a situation they perceive as unjust. Some participants use the term “snap” to explain how strain becomes a shooting. Although many people are under considerable strain from the difficulties of modern life, the type of strain white men are exposed to is unique to their identity. This strain resulting from masculine expectations and the perceived injustice of being blamed for many of society’s problems, as white men have been in power during the oppression of others, is unique to them.

Strains that are perceived as unjust and those related to failed masculinity goals are considered especially likely to result in deviant coping, i.e., crime (Agnew 2001). Participants present white men as having been socialized to believe violence is a realistic means of grievance resolution, struggle to meet hegemonic norms of masculinity, and feel unjustly attacked. The extent to which they feel these strains varies from person to person, but all white men are presented with the same hegemonic norms as members of the same society. When society and its institutions are why their goals cannot be reached and they feel all other demographic groups are accusing them of oppression and causing harm, anyone who is not them becomes a target of violence and retribution.

As a qualitative analysis, this study lacks generalizability and conclusions made here are not the end of this research, nor should they be. The men and women in this sample are not a perfect representation of the United States or all the potential beliefs and perspectives on masculinity, race, and active shootings. The participants in this sample are highly educated and middle class. They are also all white. While this lends credibility to their claims about feeling white and the women provide a valuable outsider perspective on white men, there is a lack of alternatives to the white perspective. Future research should investigate white masculinity from the perspective of non-white men and women.

However, what this study lacks in generalizability, it gains in depth. The focus of the research question on white men makes the participant's identities as white men and women. The smaller sample size allowed for in-depth, rich, and expansive interviews and perspectives on white men's societal position, pressures, violence, and shootings.

White men describe themselves as being targeted by other groups and being blamed for issues like racism and sexism. Regardless of how true this may be, and I argue there is some truth to it, the feelings that this perceived persecution cause are very real. Even participants who do not believe white men are suffering because of this perceived persecution feel as though the white masculine identity is being targeted by others, which is uncomfortable and at times frustrating. This expands on prior research which largely focuses on white men in extremist groups, like white nationalist and supremacist organizations and men's rights activism (Kimmel 2018; Kimmel 2014; Coston and Kimmel 2013; Ferber 2000; Kimmel and Ferber 2000). I argue that being a white man today is more difficult than often perceived by others, as society questions their hegemonic position within the social hierarchy, something they have not truly experienced before.

This difficulty stems, I believe, from white men being generally unprepared to manage such change. Unlike other demographic groups, white men have never navigated a world in which they must defer to others. Being asked to, even in small ways, such as Arnie being told not to be alone with women students, feels deeply distrustful, fostering anger and frustration. These feelings span all white men, even the most well-meaning that seek to ally themselves with less privileged groups.

While the United States contends with its history of racism, as Black Lives Matter and others create conversations around race and privilege, whiteness is continually privileged and

desired (Reece 2019; Ryan and Moras 2017; Gibson, Robbins, and Rochat 2015). White men remain the most privileged group but the feelings that are produced by social conversations about their race and gender create perceptions of lost privilege, producing additional feelings of aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel 2014). White men do not only feel entitled to good jobs, status, and family, but they have historically been the most entitled to use violence (Anderson 2021). The ability to wield violence for their benefit is outlined by the participants in this study as perpetuated through intergenerational and interpersonal interactions and norms as well as by media narratives, both fictitious and true stories. Violence is a realistic and achievable method for any man to use to establish themselves as dominant, lay claim to lost or failed masculine achievements on the part of the individual, and reassert the hegemony of white men generally.

Based on the participant responses and the data on active shooters, I argue that white men commit active shootings in greater proportion than other racial groups due to the combination of generalized white racial entitlements to the use of violence and firearms for grievance management, attempts to achieve hegemonic masculine norms that require men to be aggressive, physical, and dominant, and the experience of strains from threats to their sense of control and privilege. In a manner of speaking, white men have the freedom to take their grievances out on the public in a manner that other social groups do not. Since the beginning of the United States, they have been the only group consistently allowed to wield violence against others to assert hegemony, often legitimized by the government because they have been the government (Anderson 2021). Entitlements to violence and guns do not require white men to commit mass violence or even interpersonal violence, but they do frame gun violence as a legitimate means of reestablishing masculinity and racial hegemony should they feel threatened.

Policy Implications and Author's Note

Unfortunately, there is no simple answer that comes from any study of human behavior, but the lack of findings across shooter data and the perceived and personal nature of threats to masculinity are difficult to counter. The findings from this study can only be described as frustrating to marginalized communities. If active shootings on the part of white men are largely motivated by hegemonic gender norms and perceived and actual threats to their status in the social hierarchy, one way to reduce them would be to support white men's hegemony, re-prioritize white men across employment, restrict the visibility of other demographic groups, and reduce the activism of oppressed groups seeking equality. However, such actions are clearly not a solution to curbing men's violence generally which is presented in this study as a result of attempts to re-assert white men's power and privilege.

Although I do not find evidence of mental health diagnoses across active shooters, the participants in this study place great emphasis on men's struggles with emotional vulnerability and the strain caused by norms of emotional control and suppression. Therefore, evidence from this study supports increasing mental health access and attractiveness to men. Targeted public service campaigns that frame men's mental health as valid and encourage all men, white and non-white men (as it can only benefit them), to embrace emotional vulnerability and therapy could increase the propensity of men to seek help when suffering from negative emotions and strain.

Similarly, increasing the number and the engagement of guidance counselors in schools such that children and teens have reliable access to someone should they feel alienated or like they have nowhere else to turn may increase coping and prevention of these incidents well before

they would become attractive to those individuals. These changes should increase white men and boy's ability to cope with negative emotions and difficult life events that motivate the kind of justice motivated, "last resort" style active shootings described by the participants here as they would have alternative means to resolve their grievances. Additionally, it would reduce the undertreatment of any mental health issues that may contribute to these incidents.

Given men's resistance to emotional expression, even among those men who voice resistance to hegemonic norms, these issues would benefit from being framed within hegemonic masculine norms other than emotional suppression. Hiring men in the public eye who are perceived to embody hegemonic ideals to communicate these messages would make changes to emotional vulnerability more attractive or acceptable to other men. Of course, this would reassert the strength of other problematic hegemonic ideals, but those changes will be slow and face much resistance.

Essentially, the results from this study would support increased attention to white men's needs and emotions. This is not something I am willing to recommend as a woman who has lived her life in a society that already prioritizes the voices and feelings of white men over others. Marginalized groups should not have to do this work. Instead, I argue that white men who ally themselves with marginalized groups and believe they resist their own hegemony need to work to decenter their own voices and the voices of other white men. White men who resist hegemonic norms in their own lives, particularly of emotional control and suppression, should do so publicly to work to change hegemonic values.

It is on all members of society however to not exclude white men in an effort to decenter them. The perceived persecution white men face creates real feelings that should not be ignored, but also should not be re-privileged as the privileges and entitlements white men have had

historically have created social problems today, including active shootings. Being empathetic to white men's issues does not mean ignoring the problems of marginalized groups or our social structures that prioritize white men.

As a white woman in higher education who has been "mansplained" and had her ideas "hepeated," I understand that it is difficult for those who are not white men to hear that white men are struggling to speak less and to want to help them. However, the men I spoke to in this study are warm, kind, intelligent, and thoughtful individuals who deserve empathy and kindness in return. Like Anthony said, it was an accident of birth that made them white men. The women in this study communicated great empathy for the difficulties of masculinity and white men, while simultaneously holding them accountable for individual behavior and acknowledging their privileged status. They are an excellent example of the balance I believe white people in particular need to utilize to both reduce and empathize with the voices of white men.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A *IRB Documentation* Initial Approval

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

08-Oct-2020

Fogg, Linda M.
Sociology Department, McConnell Hall
15 Academic Way
Durham, NH 03824

IRB #: 8393

Study: White Men and White Shooters: How Masculinity, Racial Identity, and Strain Impact Mass Shootings

Approval Date: 08-Oct-2020

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 104(d). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Note: IRB approval is separate from UNH Purchasing approval of any proposed methods of paying study participants. Before making any payments to study participants, researchers should consult with their BSC or UNH Purchasing to ensure they are complying with institutional requirements. If such institutional requirements are not consistent with the confidentiality or anonymity assurances in the IRB-approved protocol and consent documents, the researcher may need to request a modification from the IRB.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact Melissa McGee at 603-862-2005 or melissa.mcgee@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Director

cc: File
Rebellion, Cesar

Modification #1 Approval

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

08-Dec-2020

Fogg, Linda M.
Sociology Department, McConnell Hall
15 Academic Way
Durham, NH 03824

IRB #: 8393

Study: White Men and White Shooters: How Masculinity, Racial Identity, and Strain Impact Mass Shootings

Study Approval Date: 08-Oct-2020

Modification Approval Date: 12-Oct-2020

Modification: Add race question to survey

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your modification to this study, as indicated above. Further changes in your study must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. This document is available at <http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources> or from me.

Note: IRB approval is separate from UNH Purchasing approval of any proposed methods of paying study participants. Before making any payments to study participants, researchers should consult with their BSC or UNH Purchasing to ensure they are complying with institutional requirements. If such institutional requirements are not consistent with the confidentiality or anonymity assurances in the IRB-approved protocol and consent documents, the researcher may need to request a modification from the IRB.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact Melissa McGee at 603-862-2005 or melissa.mcgee@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Director

cc: File
Rebellion, Cesar

Modification #2 Approval (Creation date reflects change of IRB documentation to Cayuse system)

Date: 12-14-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY2022-202

Title: White Men and White shooters: How Masculinity, Racial Identity, and Strain Impact Mass Shootings

Creation Date: 11-15-2021

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Linda Fogg

Review Board: UNH IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
Submission Type	Modification	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member	Karen Van Gundy	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	Karen.VanGundy@unh.edu
Member	Linda Fogg	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	lmf1023@wildcats.unh.edu
Member	Linda Fogg	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	lmf1023@wildcats.unh.edu

APPENDIX B *Interview Script – Men*

“My research is based on understanding men today and how men interact with the social world as well as their perspectives on society and conflict, so I would like to start by asking you about yourself.”

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. What is it like, being a man today?
 - a. Follow-up 1: What do you think society expects of men?
 - b. Follow-up 2: That maybe they don't from women?
 - c. Follow-up 3: Do you think expectations are different for men today than 10 or 20 years ago?
3. What was it like growing up as a boy?

“One of the issues I'm interested in learning your perspective on race.”

1. Under what circumstances, if any, do you tend to think about your race?
 - a. If none, “why do you think you don't think about your race?”
2. How important would you say being white is to your identity?
3. What do you think society thinks of white men?
 - a. Do you think society expects more or less of white men compared to other men?
4. How do you personally feel being a white man in society today?
5. How do you think being a white man affects you?

“I'd like to ask your perspective on conflict, focused primarily on local and interpersonal, not global issues.”

1. What do you think causes most conflict in society today?
2. How do you think most people handle conflicts between themselves and others?

“One of the reasons I am interested in the male perspective is that we often take for granted in academia, and I think society in general, that most arrests are men in the US, particularly for violent crime.”

1. Why do you think that is?

2. Do you think violence is ever necessary? (if answer globally prompt with interpersonal situations)
3. What circumstances do you think most lead to violence?

“This is all really interesting - it seems like you've thought about these things before.” (remind them the interview is confidential)

1. Do you have any personal examples with violence?
2. Have you ever engaged in violence personally?
3. What led up to it?

“I'm interested in learning about your perspective on mass gun violence and the perpetrators of that violence. You're obviously aware of the mass shootings in recent years in the US, like in Las Vegas and several high schools.”

1. What do you think brought on such violent reactions from those men?
 - a. Do you think there might be some stressors that could push any man to engage in such behavior?
 - i. What?
 - ii. Which ones?
 - b. Do you think anything could push you to do what they did?
 - i. What?
2. Do you think any of them were at all justified in their actions?
 - a. Do you think anyone does or do you know anyone who does?
 - b. How so?
3. The shooters have been mostly men and primarily white. What do you think might explain that?
 - a. For white men: As a white man, how do you feel about the shooters looking like yourself?
 - b. There are some women who have carried out these acts. Do you think there's a difference between what drives the women shooters and the male shooters?

APPENDIX C *Interview Script – Women*

“My research is based on understanding men today and how men interact with the social world as well as their perspectives on society and conflict, so I would like to start by asking you about yourself.”

4. How would you describe yourself?
5. What is it like, being a woman today?
 - a. What do you think society expects of women?
 - b. What about men? What do you think society expects from men?
 - c. Do you think expectations are different for men and women today than 10 or 20 years ago?
6. What was it like growing up as a girl?
7. What did you think about the boys around you? What were things like for them?

For women participants:

“One of the issues I’m interested in learning your perspective on is race.”

6. Under what circumstances, if any, do you tend to think about your race?
 - a. If none, “why do you think you don’t think about your race?”
7. How important would you say being white is to your identity?
8. What do you think society thinks of white people?
 - a. Do you think society expects more or less of whites compared to other racial groups?
 - b. Do you think that’s different for white men versus white women? How so?
9. How do you personally feel being white in society today?
10. How do you think being a white woman affects you?

“I’d like to ask your perspective on conflict, focused primarily on local and interpersonal, not global issues.”

3. What do you think causes most conflict in society today?
4. How do you think most people handle conflicts between themselves and others?

“One of the reasons I am interested in your perspective on conflict is that we often take for granted in academia, and I think society in general, that most arrests are men in the US, particularly for violent crime.”

4. Why do you think that is?
5. Do you think violence is ever necessary? (if answer globally prompt with interpersonal situations)
6. What circumstances do you think most lead to violence?

“This is all really interesting - it seems like you've thought about these things before.” (remind them the interview is confidential)

4. Do you have any personal examples with violence?
5. Have you ever engaged in violence personally?
6. What led up to it?

“I'm interested in learning about your perspective on mass gun violence and the perpetrators of that violence. You're obviously aware of the mass shootings in recent years in the US, like in Las Vegas and several high schools.”

4. What do you think brought on such violent reactions from those individuals?
 - a. Do you think there might be some stressors that could push any person to engage in such behavior?
 - i. What?
 - ii. Which ones?
 - b. Do you think anything could push you to do what they did?
 - i. What?
5. Do you think any of them were at all justified in their actions?
 - a. Do you think anyone does or do you know anyone who does?
 - b. How so?
6. The shooters have been mostly men and primarily white.
 - a. What do you think might explain that?
 - b. Does it surprise you at all?
 - c. Being white, how do you feel about the shooters looking like yourself?
 - d. There are some women who have carried out these acts. Do you think there's a difference between what drives the women shooters and the male shooters?

APPENDIX D *Participant List*

Table 6: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	State	Occupation
Rick	33	New Hampshire	Building Inspector
Harold	80	New Hampshire	Retired
Felix	33	Oregon	Public Affairs
James	28	Washington	Information Technology
Frederick	26	Wyoming	Environmental Conservation
Brian	30	Washington	Army
Steven	28	Maine	Engineer
Trevor	38	New Hampshire	Nurse
Charles	80	Connecticut	Retired – Air Force
Anthony	80	Vermont	Retired – Insurance Adjuster
Elias	35	Vermont	Teacher (high school)
Hooker	59	Maine	Behavioral Health Specialist
Theodore	67	Mississippi	Quality Insurance, Car Manufacturing
Jeffery	63	New Hampshire	Information Technology
John Doe	20	Maine	Student
Jake	25	New Hampshire	Engineer
Mitch	32	Indiana	Professor
William	54	Ohio	Professor
Arnie	30	Virginia	Physical Therapist
Morgan	39	Massachusetts	Teacher (middle school)
Name	Age	Location	Occupation
Lollipop	31	Massachusetts	Odd Jobs
Catherine	60	Vermont	Librarian
Arlene	60	Massachusetts	Therapist
Andrea	48	New Hampshire	Nurse
Martha	66	Georgia	Nurse
Kathy	55	California	Teacher (middle school)
Mikayla	24	Virginia	Law Student
Ava	24	Connecticut	Graduate Student (psychology)
Sheri	27	Washington	Personal Trainer
Beverly	71	Connecticut	Retired - Lawyer

APPENDIX C *Interview Codes*

Anger	Mentions of anger and/or of being angry, upset, or frustrated. Either the participant’s own anger or the anger of others.
Being White	General references to being white that do not fit into other categories
Importance of Race	References to the ways in which race orients the social world and affects outcomes. Also includes direct references to race as an important factor in the world.
White Habitus	Indications of white habitus or the racialized socialization that creates white racial attitudes, behaviors, tastes, and racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Mentions of growing up in majority white places, not encountering many people of color, not having a “culture”, and/or not feeling like they have a race.
White Privilege	Expressions of having benefited from being white, explicitly or implicitly. Also includes direct references to white privilege.
Causes of Conflict	Respondent answers to “what causes most conflict”. Discussions of how personal conflicts began and beliefs about conflict initiation.
Causes of Violence	Respondent answers to “what circumstances most often lead to violence” and discussions of where violent behavior comes from.
Conflict Resolution	Respondent answers to “how do most people handle conflicts?” and discussions of how conflicts in their personal lives or between shooters were resolved.
Empathy	Discussions of empathy and emotional intelligence.
Extremism	Mentions of terrorist or hate groups (e.g. white nationalism, white supremacy, al-Qaeda), individuals with extremist ideologies.

Fatherhood	Mentions of fatherhood, being a father, or what fatherhood means to them.
Feeling White	Respondent discussions of feeling their whiteness, not simply being aware of it.
Female Shooters	Primarily responses to the final question in the interview about the motivations of female shooters vs male shooters. Discussions of the differences between male and female shooters, hypothetical or real.
Guns	Any conversation about guns, gun types, gun uses.
Gun Access	Discussions of gun access generally and in connection to shootings and general violence.
Gun Control	Conversations about gun control.
Gun Ownership	Respondent discussion of their personal experience with guns and owning their own guns.
Guns and Shootings	Discussions of guns in connection to shootings – including but not limited to the access, the use of, the type of gun.
Male Privilege	Overt acknowledgements of male privilege as well as mentions of activities or behaviors where being a man benefited them.
Masculinity	Any reference to masculinity or the male gender role.
Career and Money	Mentions of the expectation to achieve career and/or financial success including promotions at work and being financially reliable for others.
Control and Risks	
Emotions	Discussions of emotions as tied to masculinity. Restricted or repressed emotions or the feeling that they must do so.
Family	Discussions of the male role with the family including their own role, their expected role, and the male patriarchal role expectation.

Fatherhood	Discussions of being a parent, specifically being a dad or father
Providing	The male expectation to be a breadwinner and to provide for those around them and their family.
Frontiersman	The male expectation to be independent and self-sufficient such as being able to fix anything, particularly things like cars and the home. Does not include activities like fixing tears in clothing.
Heterosexuality	Discussions of or that relate to the male heterosexual expectation, sexual relationships with women, and sexual exploits by them and those around them.
Male Violence	Discussions of violence among and by men. Can be explicitly connected to the interview questions about male violent offending or men as shooters. Includes explanations of male violence as well as descriptions or observations of male violence.
Physical Protection	Using the male body to physically protect others.
Physical Prowess	Discussions of how men are expected to be physically. Feelings of not measuring up physically or feeling they needed to. Includes but not limited to working out, physical size, and getting into fights.
Social Dominance	The idea or need to be a leader or winner in social situations.
Sports	Discussions of participating in sports or liking sports as part of being a man or being masculine.
Toxic Masculinity	Mentions of toxic masculinity explicitly and mentioned of behaviors or outcomes tied to masculine expectations or behaviors that are limited, restrictive, or unhealthy.
White Masculinity	Specific indications of white men and masculinity that is tied to whiteness.
Women	Discussions that tie men to women, masculinity versus femininity, and the ways men interact with and perceive women.

Relationships with Women	Discussions of their personal relationships with women, friends relationships with women, or anticipated/desired/expected relationships with women.
Media	Mentions of media and social media, their use, and their effect on people.
Nationalism	Mentions of nationalism
Necessary Violence	Responses to the question “is violence ever necessary?” and other mentions of being forced into some kind of violent behavior.
Racially Coded Language	Seemingly race neutral terms and wording that reflects racial-based ideologies or stereotypes.
Racism	Mentions of racism, expressed prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism towards a racial group, or discussions of racial prejudice by others.
Colorblind Racism	Claims to “not see color” and using individual justifications for racial differences that indicate persistent racial prejudice.
Recognizing Race	Phrases, stories, discussions often in response to “when do you think about your race” that reveal when individuals acknowledge and think about their identity as white.
Relationships with Men	Descriptions of the relationships the respondent has with other men or that they wish they had with other men.
Self-Description	Description of the respondent by the individual. Typically obtained in response to the question “how would you describe yourself” but emerges in other parts of the conversation as well.
Sense of Community	Desire for or experienced community, particularly with other men.
Sexism	Mentions or overt discussions of sexism or sexist attitudes
Shooter Motivations	Explanations for mass shooter’s actions provided by the respondent.

Bullying	Mentions of bullying in connection to shootings, shooter motivations, and shooter backgrounds.
Fame Seeking	Mentions of the shooter trying to get famous or go out in a blaze of glory. References to the shooter seeking to become know or be heard through the shooting.
Justice	Mentions of seeking justice, fairness, or attempts to rectify a wrong against them through violence.
Last Resort	Discussions of the shooter being so overwhelmed, fed up, tired, etc with their life and the things happening to them that violence is the way out.
Prejudice	Mentions of the shooters being motivated by prejudice or hate towards some group, such as racial minorities or women.
Revenge	Discussions of the shooters being motivated by some kind of revenge against those that have or been perceived to have hurt them.
Shootings	Header code only.
Justification	Following question asking if the respondent believed or others believe the shooter to be justified in their actions.
Mental Illness	Discussions of mental health in relation to shootings, either as a cause or as part of the story. Includes also discussions of mental illness in relation to violence and conflict more generally and the mental health in society.
Personal Ability	Discussion by the respondent about their personal ability to engage in a hypothetical shooting.
Shooter Identity	Discussions about the shooter identity as white men, in relation to the respondent and as a contributing factor to the shootings.
Societal Expectations	Mentions of expectations placed on individuals by society.

Expectation Changes	Discussions of how expectations within society have or have not changed over time.
Societal Expectations for Men	Mentions of the expectations in society that are placed on men generally or that the individuals feel pressured to fulfil personally.
Societal Expectations for Women	Mentions of the expectations in society that are placed on women generally. Can be second hand knowledge from women in their life or perceptions of expectations for women.
Societal Expectations for Minorities	Mentions of the expectations in society that are placed on people of color above and beyond expectations for men and women generally. Can be second hand knowledge from individuals in their life or perceptions of those expectations.
Strains	Negative life events, i.e. stressors, that affect the individual or they perceive as affecting many people.
Aggrieved Entitlement	Often resulting from strains, feelings or expressions of entitlement to aspects or benefits from society.
Targeted Men	Expressed beliefs or implications that men, including the respondent, are or feel targeted by society (other groups) and the effects that has.
Women Only	
Being a woman	Discussions of behavior and feelings linked directly to their identity as women, most often following the first script questions.