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Lone Wolf Riots: Social Frustration & U.S. Mass Violence

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Abstract

Through various life events and circumstances, some individuals find themselves at a disconnect with their surroundings—unable to relate to peers, socially awkward, and socially isolated and outcast. As a result, socially constructed basic human needs (BHNs) of meaning, recognition, and justice can seem even more difficult if not impossible to satisfy. The resulting relative deprivation becomes more problematic for these individuals as they navigate pursuit of these BHNs absent the value opportunities provided by social bonds, such as shared experience, collaborative problem solving, emotional outlets, networking, and alternate perspectives. Simultaneously, empathy and bonding toward their communities are damaged or erased. Relative deprivation draws the lone wolf inward, where altered realities both further isolate the individual and seek to self-satisfy unmet needs. Having exhausted their limited resources, violence itself becomes a value opportunity. The consistent thread of unsatisfied needs and frustration align lone wolf USMV more consistently with riot or lone wolf terrorist behavior than with a copycat syndrome. Understanding USMV from the standpoint of lone wolf riots provides a basis for examining how social and cultural structures contribute to the isolation and emergence of lone wolf rioters, and how social, structural, and cultural changes may help stem the phenomena.

1. Introduction

U.S. Mass Violence (USMV)² perpetrators, as a group, are delineated from the rest of human society as natural deviants. When these tragic events happen, society wants to be comforted by the idea that there must have been “a peculiar lapse in the killers—something that would make them significantly different and, perhaps, less human than the rest of us” (Block 2007, 3). To ease our fear and confusion, they are separated from the rest of us as defective. But most studies show this isn’t the case. In the cases documented in this research³, there are

2 USMV is defined in this study specifically to examine a form of violence targeting society at large. It is a deliberate choice to exclude violence perpetrated solely on one’s family, or directed at other isolated, interpersonal disputes (for example, love triangles, gang turf battles, and like crimes of passion, turf, monetary issues, or similar).

3 Dating back to 1903; See Appendix A for the definition used in this research.

patterns of otherwise normal people being slowly antagonized by conflicting social values. Isolation, disengagement, and inability to attain basic human needs (BHNs) of recognition, justice, and meaning progress over time to a perceived relative deprivation, building up until eventually being triggered by an otherwise benign incident—the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back.

As Ted Gurr outlines in his theory of Relative Deprivation (Gurr 1970), prolonged denial of BHNs can lead to violent outbursts. However, while unsatisfied BHNs and relative deprivation are unifying traits in USMV, in themselves they are not the catalysts. Most people experience some perception of inability to attain BHNs at some point in their lives, and most do not engage in violent rampages against society. So what sets apart those who do transform their inability to attain BHNs into violent aggression? The BHNs lacking in the biographies of perpetrators of USMV have a common link—they are all socially constructed/socially reliant needs. Attainment of recognition, justice, and meaning traditionally depend on social cooperation of the larger community to provide for or validate the attainment of these needs. The loner persona is dominant in the biographies of USMV perpetrators, which indicates a disconnect from the larger community, and thus an increased inability to attain socially-constructed BHNs. Outcast from their surroundings, these lone wolf individuals redefine their world views in attempts to self-satisfy needs. Needs deprivation and social isolation create an environment ripe for enticement toward behavior that matches that of riot behavior and lone wolf terrorism, leading to the phenomenon of the lone wolf rioter.

In the 1970s and 1980s, media reports of USMV perpetrators referred to them as vile, evil, monstrous ‘others.’ More current discourse on USMV attempts to erase perpetrators from discussion altogether over concerns for spurring copycat crimes. The othering of perpetrators through the media and discourse is potentially part of the problem, as it exacerbates a pre-existing perception in the minds of the perpetrators and those who assimilate to them of being ostracized from society—being cast out from the pack as lone wolves. Although not an organized group in any traditional sense of the term, many do self-associate with previous perpetrators. “Five years ago, ABC News calculated that Columbine was mentioned by perpetrators in at least 17 attacks and another 36 alleged plots or serious threats against schools after the Columbine attack” (Gest 2019). Several attacks have occurred on the day or week of Hitler’s birth (April 20), including Columbine and the Oklahoma Bombing. Perpetrators in the 1960s associated with the Texas Tower shooter. The tendency is to refer to these similarities as evidence of copy-cat crimes, which has led to an erasure of perpetrators from media reports and related discussions about USMV for fear of encouraging further attacks. The copy-cat label is faulty, and overlooks other key factors that tie the perpetrators together. Not only are the perpetrators not natural deviants, able to be profiled and

isolated, but they represent a unique form of riot in response to perceived social injustices and frustrations over unmet socially-constructed BHNs.⁴

2. Lone Wolves and the Problem of Profiling

While a demographic dominates perpetrators of USMV, there is no clear profile. The field is more than 60% white males between 17–30 years of age⁵, but there are also representatives in Hispanic, Asian, African American, and Other groups (see Fig. 1). There are also at least two females. While California, Florida, and Texas have significantly more incidents on record than other states, there are forty other states with incidents, most of them with more than one. The ages range from 11–70. Several have military backgrounds, but many others don't. While the perpetrators don't consistently share traits, they do consistently share the experience of being denied or unable to attain BHNs, while also self-identifying as loners or outcasts. This is supported by media reports and family and acquaintance interviews included in news articles, as well as later news articles looking back at past cases that include further biographical details about the perpetrators. A group identity emerges that, while useless for predicting (aka profiling) future perpetrators, does provide a way to uncover social and structural contributors and to understand the rioting mindset.

4 Some of the cases included in this study are also included in the FBI Vault under the search term “lone wolf” (vault.fbi.gov).

5 I'm currently delving further into this demographic, and why it dominates incidents of USMV, and plan to write more on this in the future. For now, it is of interest to note the concept presented by Pederson on prison riots about “Inmate elites who are socially situated in positions that allow them extra time to think and physically located in areas that trigger feelings of relative deprivation are most likely to be the first to rebel.” (512) “Rebels tend to be the marginally imprisoned (physically secure but mentally insecure) for whom relative deprivation becomes ‘visible.’” (512)

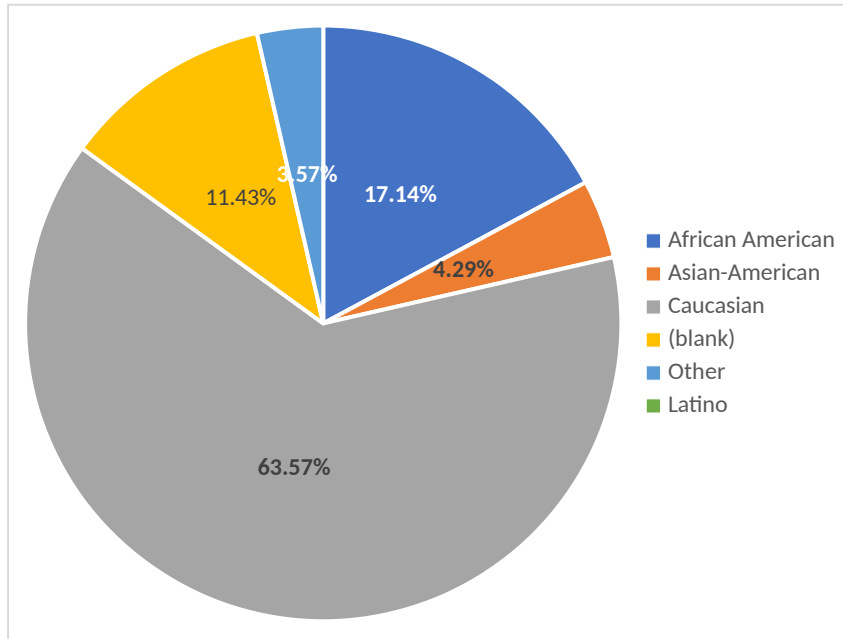


Fig. 1 Racial demographics across 166 cases dating back to 1903.

There is also evidence in FBI research that there are ties between violence on campuses and related violence in campus communities, leading to a need to look at more structural influences rather than individual profiles. “Analysis of 33 incidents highlighted the fact that college campuses share commonalities with the communities at large with regard to murders. As in the general population, Bromley found, examples of domestic, intimate, and workplace violence were present in campus homicide cases” (Campus Attacks 2019). Drawing on the work of Durkheim and trends in suicide rates, it is also significant to compare suicide rates over the past several decades to the rates of USMV as defined as aggression toward society at large. Both have been increasing steadily (see Appendix B). Durkheim related this back to societal undercurrents and epidemics when related to suicide, and I argue that societal undercurrents are also key to understanding the phenomena of USMV.

3. Socially Constructed BHNs

Unsatisfied BHNs of recognition, meaning, and justice are what unify the perpetrators across race, gender, class, status, age, and other personal and demographic traits. What stands out across these demographic lines is the experience of perceived inability to attain these needs tied to their loner status.

3.1 Lacking Recognition

Recognition, also sometimes described as “encouragement,” describes the need to be recognized for one's work, value, and contributions to the larger community. In workplaces it's often referred to colloquially as job security, which underlies why it can be a driving need. By establishing your worth and contributions to the community at large, you establish a sense of security about your place within the community. When recognition is not gained in the workplace, you risk being overlooked for promotions, easily let go when economical times are tough, and left out of key events, whether work related or social. If recognition is lacking in the school, you miss out on culturally valued life experiences such as dating, socialization skills building, and extracurricular activities, to name some. You may risk being held back academically and potentially risk being held back from adulthood and its ensuing phases (jobs, career, marriage, family, independence, stability). There are quite a few perpetrators of USMV who, after difficulties attaining satisfactory recognition through school and work, have opted to join the armed forces, where they were given another more structured chance to succeed at recognition. Most of them did until they were discharged and had to try again to live up to more opaque standards among civilian communities.

Two cases highlight contrasting ways that military service affected perception of social recognition. Texas Tower shooter Charles Whitman had excelled in military service, being recognized for his service and marksmanship. Attempts to leave the service and engage in college life resulted in failure and loss of his scholarship. When he returned to military service after his failed attempt at college, he carried into his military life the habit of gambling that he'd acquired during college, resulting in discharge from the military as well. From there, his life started a downward spiral as he struggled to find his footing in civilian life (Charles Whitman).⁶

Mark James Robert Essex (Howard Johnson's sniper) grew up in a small town where racism was present, but not overt. As a result, his childhood remained somewhat isolated from the effects of racism. Following a fairly traditional path, from a childhood in boy scouts and relative social integration among his classmates, Essex enlisted in the Navy, where while his performance excelled, racism was much more overt. After continued bullying and ostracization from his military peers, Essex's view of his place in society was adversely affected. He came back to civilian life “filled with a smoldering racially based hostility” (Noe 2011) toward all white society, and could no longer see himself as a recognized, accepted part of U.S. society at large. For Whitman, military service was where he once found recognition, which he then had trouble translating to civilian life, but also couldn't regain in military life. For Essex, military life exposed rampant denial of recognition in society at large for African Americans. For both men, the

⁶ Whitman had been diagnosed post-mortem with a brain tumor, but it has not been confirmed that the tumor was causal to his violent outburst or mental state. It may have predisposed him to vulnerability to urges.

experience in the military became a turning point after which there was a discord between their existences and society at large.

3.2 Seeking Meaning

Meaning (Sandole 2013, 23), often in the form of communication and perception, ties into distributive justice, especially in terms of perceptions of appropriate value systems, means of achievement, and expected responses, and communication/miscommunication between perpetrators and the community of not only expectations, but the value systems themselves. It's a common human trait, often considered universal, to want to be understood. Meaning also relates to finding meaning in one's life, which most often is attained through social connections (Galtung 1993, 309).

Classmates of Joseph William Blank (later renamed Joseph William White) remarked that "Everyone at school thought he was dumb" (Daily Review Newspaper Archives 1970). A work colleague said he "was in the group but not of it" (Daily Review Newspaper Archives 1970). Theodore John Kacyzynski (Ted Kacyzynski) had trouble adjusting to social life after being skipped a grade. His classmates also viewed him as an outsider. As he got older, his ability to socialize with others did not improve, eventually affecting his ability to teach his students and collaborate with peers. Despite high intelligence (White was a Regents scholar, and Kacyzynski the youngest assistant professor in the history of UC Berkeley), their lives were significantly and negatively affected by an inability to find meaning and acceptance in the larger social structure.

3.3 Denied Distributive Justice

Distributive justice, also understood as appropriateness of response or reward (Sandole 2013, 23), is an expectation that you will get from your efforts and actions an appropriate response and reward that is in sync with the level of response and reward achieved by others in your community—that justice (or justness) is distributed according to the value of one's actions: the input should match the output. Value systems play an important role here, and in most of the cases of USMV, the perpetrators' value systems were in conflict with the value systems of their surrounding communities, resulting in a discord in perception of justness and fairness. To the perpetrators, their actions were in accordance with their strict adherence to a set of values, often on religious texts or military discipline. Despite their obedience and adherence to these high values, society shunned, ostracized, belittled, gossiped about, or otherwise demeaned them—a stark contrast to what they expected to receive for their "good behavior."

Take the case of Howard Burton Unruh (Life Magazine), who lived as a closeted gay in the 1940s. Unruh was a devout Christian who regularly attended church and read the Bible. He also experienced success and recognition in the

military and was awarded for marksmanship.⁷ Despite his allegiance to God and service to his country, characteristics typically esteemed by U.S. society, especially in the 1940s, Unruh struggled to keep jobs or maintain success in college. He was further isolated in his community, living with his single, working mother, who was often absent due to work. He had continual squabbles with neighbors, whom he felt were constantly conspiring against him. His ability to live by the codes of the military and Bible did not offer him any rewards in the more regular, socially acceptable areas of civilian life (work, school, social life).

Leo Held “felt persecuted” (Krajicek 2017), being banned from carpools, overlooked for promotions, and in his mind constantly harassed by neighbors, until he’d felt he couldn’t take anymore. His attempts to participate in traditional society left him labeled as an outsider. Like the 2017 Vegas shooter, Held was seen by many as “just a guy” (Krajicek 2017). But in his mind, the world was treating him with undue unfairness.

4. Effects of the Perception of Inequality

Social psychologist Keith Payne has studied the effects of inequality on human behavior and psychology, including when the inequality is only perceived. Inequality is not only perceived by those in poverty levels or in certain economic or societal casts, but is a common feeling across classes. In a podcast with National Public Radio’s Hidden Brain titled “Why No One Feels Rich,” Payne discusses how “we tend to compare ourselves with those who have more than us, but rarely with those who have less” (Vedantam 2019). We are predisposed to compare ourselves to others, and this is part of the social construct of the self that is particularly pervasive in U.S. society, perhaps to a dangerous fault. According to Payne, this perceived inequality tends to make us focus on the short term, act impulsively, be less risk adverse, and to feel as if we are about to be physically attacked. This aligns with descriptions by Gurr, Galtung, and others in reference to needs deprivation, as well as to riot mentality.

Describing perceptions of inequality in an airplane, as an example, Payne describes incidents of air rage that develop from perceptions of injustice based on this inequality. Feelings of “not only do I not have something that other people have, but I deserve to have” what others have, as in the extra perks of sitting in first class over sitting in coach, has incited aggressive behavior in passengers (Vedantam 2019). Moving from this precept to perpetrators of USMV, that sense of inequality and injustice can be amplified if the perpetrator believes they are living according to high ideals. Howard Unruh (Walk of Death, 1949) was known to “read the Bible obsessively and underlined passages dealing with apocalyptic prophecies” (Cannon 2012). Mark Essex (Howard Johnsons, 1973) was a boy scout and “happy-go-lucky kid” who chose to serve his country in the Navy (Noe

⁷ Several cases involved men who had achieved high praise for marksmanship in the military. It may be that their violent turns were in part attempts to lean on their primary source of success and recognition, to highlight the one area where they felt the satisfaction of BHNs.

2011). Charles Whitman (Texas Tower shooting, 1966) was a devout Catholic and Eagle Scout. Whether the teachings of the Bible or the tenets of service and high ideals of the Boy Scouts and military, these individuals held to certain ideals until the world around them tore down those ideals and made it either impossible to live by them or impossible to see any reward from them. They are left feeling that ‘this is not fair,’ and this is not justice.

Payne goes on to describe the physiology of perceptions of inequality. When inequality is perceived, it has a very physical effect. The harder it appears to achieve equality, describing it as an increasingly steep ladder, the more frustration builds, and the more threatened the person will feel. When inequality is perceived, and it seems “the system is rigged by the other side,” and others are “out to get us,” the relative entitlement grows and the sense of a threat by the other increases to an intensifying fear of bodily harm (Vedantam 2019). In this mindset, striking out makes sense to the perpetrator. A significant percentage of USMV cases document perception by the perpetrator that society was plotting against or out to get them.

5. Gurr’s Relative Deprivation and Violence

“Relative deprivation [is] the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’ of collective value satisfaction, and that disposes men to violence” (Gurr 1970, 23). Based in the “*perception* of deprivation” (Gurr 1970, 24, emphasis added), the reality of their means of attainment may exceed their perceptions; but it is perception, not reality, that drives their actions.

Stuck between “standards . . . by reference to some group or status with which [he] is thought to identify” (Gurr 1970, 24) which he is unable to live up to, and the isolation of perceiving himself as ostracized and separate from the group or social status, frustration builds slowly over time as the individual navigates various attempts to co-exist with his community. As frustration increases and becomes encompassing, “innate frustration-induced behaviors become ends in themselves for the actors, unrelated to further goals, and qualitatively different from goal-directed behavior” (Gurr 1970, 23). Gurr’s “frustration-aggression relationship” can be seen in case after case of USMV. As the intensity of the perception of deprivation increases in degree and frequency, the potential for violence also increases (Gurr 1970, 23).

“As 16-year-old Luke Woodham—one of the bifurcated killers in this study—wrote in his manuscript, ‘I am not insane. I am angry. This world shit on me for the final time’” (Meloy et al 2001, 8). To think that these responses are inhuman, or monstrous, or insane, or deviant is an error. Driven to certain extremes over a long enough period, any human has the capacity to respond with frustration and aggression. “‘No living being,’ Durkheim began, ‘can be happy unless its needs are sufficiently proportioned to its means; for if its needs surpass

its capacity to satisfy them, the result can only be friction, pain, lack of productivity, and a general weakening of the impulse to live” (Suicide 1897). Referencing Miller, Gurr writes that “frustration produces instigations to various responses, one of which is aggression. If the non-aggressive responses do not relieve the frustration, ‘the greater is the probability that the instigation to aggression eventually will become dominant so that some response of aggression will occur’” (1970, 33). A case example is James Thomas Hodgkinson (2017 Congressional Baseball Shooting), who spent years writing letters to Congress and worked diligently with the Bernie Sanders campaign and other political activist efforts, trying to bring about what he felt were positive changes in the country. Eventually he was running out of money, unemployed, living out of his van, and estranged from his wife of 30 years. Not only was his sense of justice thwarted by negative results, but he was losing means with which to achieve his needs. On top of that, his non-aggressive efforts of letter writing and campaigning were not achieving any results. Hodgkinson had reached a point where his needs surpassed his capacity to achieve them, and non-aggression no longer seemed effective. In every case studied to this point, “The incident is precipitated by rejection by peers or disciplinary action by an authority figure” (Meloy et al 2001 2), where the rejection results in further ostracization from the larger social structure. Exile from the pack creates the lone wolf, who is now both desperate and no longer attached or in allegiance to the social structure.

Continual conflict with one’s community leads to a deviance of necessity if needs are not met; “needs are satisfied either by deviant or pathological behavior *when other means prove futile*” (Burton 1979, 76, emphasis added). In order for needs to be met, satisfiers must be available. When needs are socially constructed, satisfiers are largely in the control of the larger social structure, leaving lone wolves frustrated and helpless until they manifest means of self-satisfaction, usually found outside of socially acceptable avenues. “Like the needs, the satisfiers do not fall from heaven, . . . they are produced in and by a social context and are dependent on that context” (Galtung 1993, 307). For lone wolves, this often means escape into an alternate existence of their own making, and if that alternate existence continues to be threatened by forces from the outside world, this can lead to violence.

Most people facing frustrations restrain themselves from aggressive behavior; they find alternate solutions, ways to step back and reevaluate, or nonviolent resources available to overcome frustrating circumstances. These social value opportunities are social bond resources that provide sounding boards for frustrations, reality checks, benefit of past experience of peers, safe spaces to vent and share, and a variety of other alternatives to violence that social bonds provide (including group activities such as sports and games, that act out alternate realities in safely competitive venues). “Courses of action people have available to them for attaining or maintaining their desired value positions are their value opportunities” (Gurr 1970, 33), and my hypothesis is that those who end up as USMV perpetrators are lacking key value opportunities to alternative means of

coping with their frustration. Their denial of needs is amplified by a deprivation of these value opportunities; the most consistently shared experience across USMV perpetrators is a dearth of productive social connections.

5.1 Society's Role in Relative Deprivation of Socially-Based BHNs

“Scholars have noted that societies with higher levels of social cohesion tend to experience lower levels of antisocial behavior” (Durkheim 1951). Each of these basic human needs of recognition, justice, and meaning requires an interdependence between the individual and the community, “determining the conditions necessary for social organizations to survive harmoniously” (Burton 1979, 79). They are inherently “individual needs that have a social significance . . . without which there cannot be on-going social relationships and harmonious organizations” (Burton 1979, 57-58). Lacking the bonding necessary for inclusion in the community further isolates the individuals, reducing further their resources for recognizing alternative solutions. Referring back to Galtung’s typology of BHNs, USMV highlights the need to “be more interested in how actors and structures—in other words the social context—impede or meet needs” (1993, 307).

Case studies highlight an inability to assimilate to surroundings and socially accepted norms of behavior and expectations. A common thread throughout the cases is a building frustration, unsatisfactory results from communally accepted methods of needs attainment, and a resort to aggression when all other means of response have proved futile in the mind of the perpetrator. “Little attention has been paid to the social and cultural contexts of these deadly incidents” (Fox et al 2005, 1), and this is detrimental to understanding and finding solutions to the problem of USMV. I do not believe it is of little significance, either, that incidents of USMV are increasing rapidly at the same time as other societal unrest—increased incidents of racial strife and confrontations, increased political tensions, and increased social and political divisions nationwide. The further society fractures, the more isolated and disconnected individuals are going to feel.

“If the norms . . . inhibit and frustrate . . . [the perpetrator] will employ methods outside the norms . . . will be labeled deviant . . . but this is the cost he is prepared to pay to fulfill his needs” (Burton 1979, 78-79); “He will invent his own norms and be labeled a deviant, or disrupt himself as a person, rather than forego those needs” (Burton 1979, 60).

6. Anomie, Egoism, and the Case Against the Copycat Label

“‘You know, knowing Mitchell, it’s hard to believe—you know, I still cannot believe that Mitchell Johnson did that because he was really, he was the most

polite student I've ever had. . . . *It was like he wanted to fit in*" (Fox et al 2005, 2, emphasis added).

Disconnects between an individual and community are consistent across USMV cases as value systems clash and value opportunities are withheld. As Durkheim theorized, "Common values and common meanings are no longer understood or accepted, and new values and meanings have not developed," creating "a sense of futility, lack of purpose, and emotional emptiness and despair. Striving is considered useless, because there is no accepted definition of what is desirable" (Peyre n.d.). Durkheim was looking specifically at suicide, and the damage to the self that happened when social bonds broke down or failed to develop. As social bonds break down even further and seem more unattainable, the individual depends less on the group and more upon himself, and recognizes no rules of conduct beyond private interests. "Durkheim called this state of 'excessive individualism' egoism, and the special type of self-inflicted death it produces egoistic suicide" (Peyre n.d.). Other studies of USMV incidents have recognized a "social dynamic of alienation from others, the possibility of a pathology of attachment, and a compensatory mode of narcissistic repair, especially among the classroom avengers. . . . The use of compensatory narcissistic fantasy to withdraw from real objects and repair emotional wounds has been discussed extensively." (Meloy et al 2001, 7)

Social indifference can lead to a disregard for the lives of others as much as for the lives of the self when linked to rage, despair, and resentment at a society being blamed as the cause of needs being unfulfilled. Durkheim's egoism and anomie "have a special 'affinity' for one another—the socially detached egoist is often unregulated as well . . . while the unregulated victim of anomie is frequently a poorly integrated egoist" (Peyre n.d.). What develops is a "state of moral confusion" in which "discouragement gives birth to desperate self-destructive resolutions," which Durkheim says "infects not only individuals but whole societies" (Peyre n.d.). This infestation of destructive resolutions can be seen in what the media likes to term copy-cat incidents. But they do not fit the proper definition of copy-cat incidents, and are more like a riot mentality, where the brazen actions of another like-minded individual leads the charge for others with similar frustrations. Unlike group-based riots where the actions of a leader(s) spur immediate reaction/mimicry by followers, lone wolf rioters sit in waiting, plotting out their own personal uprisings. When examining cases of school shooters, "the adolescent victim of bullying does not lash out in rage at the time of the felt shame, perhaps because the bully is bigger and stronger, but instead withdraws into fantasy to compensate for the almost intolerable feelings of a public humiliation, the exposure of the self as weak and ineffectual" (Meloy et al 2001, 7). Riot behavior can also seek out recognition—after all, that is one of the BHNs sought by perpetrators—but this is different than recognition for the sake of notoriety. At least as far back as Hadley Cantril's article in the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, "Causes and Control of Riot and Panic," riot has been associated with social movements, "A strong desire for some *meaning* or explanation of the

difficulty they feel they are in” (1943, 671, emphasis added). Riots are “ascribed to structural changes” or causes (Pederson 1978, 509) stemming from a “gap between expectations and gratifications” (Pederson 1978, 510) where “violence increases as the relative deprivation gap widens between what individuals want and what they get” (Pederson 1978, 511). These are in stark contrast to descriptions of copycat behavior driven by ego and fame-seeking, and in line with the experiences of USMV perpetrators.

6.1 Copycat Claims Mistake the Motives

“It is often difficult to know when an offense is linked to an earlier offense; crimes are also sometimes characterized as copycats when they are not” (Helfgott 2008, 377). The focus in discussion of copycat crime is on a pursuit of infamy, notoriety, and celebrity (Helfgott 2008, O’Toole et al 2014). While there are some cases in my database that align with the copycat theory, most cases do not fit this description. “The premise of copycat crime is that exposure to a generator crime is the linking mechanism and that the removal of the exposure would eliminate the occurrence or form of the subsequent copycat crime” (Surette 2017). Copy-cat incidents do not require a preceding motivation, although they are “most likely to appear in at-risk individuals predisposed to crime and in preexisting criminal populations” (Surette 2017). Typically, without the motivating factor of the predecessor, the crime of a copycat perpetrator would not happen.

One of the markers of copycat crimes is the presence of the media influence as a precursor to the idea of the crime. Liebert defines copycat crime as “people who do seem to be affected in a very negative way and become aggressive and *strive for the limelight and strive for notoriety*” (O’Toole et al 2014, 3, emphasis added). Although some perpetrators may exhibit traits of media personalities, we must be careful to understand this distinction. There is a difference between being inspired by a character that plays upon a predisposed unstable mentality, aka copycat, and referencing prior cases for intel. “For example, resources such as ‘the Anarchist Cookbook,’ ‘Training with a handgun,’ ‘Remote Control Detonation,’ and ‘How to make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom’ are known to be widespread on the Internet and have been used by lone wolf terrorists for acquiring knowledge on how to build simple pipe bombs, etc.” (Brynielsson et al. 2013, 3). Referencing movies, blogs, manifestos, or other media resources as how-to guides is quite different from being initially inspired by them. Time order is a key component to consider in most of the cases of USMV. Where there are cases of media related influences, they have tended to coincide with the development of the crime, rather than well precede it. When the media isn’t concurrent with the development of the crime, it is a marker of the label copycat being unsubstantiated. The media then can be seen as merely a tool in a larger goal (Surette 2016, 6).

The research on USMV and copycat phenomena is mostly anecdotal, as well. In a panel of experts, responses to whether there was a connection was met with careful language based on studies of suicide:

by extended logic . . . ; There is no data that I have found on mass murderers, but the research on copycat behavior and suicide is really clear; . . . I can express an opinion. . . . clearly from the perspective of . . . media on suicide . . . one would reasonably expect, . . . I would reasonably opine, that the new media would equally have an effect on influencing imitative behavior, . . . But I do not know if there have been any research studies of the [USMV] phenomenon to date (O'Toole et al 2014, 2).

And later in the discussion, there is caution expressed in equating copycat phenomenon to USMV. "There have been a number of really good studies that show that it is not the video games that either cause or are correlated with violent behavior. But it is that trait aggression and stressful life events rather than the games themselves that are instrumental" (O'Toole et al 2014, 2). Other scholars express the same uncertainty—cases "may represent a 'contagion' or copycat effect" based on studies of suicide, but not based on documented studies of USMV (Meloy et al 2001, 7).

Some scholars have made assimilations between USMV and suicide, thus equating the copycat phenomena of suicide with the extension of that phenomena to USMV (Sanford 2014, 11). However, there's still about half of the incidents of USMV that do not end in suicide (see Fig. 2). Another problem with this is that the trend of USMV in schools is in line with trends in USMV in non-school settings, where many of these incidents don't get the level of media attention that school shootings receive.

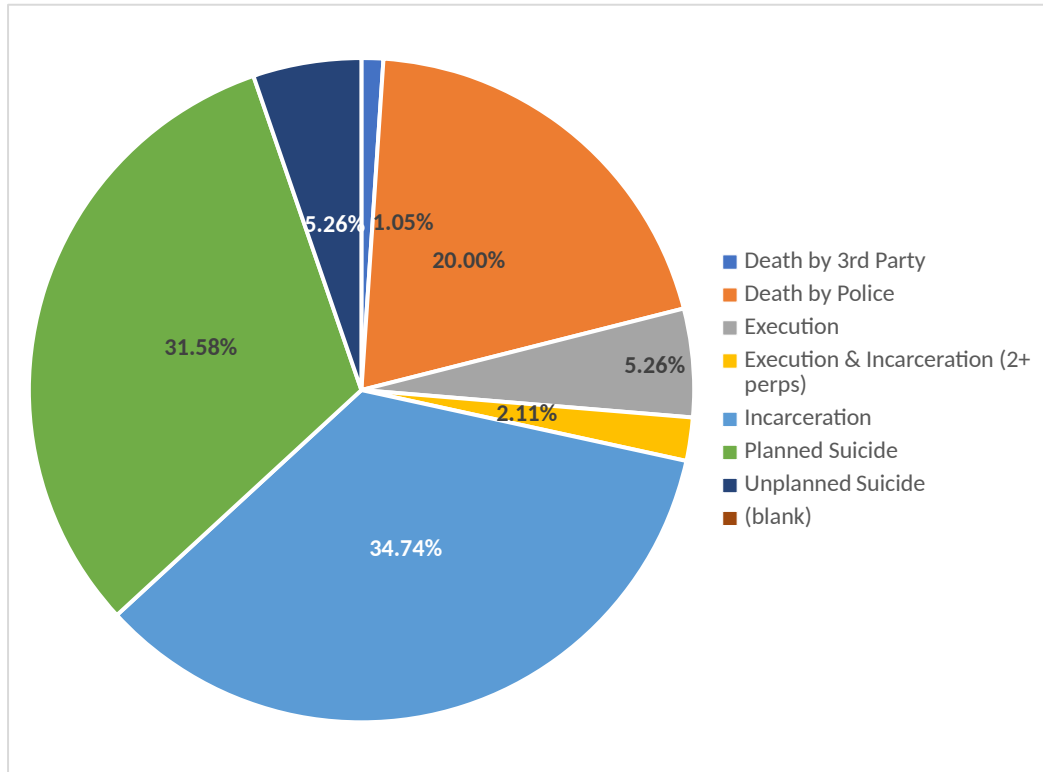


Fig. 2 Outcomes for perpetrators of USMV. There are some assumptions in place in determining whether a suicide was planned or unplanned. For example, it may be the case that some cases of death by police were planned suicide-by-cop, but without evidence from suicide letters, diaries, blogs, or other documentation, the assumption is that death by police was unplanned.

A fascination with a dynamic character in the media can inspire an already criminally predisposed individual toward deviant behavior. However, the goal with copycat crimes is recognition, media attention, a place in history, a one-upmanship of the predecessor, motivation based in ego—whereas riot mentality is based in frustration and deprivation. One of the cases in this study, the Rose-Mar College of Beauty massacre, stands out as a copycat crime. Robert Smith had developed a fascination with figures such as Lee Harvey Oswald, John Wilkes Booth, Brutus, Jesse James, and Hitler. Inspired by the Texas Tower and South Chicago Community Hospital shootings earlier the same year, after shooting everyone at the beauty school he told authorities he “wanted to kill about 40 people so I could make a name for myself. I wanted people to know who I was” (Bovsun 2008). But the previous two shootings, the Texas Tower shooting and the South Chicago Community Hospital, that inspired him were quite different. Neither of those two shooters desired fame or notoriety, and both suffered from despair, frustration, and ill fortune. The Rose-Mar shooting is an anomaly, not the

norm. Calling most USMV incidents copycat crimes is typically showing to be inaccurate.

6.2 Lone Wolf Terrorism and Riots

Lone wolf terrorism aims to disrupt a social order, to intimidate and create unrest for a variety of reasons centered on social, political, or religious discontent. “Klebold and Harris [Columbine Shooting] could be accurately described as terrorists. They believed that their lives would have meaning only upon bringing death to themselves and others.” (Block 2007, 6) For Spaaij, terrorism is:

Intentional acts that are committed with the aim of seriously intimidating a population, or unduly compelling a Government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act, or seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization (Spaaij 2010).

“Lone wolf terrorism involves terrorist attacks carried out by persons who (a) operate individually, (b) do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network, and (c) whose *modi operandi* are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or hierarchy.” (Spaaij 2010).

Riots are associated with civil disorder and uprisings spurred by a shared sense of injustice and unmet needs. Tensions build up, until someone leads the way in charging the streets or initiating a protest, that can quickly turn turbulent and violent. Driven by perceived injustices and inequalities, actions become impulsive in nature, carried out without regard for risk. After initial strikes by prominent USMV perpetrators, others will follow in the manner of frustrated citizens following a riot leader. The term “disorganized groups” is important here. There can be no more disorganized group than dozens of perpetrators of varying ages, geographies, backgrounds, and timeframes with no seeming connection. However, blogs emerged after the Columbine shooting where teens and young adults from across the country were sharing frustrations with society and authorities, rage against the system, and assimilations with the doctrines left behind by the perpetrators of Columbine. Chat rooms held conversations among disenfranchised youth. How-to’s were shared among this community, much like the manuals mentioned earlier in relation to lone wolf terrorism. “Despite the popular use of the term ‘lone wolf terrorist,’ many of the perpetrators are only loners in their offline life, but are often very active in communicating their views and radical opinions in various discussion groups or other kinds of social media” (Brynielsson et al. 2013, 1). Individuals frustrated with current situations may not have either the courage, creativity, or know-how to act on their frustrations. But when they witness another individual acting out on their frustrations, they not only are now able to envision a way to express their own frustrations, but are

motivated by the incident to act themselves. Motivation is a significant distinction between copy-cat phenomena (motivated by ego) and riot mentality (motivated by frustration and perceived injustice).

The 2011 riots in England are perhaps the latest major example of the way in which rioting moves well beyond its original point of outbreak. The trouble, which initially occurred in Tottenham, north London, on Saturday, 6 August, was followed in the next four days by rioting within at least 22 of London's 32 boroughs, as well as in the provincial cities of Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Salford, Liverpool and, on a smaller scale, in a range of other places (Newburn 2016, 3).

Thus, riot is also prone to exhibit this so-called copycat effect, yet it is recognized as a social movement or response, rather than a copycat plea for recognition. It is worth further exploring the Waddington et al flashpoints model of crucial determinants of order and disorder in relation to USMV (Newburn 2016, 6).

As Gurr has found, the more uncertainty about approved behavior, "the greater their anomie, . . . and hence the greater is [Relative Deprivation]" (1970, 43). Many USMV perpetrators these days turn to the internet in search of a community where they can fulfill the need for meaning, justice, and recognition. "In addition to give a possibility of becoming part of a community, the Internet is also a platform where lone wolves [in re terrorists] can express their views" (Brynielsson et al. 2013, 1-2). But the online universe is a poor substitute for real social interaction, and the lone wolf rioter remains ostracized from any practical form of community. Anomie realizes the insignificance of the self, while egoism continues to fight for the satisfaction of needs, even to the bitter end. A "decremental deprivation" (Gurr 1970, 50) of value systems leads to anomie, which has close relations to egoism in studies of suicide. The self feels hopeless and society feels useless.

7. Conclusion

Thus the Lone Wolf Rioter has evolved in the United States. Members of society for various reasons become overtly or subliminally ostracized and cast out from society, unable to develop healthy social bonds—a key component to achievement of the socially constructed BHNs of recognition, meaning, and justice. As a result, value opportunities are scarce or unavailable—the social assets of sounding boards, shared experience, collaborative learning, teamwork, networking, group problem solving, emotional outlets, and a host of other socially-constructed coping mechanisms are out of reach of the lone wolf. Self-navigating this unstable disjuncture from society leads to frustration. Relative deprivation draws the lone wolf inward, where the creation of an alternate reality attempts to resolve the

unsatisfied needs. With social bonds broken or unrealized, empathy is damaged or never realized. The more the lone wolf focuses on self satisfaction and survival, and the more the social structure becomes viewed as the enemy, the easier it is to visualize and accept violence as a (distorted) value opportunity. There is no longer a shared value system to connect the perpetrator to society, and the divide increases. And society itself is seen as the cause of this state of being. Driven by his own sense of right and wrong, the USMV lone wolf strikes out in a riot mentality against the injustice.

The most critical thread among these cases is the social disconnect. Not only is community where needs such as recognition, meaning, and justice are defined and validated, but healthy social connections provide resources for alternative coping mechanisms. And the social connections that usually act as deterrents to eliciting harm to society at large are eventually replaced altogether with a “me versus them” survival mentality.

Society may be shirking its responsibility in resolving this epidemic by trying to profile and cast aside the USMV perpetrators, drawing them as innately deviant non-beings that need to be hidden from sight, removed from the narrative altogether. It is understandable to not want to glorify or make famous or infamous persons who commit acts of violence. However, the USMV lone wolves are not, in most cases, driven by fame or glory. Completely erasing them from the narratives further ostracizes an already cast out faction of society. Isolating perpetrators as “others” and deviants also removes the public from addressing their role in contributing to the creation of lone wolf rioters—from the role society plays in inhibiting the realization of meaning, recognition, and justice, as socially constructed needs. There appears to be a greater need for finding ways to connect potential perpetrators back into their communities. It is the disconnect from their surroundings that ties all of these incidents together, and this so far seems to be the only thread that consistently connects the incidents across all the varied demographics of USMV perpetrators. Bringing the discussion of lone wolf rioters back out to the larger social picture, we must look at the possible connection between the increasing incidents of lone wolf riots and the increasing social fracturing within the U.S. As large factions of the population emerge in rage, despair, and frustration; subcultures face increased resurgence in conflict and confrontation; long-standing discords of racial strife and cultural clashes boil up and erupt again—it is fair to say that we are seeing increased isolation, ostracization, and frustration across the country. Something much larger than a copycat syndrome is at play. We must start to turn our attention toward the deeper social structures that are contributing to the formation of lone wolf rioters.

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Appendix A

Definition of United States Mass Violence (USMV) Incidents as Societal Aggression:

Incidents in which the intended consequence was large scale (4 or more) harm or destruction to human lives randomly or semi-randomly, not isolated to a single family or specific and limited personal relations, regardless of the number of actual deaths. Violent attack perpetrated by a non-terrorist, non-gang member, non-group-organized individual or individuals (less than 4) in a space occupied by multiple numbers of citizens, where there is a great risk of “bystanders” being injured, intentionally or not, as a result of the violence. An attack by individual(s) on a sector of society. Points of individual violent conflict with society.

Appendix B

“Despite continued drops in general violence in schools, ‘There is a low-frequency and high-intensity crime, however, that appears to be on the increase—adolescent mass murder. Between 1996 and 1999 there were six incidents of mass murder in schools that involved at least three fatalities’” (Meloy et al 2001, 1). Comparing my database to CDC reports—counter to Durkheim’s claim that there’s an inverse reduction in murder when there’s an increase in suicide—the below suicide rate increases coincide with increases in USMV incidents (Products—Data Briefs).

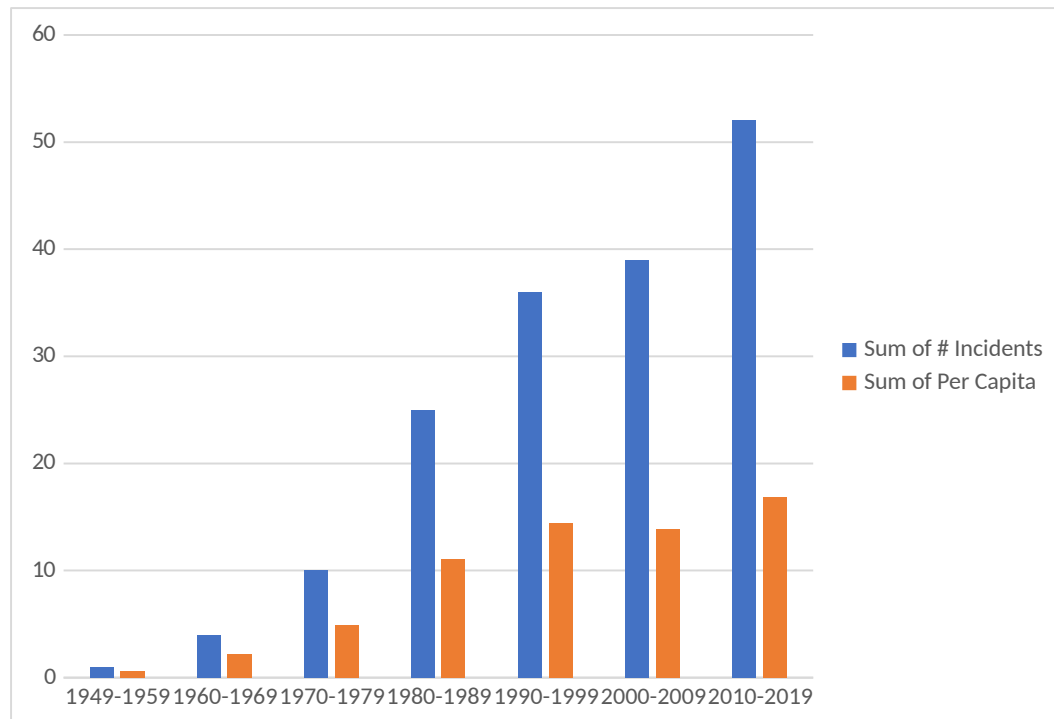
Data from the National Vital Statistics System, Mortality

- From 1999 through 2017, the age-adjusted suicide rate increased 33% from 10.5 to 14.0 per 100,000.
- Suicide rates were significantly higher in 2017 compared with 1999 among females aged 10–14 (1.7 and 0.5, respectively), 15–24 (5.8 and 3.0), 25–44 (7.8 and 5.5), 45–64 (9.7 and 6.0), and 65–74 (6.2 and 4.1).
- Suicide rates were significantly higher in 2017 compared with 1999 among males aged 10–14 (3.3 and 1.9, respectively), 15–24 (22.7 and 16.8), 25–44 (27.5 and 21.6), 45–64 (30.1 and 20.8) and 65–74 (26.2 and 24.7).
- In 2017, the age-adjusted suicide rate for the most rural (noncore) counties was 1.8 times the rate for the most urban (large central metro) counties (20.0 and 11.1 per 100,000, respectively).

Since 2008, suicide has ranked as the 10th leading cause of death for all ages in the United States (1). In 2016, suicide became the second leading cause of death

for ages 10–34 and the fourth leading cause for ages 35–54 (1). Although the Healthy People 2020 target is to reduce suicide rates to 10.2 per 100,000 by 2020 (2), suicide rates have steadily increased in recent years (3,4). This data brief uses final mortality data from the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) to update trends in suicide mortality from 1999 through 2017 and to describe differences by sex, age group, and urbanization level of the decedent’s county of residence.

From my database—USMV Incidents by Decade:



https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333203714_Database_of_USMV_1903-Present