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Decoding School Mass Shooter Manifestos to Predict Behavior: A Theory Based Qualitative Study

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This article seeks to apply the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to understand and address school shootings that involve examining the content of shooter manifestos as a crucial component. The frequency and severity of school shootings raises questions about the safety of students, teachers, and staff within educational institutions. This study suggests that the TPB can support the analysis of verbal forms of school shooter manifestos uploaded to social media. TPB may be used as a tool to understand and prevent violence indicative of a school shooter's attitude to perform a behavior; their subjective norms; their perceived behavioral control; their behavioral intentions as expressed in the manifestos to predict and deter the manifestation of the behavior. In addition to studying the utility of TPB, thematic analysis reveals a complex interplay of TPB and psychological, social, and existential factors driving individuals toward violent behavior that also need consideration. The three (3) themes are—sense of alienation and nihilism, societal rejection and quest for validation, and perceived ease and accessibility of violent behavior. Implications for professional practice include threat prevention practitioners and mental health professionals to develop methods such as cognitive-behavioral strategies to challenge harmful beliefs by applying TPB in real-time which may eventually lead to earlier threat detection to mitigate massive loss of life.

Public Significance Statement


The present study suggests that the theory of planned behavior may be used as a tool to understand and prevent violence indicative of a school shooter's attitude to perform a behavior; their subjective norms; their perceived behavioral control; and their behavioral intentions as expressed in the manifestos to predict and deter the manifestation of the behavior. Ultimately, threat prevention practitioners and mental health professionals can develop a method to apply the theory of planned behavior in real-time which may eventually lead to earlier threat detection to mitigate massive loss of life.

Keywords: theory of planned behavior, school shooting, manifesto, behavioral intention

The issue of school shootings in America is a deeply troubling and complex societal problem that has garnered widespread attention and concern (Thomas, 2023). The frequency and severity of these incidents have raised pressing questions about the safety of students, teachers, and staff within educational institutions. When a school shooting occurs, there is an average of “6.3 fatalities and 3.7 non-fatal injuries” (Geller et al., 2021, p. 8). The root causes of school shootings are multifaceted, involving a combination of mental health issues, social isolation, access to firearms, and a lack of effective preventative measures (Hilaire et al., 2023). The impact of these tragic events extends beyond the immediate victims, leaving lasting emotional scars on entire communities and fostering a pervasive sense of fear and insecurity among students and their families.

The continued emergence of school shooter manifestos as a disturbing trend underscores the urgent need for research that applies the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to comprehend and potentially prevent these acts of violence (Slemaker, 2023). Very little research is offered to understand this phenomenon from this standpoint and therefore has created a large gap in peer-reviewed literature (Marshall & Clark, 2023). Understanding the psychological underpinnings of individuals who contemplate or carry out school shootings is essential for developing targeted interventions. “The motivations behind mass murder events can often, although not always, be understood if researchers closely examine the writings, statements, and behavior of mass murderers” (Hunter et al., 2021, p. 272). While debates over gun control policies are a

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Jodi LaMothe played a lead role in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, resources, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing.

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significant part of the conversation, efforts to address the problem of school shootings in America require a comprehensive approach that goes beyond reactive measures (LaMothe, 2021).

Problem Statement

In the years ranging from 2000 to 2021, elementary and secondary schools experienced the highest “number of active shooter incidents” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). One prominent challenge revolves around the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach to understanding and preventing school shootings across diverse educational stages. The motivations, risk factors, and psychological underpinnings may vary significantly between primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels, necessitating a nuanced theoretical framework that considers the unique developmental and contextual factors for school shooters perpetrating violence at institutions at each educational stage (Katsiyannis et al., 2023).

Broader statistics on school shootings in the United States reveal that these incidents, including those at primary schools, have been a recurring and concerning phenomenon (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Efforts to prevent such tragedies emphasize the need for comprehensive approaches that address the multifaceted factors contributing to violence, including mental health support, early intervention programs, and measures to enhance school safety (Joseph et al., 2023). Comprehensive prevention strategies, including mental health support, antibullying initiatives, and improved security measures, are essential to mitigating the risk of violence in secondary schools and fostering a safe learning environment for students.

Research Rationale

Examining the diverse impacts of school shootings through the lens of TPB becomes intricate due to the intricate interaction of individual, social, and systemic elements. Using TPB as a theoretical framework to examine systemic issues such as school shootings can bring attention to inadequate mental health support and insufficient intervention strategies (Thomas, 2023). In particular, school shootings that are planned in advance and where the individual shows intent through public manifesto targeting institutions within primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools. By incorporating a multifaceted understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the application of TPB, researchers and mental health professionals can develop targeted strategies for prevention, intervention, and mental health support, ultimately fostering safer educational environments (Lee et al., 2022).

Literature Review

School Shooter Online Manifestos

Social media plays a part in school shooter online manifestos as social media is, “a form of mass media communications on the Internet (such as on websites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024, para. 1). The phenomenon of mass shooters sharing online manifestos has become a concerning aspect of some high-profile acts of violence prior to the attack (Do, 2023). These manifestos are typically detailed documents outlining the shooter’s grievances, motivations, and sometimes a distorted ideology.

The act of uploading such manifestos online may be driven by a desire for notoriety, as perpetrators seek to share their beliefs with a wider audience (Peterson et al., 2023).

The internet provides a platform for these individuals to amplify their messages and, in some cases, to gain a sense of validation or recognition. The need to upload manifestos online may be linked to a distorted form of self-expression or a desire for a lasting impact.

Quantitative analyses uncovered numerous parallels between fame-seeking shooters in the United States. These individuals were found to be predominantly young and exhibited a higher tendency to target educational institutions, engage in acts of self-harm, and inflict significant harm on a larger number of victims (Silva et al., 2023, pp. 1483–1488).

“A majority of lone wolves, despite their social isolation, often take the time to explain the intent behind their actions by writing letters, manifestos, and generating videos” (Hunter et al., 2021, p. 21). It is important to note that not all manifestos associated with schools are indicative of violent intentions; some may be written to express dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the educational system, critique policies, or convey personal struggles. Nonetheless, the term “school manifesto” has become closely associated with instances of violence due to the notoriety of such documents in high-profile cases, prompting a need for careful analysis and interpretation to discern potential threats and contributing factors (Siggery et al., 2023).

TPB Background

TPB is a psychological theory developed by Icek Ajzen in the late 1980s, building upon his earlier work with Martin Fishbein on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB posits that individuals’ behaviors are guided by their intentions, which, in turn, are influenced by three key factors: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2020). According to the theory, attitudes represent an individual’s evaluation of the behavior in question, assessing whether it is favorable or unfavorable (Lihua, 2022). Subjective norms reflect the perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in the behavior based on the opinions and expectations of significant others (Ajzen, 2020). Subjective norms may lead to perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual’s perception of their ability to perform the behavior successfully, considering both internal and external factors that may facilitate or hinder the action (Ajzen, 2020).

Manifesto Attitude

Specific research literature directly addressing “manifesto attitudes” within the context of the TPB is not readily available. However, literature related to the TPB and violent behaviors, particularly in the form of manifestos, underscores the significance of attitudes as a crucial component in understanding and predicting behavioral intentions (Vincent et al., 2023). According to the TPB, attitudes represent an individual’s evaluation of a particular behavior, reflecting their beliefs about the positive or negative outcomes associated with that behavior (Ajzen, 2020). In the case of manifestos associated with violent acts, researchers are likely to explore how individuals express their attitudes toward aggression, retaliation, or other harmful actions within these documents. Understanding these attitudes becomes

essential in deciphering the cognitive processes and motivations that lead individuals to formulate violent intentions.

Manifesto Subjective Norms

Specific research literature explicitly focuses on “manifesto subjective norms” within the framework of the TPB. However, studies exploring violent behaviors, particularly those associated with manifestos, often emphasize the role of subjective norms in shaping behavioral intentions. Subjective norms in the TPB refer to an individual’s perception of social pressures and expectations related to a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of manifestos, researchers may investigate how individuals express and perceive societal or peer influences that contribute to their violent intentions (Ajzen, 2020). Understanding these subjective norms becomes crucial in deciphering the external factors that influence an individual’s decision to communicate violent plans through written manifestos.

Manifesto Perceived Behavioral Control

Specific research literature directly addressing “manifesto perceived behavioral control” within the context of the TPB may be limited. However, studies applying similar psychological theories to violent behaviors and manifestos often consider perceived behavioral control as a critical factor in understanding the formulation of violent intentions (Gibson, 2023). Perceived behavioral control, in the TPB, reflects an individual’s belief in their ability to perform a specific behavior successfully (Ajzen, 2020). In the case of manifestos, researchers may explore how individuals express their confidence or doubts regarding their capacity to carry out the violent actions they describe in writing. Understanding perceived behavioral control in the context of manifestos becomes crucial in deciphering the individual’s assessment of their ability to execute planned violent behavior.

Manifesto Behavioral Intention

Research literature on manifesto behavioral intention within the framework of the TPB tends to focus on understanding the explicit expressions of intent to engage in violent acts found in written manifestos. According to the TPB, behavioral intention is a central determinant of actual behavior and is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of manifestos associated with violence, researchers examine how individuals articulate their intentions to commit harmful acts, exploring the underlying psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to the formulation of such intentions (Ajzen, 2020). Literature often delves into the language used, the clarity and specificity of the expressed intentions, and the emotional and motivational aspects to gain insights into the depth and severity of the planned actions.

Manifested Behavior

There is limited direct research literature explicitly focusing on “manifesto behavior” within the framework of the TPB. However, studies applying the other behavior prediction theories to violent behaviors and manifestos often explore how the articulated behavioral intentions in these documents translate into actual behavior using

TPB (Do, 2023). The TPB posits that behavioral intentions strongly influence subsequent behavior, and researchers may investigate how the content of manifestos aligns with or deviates from the expressed intentions (Ajzen, 2020). This analysis aims to shed light on the factors that bridge the gap between intention and action, considering external influences, situational constraints, and the dynamic interplay of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The following interpretive summary lists three themes that emerged as underlying emotional and cognitive underpinnings of school shooters that support TPB application.

Sense of Alienation and Nihilism

The thematic analysis of a sense of alienation and nihilism provides insight into the intricate motivations and attitudes driving individuals toward violent behavior. This theme explores the profound sense of alienation and nihilism experienced by these individuals, underscoring their belief in the insignificance of life and a desire for recognition through disruptive actions. This theme sheds light on the psychological turmoil and despair that contribute to their willingness to engage in destructive behavior, as they seek to assert their existence in a world they perceive as indifferent (Peterson et al., 2022).

Recent research highlights that feelings of alienation often emerge from chronic social rejection, isolation, and a lack of meaningful interpersonal connections. This disconnection can escalate into nihilistic worldviews, where individuals believe their actions, no matter how destructive, are the only way to leave a mark (Paskaleva-Yankova, 2022). Moreover, this alienation frequently coexists with mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety, which can amplify the sense of hopelessness and drive individuals toward violent ideations (Mayer & Astor, 2023).

Understanding these themes is critical for early intervention. Studies indicate that programs focused on building community, fostering emotional resilience, and addressing mental health disparities can mitigate these feelings of alienation and prevent the escalation of nihilistic tendencies (Morinaj et al., 2019). By addressing the root causes of disconnection and despair, educational institutions and communities can create environments that promote inclusion, ultimately reducing the likelihood of individuals turning to violence as a means of expression.

Societal Rejection and Quest for Validation

The second theme delves into the individuals’ perceptions of societal rejection and their desperate quest for validation. Feeling misunderstood and marginalized, they harbor deep-seated anger and resentment toward society, particularly toward those who they believe have wronged them (Krebs & Mackavey, 2023). This theme highlights the interplay between feelings of alienation and the desire for recognition, driving them to seek notoriety through violent acts as a means of asserting their existence and significance.

Recent research emphasizes that societal rejection often stems from a history of exclusion, bullying, and a lack of meaningful social bonds. Such experiences foster a distorted self-image, where individuals feel inherently unworthy and disconnected from societal norms, which can intensify their quest for validation through extreme actions (ElSherief et al., 2021). Violent behaviors are often framed in their own narratives as acts of revenge or an attempt to “send a message” to a world they perceive as having failed them,

amplifying the cycle of anger and alienation (Stephenson et al., 2024).

Interventions that address societal rejection and provide pathways for healthy self-expression have been shown to reduce violent ideations. Programs focused on social-emotional learning, restorative justice, and peer mediation can help marginalized individuals rebuild their sense of belonging and self-worth, ultimately steering them away from harmful behaviors (Cohen, 2021). By fostering supportive environments, communities can disrupt this dangerous cycle of rejection and validation-seeking, promoting healing and inclusion.

Perceived Ease and Accessibility of Violent Behavior

The third theme unveils the perceived ease and accessibility of violent behavior, underscored by a chilling sense of empowerment and defiance. The individuals display a disturbingly casual attitude toward planning and executing violent acts, viewing them as straightforward solutions to their perceived grievances (Silva et al., 2023, p. 1485). This theme unveils a troubling perspective and use of words that are indicative of violence as a readily available means of asserting power and control, regardless of societal barriers or consequences. Recent research highlights how access to firearms and other weapons significantly contributes to this sense of ease, lowering the perceived barriers to enacting violent intentions. Studies show that individuals who feel alienated or marginalized often find a sense of control and empowerment in the accessibility of weapons, amplifying their resolve to act on violent ideations (Peterson et al., 2022). Additionally, exposure to online content that glorifies or rationalizes violence reinforces the idea that such acts are not only attainable but also a viable method for achieving recognition or revenge (Ybarra et al., 2022).

Interventions aimed at reducing accessibility to weapons and monitoring harmful online content are crucial in addressing this theme. Policies that enhance background checks, improve firearm storage safety, and regulate extremist content online have been shown to reduce the likelihood of individuals perceiving violence as an easy or accessible option (Morinaj et al., 2019). By creating more substantial barriers to access, these efforts can play a vital role in preventing violent acts and mitigating the risk posed by individuals harboring harmful intentions.

Methodology

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated: (1) Do certain patterns of words or phrases written in school mass shooter manifestos indicative of attitudes, subject norms, and perceived behavioral control which predict an intention to shoot? And (2) Do certain patterns of words or phrases written in school mass shooter manifestos indicative of an intention to shoot predict actual shooting?

Methodology

The following search terms were used to find relevant school shooter manifestos posted online before a school shooting incident: *school shooter statistics, TPB in school shootings, school shooter online manifesto over the past 15 years, case studies of school shootings, primary education level school shooter online manifesto,*

secondary education level school shooter online manifesto, and postsecondary education level school shooter online manifesto. The search was exhaustive and yielded over 21 results. The writings of 21 school shooting perpetrators were systematically reviewed and analyzed to determine if their manifesto fit the criteria of this study. Using criteria grounded in the TPB, specifically focusing on indicators related to attitudes toward violence, perceived social norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intentions as expressed in the manifestos and actual expressed behavior ... six (6) manifestos were selected.

This study used public data from six (6) mass shooters' manifestos which included social media communications, video transcripts and written letters uploaded to media platforms before the act of violence was perpetrated. Selecting six manifestos ensures a manageable yet diverse sample that allows for in-depth qualitative analysis while maintaining methodological rigor. This sample size of six manifestos aligns with established qualitative research standards, enabling the identification of recurring themes and patterns without sacrificing the depth of individual case examination (Mayer & Astor, 2023). The manifestos were systematically coded and categorized using NVivo 12 software by a trained researcher using a structured coding framework, with interrater reliability measures, including Cohen's kappa, employed to ensure that the codes accurately reflected the content rather than researcher bias. The codes were structured around the research questions.

For this study, a total of six (6) written (excluding video recorded) manifestos (written within twelve (12) months of a violent school shooting incident) were chosen to be included in this study for school shooting committed in the United States of America. The chosen manifestos were selected for their completeness in terms of information disclosed in each of them that fit the following research criteria. The manifestos were divided into three (3) educational stage categories: primary school stage (two (2) examined manifestos total), secondary school stage (two (2) examined manifestos total) and postsecondary school stage (two (2) examined manifestos total). The results of this study are presented in alignment with each research question.

The Results of Applying TPB to Manifestos

In this section, results endeavor to answer research question #1—Do certain patterns of words or phrases written in school mass shooter manifestos indicative of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control which predict an intention to shoot? *Attitudes.* Attitude is defined as, "One's attitude toward the behavior (related to behavioral beliefs, as well as one's evaluation of the probable outcome of the behavior)" (Khani Jeihooni, et al., 2023, para. 11) which was used to identify the shooter(s)' attitude about the act of violence. The manifestos of the Robb Elementary School and Sandy Hook Elementary School from shooters of primary educational stage institutions revealed some insights in the attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls which are determinants of behavioral intention. Attitudes were revealed by the following quoted statements from the manifestos, "Are you still gonna remember me in 50 something days?" (*The interim report released today by the Texas house investigative committee on the Robb elementary shooting*, 2022, p. 37) and "children will end up 'not well' in all sorts of ways" (Langman, 2024a, p. 27)

The school shooter manifestos of Chardon High School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School secondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “Now! Feel death, not just mocking you. Not just stalking you but inside of you. Wriggle and writhe. Feel smaller beneath my might. Seizure in the Pestilence that is my scythe” (Langman, 2024f, para. 6). The school shooter manifestos of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Umpqua Community College postsecondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “Die you Descendants of Satan! [expletive] you, and die now! I am Ax Ishmael. I am the Anti-Terrorist of America” (Langman, 2024d, p. 4).

Attitude Themes

Based on the provided text, the theme pertaining to one’s attitude toward behavior seems to revolve around feelings of alienation, nihilism, and a desire for recognition or significance through destructive actions. The individual expresses a sense of detachment from society (“I am nothing. I am no one. My life is nothing and meaningless”), coupled with a desire for attention and notoriety (“put him ‘all over the news’”). This attitude is characterized by a deep sense of despair (“Feel death, not just mocking you”) and a belief that their actions will have a profound impact, even if it is through causing fear and chaos (“From the wrath of my power they will know who I am”). Overall, the theme suggests a complex interplay between feelings of insignificance, alienation, and a quest for recognition through violent or disruptive behavior.

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms are defined as, “one’s belief that the people who are important to him or her agree or disagree with that behavior as well as motivation to follow” (Khani Jeihooni, et al., 2023, para. 11) which was used to identify the shooter(s)’ subjective norms about the act of violence. Subjective norms for Robb Elementary School and Sandy Hook Elementary School from shooters of primary educational stage institutions were revealed by the following quoted statements from the manifestos, “And speaking more generally, I don’t really understand why Aurora shooting was considered such a big deal all-around, as if such a thing had never happened before. It’s not like its 1984” (Langman, 2024a, p. 29).

The school shooter manifestos of Chardon High School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School secondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “I am Death. And you have always been the sod. So repulsive and so odd” (Langman, 2024f, para. 6). The school shooter manifestos of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Umpqua Community College postsecondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “You will never know when and where the Weak and Defenseless that you [expletive] will strike—day, night, at school, in the public, in your home, during your most comfortable hour and protected place” (Langman, 2024d, p. 12) and “But for people like me there is another world, a darker world that welcomes us. For people like us this all that’s left” (Langman, 2024c, p. 2).

Subjective Norms Themes

The theme pertaining to one’s belief regarding the perception of their behavior by important individuals and their motivation seems to center around a deep-seated feeling of alienation, rejection, and a desire for recognition or validation. The individual expresses a sense of being ostracized and misunderstood by society, particularly by their peers (“people at school talk [expletive] about you and call you school shooter”). This perceived rejection fuels a sense of anger and resentment, as evidenced by references to past mass shootings and a desire to emulate them (“For the Vestor Flanagans, Elliot Rodgers, Seung Cho, Adam Lanzas of the world, I do this”).

There is also a theme of seeking validation and significance through their actions, with the individual expressing a desire for their manifesto to inspire others and to be remembered (“I write this manifesto so that others will know of my story and perhaps find some solace in it, some kind of inspiration for their own lives”). This suggests a deep-seated need for recognition and a belief that their actions will have a lasting impact, despite feelings of being marginalized by society. Overall, the theme reflects a complex interplay between feelings of alienation, rejection, and a desire for recognition or validation through destructive behavior. This theme is confirmed by (Research Article with quote confirming or supporting theme or this is a new thought).

Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control is defined as, “people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour in question” (Zolait, 2014, p. 65), which was used to identify the shooter(s)’ perceived behavioral control about the act of violence. Perceived behavioral control from Robb Elementary School and Sandy Hook Elementary School shooters of primary educational stage institutions were revealed by the following quoted statements from the manifestos, “The inexplicable mystery to me isn’t how there are massacres, but rather how there aren’t 100,000 of them every year” (Langman, 2024a, p. 28).

The school shooter manifestos of Chardon High School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School secondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “He will have for what he pleads, through the eradication of disease. So, to the castle he proceeds, like an ominous breeze through the trees. ‘Stay back!’ The Guards screamed as they were thrown to their knees” (Langman, 2024f, para. 4) and “From there I’ll go into the—onto school campus, walk up the stairs, unload my bags and get my AR and shoot people down at the main—what is it? – the main courtyard, wait, and people will die” (Langman, 2024i, p. 2).

The school shooter manifestos of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Umpqua Community College postsecondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “Die, all of you” (Langman, 2024f, para. 6) and “Today is the day. The day that it all begins. The day of my massacre shall begin” (Langman, 2024i, p. 3).

Perceived Behavior Control Themes

The theme pertaining to people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior in question appears to revolve around a sense of accessibility and empowerment through violent

means. The individual in the text demonstrates a belief that carrying out violent actions is relatively straightforward and attainable, even providing specific instructions and advice on how to do so (“My advice to others like me is to buy a gun and start killing people”). This perception of ease is reinforced by the casual nature with which the individual discusses their plans and actions, such as the nonchalant mention of ordering hollow point ammunition and the description of violence in a matter-of-fact manner (“You will never know how we will kill you—slash your throat, bullet in your back, torture you with knives, hammers, bolt cutters, scissors”). Furthermore, there is a sense of defiance against any perceived obstacles, such as strict gun laws in certain regions, with the individual suggesting alternative methods to achieve their goals (“either pay the necessary fees/time to get a license or become a serial killer”). This reflects a mindset that views violence as a readily available solution to perceived grievances, regardless of any societal barriers. Overall, the theme highlights a chilling perspective on the perceived ease and accessibility of engaging in violent behavior, coupled with a sense of empowerment and defiance in the face of potential obstacles.

Behavior Intention

Behavior intention is defined as “intention is assumed to be the immediate antecedent of behavior and refers to an individual’s subjective likelihood of engaging in a given behavior” (Supavitpatana et al., 2012, p. 194) which was used to identify the shooter(s)’ attitude about the act of violence. The school shooter manifestos of Robb Elementary School and Sandy Hook Elementary School primary educational stage institutions were revealed by the following quoted statements, “10 more days,” “Kids be scared,” (Seitz, 2022, para. 1) and, “I just can’t get into vehicular slaughterers. It seem too mediated, like using remote explosives (too hot). And knives stray too far from the whole ‘mass’ aspect (too cold). The aesthetic of pistols tends to be just [sic] right” (Langman, 2024a, p. 28).

The school shooter manifestos of Chardon High School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School secondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “Die, all of you” (Langman, 2024f, para. 6) and,

Hello. My name is Nick and I’m gonna be the next school shooter of 2018. My goal is at least 20 people with an AR-15 and a couple tracer rounds. I think I can do—get done. Location is Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, Florida. It’s gonna be a big event. And when you see me on the news, you’ll all know who I am (laughing). You’re all going to die. Pew, pew-pew, pew, pew, pew, pew. Ah, yeah. Can’t wait (Langman, 2024i, p. 4)

The school shooter manifestos of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Umpqua Community College postsecondary educational stage institutions revealed by the following quoted statements, “Kill yourself or we will hound you down and rip you, all your friends, and all your family into small pieces” (Langman, 2024d, p. 12) and “Today I die like Jesus Christ” (Langman, 2024c, p. 6).

Behavior Intention Themes

In terms of behavior intention, some language is cryptic such as, “10 more days,” “Kids be scared,” (Seitz, 2022, para. 1) and

fantastical such as, “He longed for only one thing, the world to bow at his feet” (Langman, 2024f, para. 1). Some language is straightforward or plain language such as,

Hello. My name is Nick and I’m gonna be the next school shooter of 2018. My goal is at least 20 people with an AR-15 and a couple tracer rounds. I think I can do—get done. Location is Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, Florida (Langman, 2024i, p. 4)

The themes pertaining to intention that are assumed to be the immediate antecedent of behavior include: desire for power and recognition, anger and hostility planning and preparation, and nihilism and despair. Overall, these themes paint a picture of individuals driven by a complex interplay of desires for power, recognition, revenge, and nihilism, leading them to plan and carry out violent actions with a sense of purpose and determination.

In this section, results endeavor to answer research question #2—Do certain patterns of words or phrases written in school mass shooter manifestos indicative of an intention to shoot predict actual shooting? *Behavior*. Behavior is, “the predicted action based [on] intention” (Ajzen, 2020). Although this definition states, “predicted behavior,” this researcher used this definition to identify all shooters’ manifested behavior to use the TPB framework as a means of prediction in the future. Of course, this identification is made post the act of violence. The school shooting of Robb Elementary School, a primary educational stage institution, manifested on May 24, 2022, when in total, the number of people killed is 21 and the number of people wounded is 18 bringing a total number of victims to 39 people (Langman, 2024e). The school shooting of Sandy Hook Elementary School primary educational stage institution, manifested on December 12, 2012, when in total, the number of people killed is 12 and the number of people wounded is two (2) bringing a total number of victims to 29 people (Langman, 2024b).

The school shooting of Chardon High School, a secondary educational stage institution, manifested on February 27, 2012, when in total, the number of people killed is three and the number of people wounded is three bringing a total number of victims to six people (Langman, 2024g). The school shooting of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School educational stage institution, manifested on February 14, 2018, when in total, the number of people killed is 17 and the number of people wounded is 17 bringing a total number of victims to 34 people (Langman, 2024h).

The school shooting of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, a postsecondary educational stage institution, manifested on April 16, 2007, when in total, total, the number of people killed is 32 and the number of people wounded is 17 bringing a total number of victims to 49 people (Langman, 2024g). The school shooting of Umpqua Community College, a postsecondary educational stage institution, manifested on October 1, 2015, when in total, the number of people killed is nine and the number of people wounded is seven bringing a total number of victims to 16 people (Langman, 2024d).

Behavior Themes

Some language reads the same as a thread to tie each manifesto together collectively. Words and phrases that were quasi indicative of the outcome such as, “death,” “all die,” “will die,” and “Die, all”

were used in all the manifestos reviewed in this study. Although all victims did not die, those words or phrases are the amalgamation for some victims of the unfortunate and unforeseen events that occurred at each shooting event.

Implications to Apply TPB to School Shooter Manifestos

School shooter manifestos are often complex texts that provide unique insights into the mindset, motivations, and potential warning signs of individuals contemplating or committing acts of violence (Johnson et al., 2024). Utilizing the TPB offers a valuable framework for comprehensively evaluating the motivations and intentions underlying the publication of shooter manifestos on various online platforms, including social media, extremist forums, and the dark web. According to TPB, behavior is determined by three main factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The TPB can support identifying and managing violence risk by examining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence an individual's intention to commit violent acts. By analyzing these factors, mental health professionals such as cognitive-behavioral therapists could design interventions that specifically challenge a patient's harmful beliefs, stabilize shifting social norms, and reduce perceived ease of enacting violence, ultimately disrupting the pathway to violent behavior using TPB to lower the probability of such crimes.

When a therapist or forensic psychologist encounters a client referred to a mental health professional for violent speech, writings, or social media postings, their first step is to assess the severity, intent, and context of the communication. This involves conducting a risk assessment using structured tools like the Historical Clinical Risk Management–20 Version 3 or workplace assessment of violence risk–21, while also exploring the client's history of aggression, emotional state, and external influences. The therapist would approach the client in a nonconfrontational manner, aiming to establish rapport and encourage open discussion about their thoughts and motivations. Cognitive distortions, underlying grievances, and signs of mental health disorders such as depression or psychosis would be carefully evaluated to determine whether violent expressions are linked to deep-seated ideations or transient emotional distress.

Using the TPB, the therapist could frame questions that assess the client's attitudes toward violence, perceived social norms around aggression, and their sense of control over violent impulses. For example, they might ask, "How do you believe others view your statements?" to gauge subjective norms or "What do you think would happen if you acted on these thoughts?" to explore perceived behavioral control. Responses would be analyzed for signs of intent, cognitive rigidity, or justification of violence, helping to differentiate between idle threats and serious risk. This structured approach enables the therapist to tailor interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral strategies to challenge harmful beliefs, social skills training to reduce isolation, or crisis intervention if an imminent threat is identified.

Theoretical Challenges to Application

A school shooter's leap from behavioral intention to committing the behavior may have mutable variables that determine if the

behavior will be committed or not. Because "the intention is always introduced as a variable whose existence is necessary to perform a behavior but not enough; in other words, it can be said that there is no 100% relationship between intention and behavior." (Khani Jeihooni, et al., 2023, p. 9). Also, thematic analyses reveal a complex interplay of psychological, social, and existential factors driving individuals toward violent behavior. Nonetheless, the study of school shooter manifestos within the context of the TPB can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the behavioral precursors to violence. By identifying commonalities in attitudes and perceived norms among individuals who resort to such extreme measures, researchers can inform the development of preventive measures that target these specific factors (Peterson et al., 2023). This research not only provides insights into the minds of potential perpetrators but also lays the groundwork for proactive interventions that address mental health issues, social isolation, and other contributing factors.

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