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## **It Takes a Village: Tribalism as a Premise to Understand Societal Responsibility and Impact of Mass Violence**

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**It Takes a Village: Tribalism as a Premise to Understand Societal Responsibility and  
Impact of Mass Violence**

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BY  
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What is a mass shooter? This is difficult to answer as there is no single definition. The definition of a mass shooter depends on contextual factors including victim count, setting, and motivation (Gramlich, 2019). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines active shooters as “one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021, page 1). While other definitions are used to identify a mass shooter, given the breadth of study in this area by the FBI, this paper will use the FBI definition.

Attempts at understanding, predicting, and preventing mass shooters and the damage they cause has been in focus in the wake of tragedies such as Sandy Hook, Parkland, Las Vegas, and Orlando (DeSilver, 2020). A total of 150 lives were taken between these four events, and numerous others have occurred since. In attempts to mitigate these events and save lives, various agencies and advocacy groups have taken to tracking and understanding why these tragedies occur. Unfortunately, these attempts have not led to greater understanding regarding the etiology of these incidents. It is the goal of this paper to propose looking through the lens of tribalism and Social Drama Theory. By looking at this phenomenon from these perspectives, this paper hopes to provide insights and potential resolutions to mitigate mass shootings—and save lives.

In a time when unprecedented mass violence seemingly occurs regularly, our society is scurrying to understand why and how mass violence perpetrators make these fateful decisions. Since 2016, active shooter incidents have increased by 100% (FBI, 2021), a staggering statistic. Specifically, the FBI identified 20 active shooter incidents in 2016 and 40 in 2020. The data reveal an upward trend with an average 33% increase per year (FBI, 2021). Mass shootings cause a particular type of dilemma within the United States, due to our confusing definitions and the uncertain nature of the tragedies. To begin to understand what is occurring in the country,

data analysts must contend with the aforementioned factors, which make it nearly impossible to discern a clear trend (Smart & Schell, 2018). Another factor to contend with when defining mass shooting is the broad definition of mass shooting, including the inclusion of familicide, domestic violence, felony-related killings, and mass public shootings (Smart & Schell, 2018). For the context of this paper, mass public shootings will be the subject of discussion.

The safety of the community and the preservation of lives is paramount when discussing mass shootings. A stunning statistic regarding how mass shootings impact communities is that approximately one-third of American adults are fearful of mass shootings, and the fear prevents them from going certain places or attending events (American Psychological Association, 2019). This suggests that mass shootings are a public health issue that can be addressed through policy changes; however, the issue is much more complex. The psychological impact that results from these tragedies spans beyond those directly involved. The knowledge of the incident, as well as the potential for it occurring elsewhere, may cause psychological distress to a wide array of individuals. While mass shootings are traumatic and shocking events, the reality is that they represent less than 0.5% of all homicides in the United States (Duwe, 2020). Statistically, mass shootings are considered rare despite their staggering consequences. The low base rates of these incidents further complicate how to predict and prevent mass shootings. This does not suggest, however, that we should discontinue investigation and exploration of mass shootings, but to consider how the changes proposed would ultimately impact the occurrence of them.

The unpredictable nature of mass shooting incidents further complicates our understanding of who, when, and why these tragedies occur. There are varying motives, means, and rationales as to why these incidents are carried out (Smart & Schell, 2018). One recent recognized trend is the notoriety of mass shootings (Lankford & Silver, 2020). However, this is

not true across all incidents and the ability to identify the perpetrators goal prior to the incident is indiscriminate. As such, attempts to understand the phenomena have mostly remained heterogeneous.

Through years of research, hundreds of cases, and consultation with numerous experts, the FBI and other agencies have attempted to create a profile of a mass shooter. They have looked at age, race, gender, pattern of perceived injustices, geographic location, and other variables. The most statistically significant trait is that most mass shooters are white males; however, there are outliers regarding gender and race (Fox, 2013). Individual risk assessments have not shown any efficacy and it is nearly impossible to understand what will trigger an individual to act on their perceived injustices or for people to make the decision to restrain violent urges (Smart & Schell, 2018). Trying to predict this risk is akin to a ticking time bomb with multiple wires—and no knowledge of which wire to cut.

In the FBI's most recent publication of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2020, they identify demographics that describe the perpetrators of mass shootings (2021). They reported that 83% of the perpetrators were male, 38% were between the ages of 25 and 34, and 57% were apprehended at the conclusion of the incident (FBI, 2021). Since 2000, reports like this have been published and few changes have been implemented (Smart & Schell, 2018). With that said, reactive plans, such as Run, Hide, and Fight, are now used to protect those who are in the midst of a mass shooting (FBI, 2016). This plan is not preventative or proactive, but a reactive intervention for when an active shooter imminently threatens harm.

While a clear definition of a mass shooter would assist in the creation of individual risk assessments and identifying future perpetrators, the characteristics collected thus far closely represent the general population (Fox, 2013). To carry out a heinous act such as a mass shooting,

the general public may assume that the person is a “violent madman” (Metzl, 2015). In fact, a number of studies suggest that this depiction of mass shooters invert the reality of what occurs. For instance, Metzl (2015) provides the example that severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia reduce the risk of violence over time, which is contrary to public perception. To further dispel the perception of a lone wolf or madman, school shooters are often boys who are performing well academically and generally live in stable communities (Newman, 2007). Additionally, Vossekuil (2002) identified that 63% of mass shooters came from two parent households where problematic family dynamics were not readily apparent. With this information at our disposal, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify who will become a mass shooter and why. The motivation for a mass shooting provides the strongest indication of potential harm. In a report that reviewed 83 “would be killers,” Fein and Vossekuil (1999) noted that evidence in their belongings or writings emulated previous killers 38% of the time. This suggests that by paying more attention to a person’s heroes, idols, and the reason for why they want to emulate these individuals can provide insight into a pattern of problematic beliefs and potential dangerousness. A study of school shooters identified that revenge was a primary motive for more than 61% of perpetrators, followed by trying to solve a problem, or to achieve recognition (34% and 24% respectively). These individual factors provide important data points when retroactively working to understand why a perpetrator inflicted mass violence on a population; however, identifying them prior to the act remains mysterious. Unfortunately, this will remain the case given the low base rates of these incidents (Peterson, 2021). The work done to identify these trends has benefited society’s understanding of the perpetrator, but it has yet to provide meaningful data to prevent the act of violence.

Attempts to understand mass shooters at the level of individual psychology has proven to be unsuccessful in regard to identification and prevention. As such, taking a broader perspective to investigate these incidents may merit greater success. Two lenses to understand mass shooters with a macro perspective include Social Drama Theory (Turner, 1974) and tribalism (Seltzer, 2019). Investigating mass shooters through these lenses, and ultimately incorporating the social context in which they occur, may provide novel ideas on how to identify and prevent these tragedies. The application of the lenses, as well as the application of the lenses to America's response to mass shootings, will be explored and the benefits that could be sought as a result.

### **Social Drama Theory**

Victor Turner's Social Drama Theory (1974), provides an applicable framework in which to understand America's phenomena of mass shooters and mass shooters. Turner defines social drama as "eruptions from the level surface of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, its customs making for regular, orderly sequences of behavior" (Turner, 1985, page 196). That is to say, even within conflict and discord, humans have a predictable series of reactions that can be delineated and defined. As such, each interaction can be broken down into four different stages: the Breach, the Crisis, the Redressive Action, and the Reintegration or Schismogenesis (Turner, 1974). Turner and other performance theorists, conceptualized events occurring in the greater societal context as being a performance, where each incident has its actors, a plot, and a conclusion (Bell, 2006). Each of these stages carry their own sequence of events and can be utilized to better understand what to expect within the social drama.

The first stage in the social drama is the breach—that is, when a member of a community breaks a rule or violates the norm. The breach can expose itself in a variety of contexts from

insignificant to blatantly obvious. Turner's theory has been applied to calamitous events such as the attacks on September 11, 2001, the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinski scandal, and The Watergate Scandal (Bell, 2006). In each instance, the stable social processes had been disrupted and prompted a breach in typical interactions. During the social drama stage, conflict is brought to the surface. People may begin to take sides, further divide themselves, and may begin to dramatize their differences (Boje, 2003). This process is typically subtle and not readily apparent until the crisis stage agitates and exaggerates the breach.

The second stage in the social drama, is the crisis or an incident that further widens the breach and makes it apparent (Turner, 1974). The distinction and conflict that was created as a result of the breach is exacerbated and now visible. It is at this point that those with power have the responsibility to create order and are burdened to grapple with the crisis. Though the crisis is secondary in the social drama theory, it is often seen as a precipitating event. The confusion, however, is that it is precipitating the redress, rather than the breach (Boje, 2003). It simply is the tool that exacerbates the breach.

Third is the redressive action, or more succinctly stated as the redress. This stage is most commonly characterized as carrying out a process (Turner, 1974). The goal of the process is to attempt to resolve the crisis. A redress can look like anything between informal advice or mediation to legal and judicial changes (Boje, 2003). While use of the term resolution may construe a positive outcome, that is not always the case. It is possible that the redress serves some, but certainly not all. It is at this point society moves into the next stage to determine if the social fabric can be repaired or if there is an irreparable schism.

Finally, Turner suggests that there is a solution of sorts, be it Reintegration or Schismogenesis (1974). Reintegration suggests a solution would be provided that all parties

involved benefit from and can agree. Ultimately, the group that had been disturbed throughout the social drama process would be reintegrated and society would be unified. Reintegration can be carried out through policy changes, changes in cultural contexts and practices, reaffirmation of core values, or other methods that resolve social discourse. Contrarily, Schismogenesis is what occurs when there is no resolution of the problem, and the schism remains in place.

Schismogenesis is the conclusion where there is no repair to the societal fabric and the contesting parties remain as adversaries (Turner, 1974). The most common example of an irreparable schism is between war and peace (Boje, 2003) and how there does not appear to be a way to achieve success in either. For instance, the perceptions of what is being fought for is different for each side. That is to say, there is not a common goal but conflicting ones that make any attempts at resolution futile. Boje (2003) speaks about the effect of liminality, the in-between space, of these conflicting goals. It is in this in-between space that reintegration is unable to be achieved and no hemming of the social fabric can be done.

### **Tribalism**

The concept of tribalism, particularly modern tribalism, is rooted in sociology and anthropology (Seltzer, 2019). It is traditionally defined as a group built from kinship, genetics, and a common ancestor, but can also be used to describe a type of conformity (James, 2006). When discussing the concept of tribes, it is not uncommon to think of native Indians of America or aboriginals from different parts of the world; however, tribes can also be found in the digital era. Social networking sites and chat rooms provide a modernistic method of creating tribes; however, they lack the necessity of survival that is inherent in traditional tribalism (James, 2006). Humans, at their core, are social beings and not equipped to live independently, which makes tribalism an exceptionally adaptive facet of human evolution (Jenks, 1998). Tribalism has

continued to evolve and influence how we organize ourselves in terms of ideology, politics, sports, and has created more discords than community. Notably, Chua (2018) posits that our instinct to identify with a group is “certainly hard-wired” and that it plays a major role in how we operate in our day-to-day lives. This theory of tribalism is apparent when discussing political views or opinions, often with the members of one group agreeing with each other indiscriminately and viewing the out-group as ignorant, “or a combination of stupid or evil” (Hussain, 2017). Essentially, tribalism is a way to organize a group of people who have belief systems that align.

Common tribal nations such as the Navajo, Cherokee, and Blackfoot were as large as tens of thousands. In order to maintain kinship ties and organization, they broke into “bands” that consisted of a few dozen to a few hundred individuals (Prine-Pauls, 2005). This allowed each band to create meaningful relationships with one another, govern themselves, and helped them to survive. Further, this allowed for minimal significant political or economic distinction among the tribe (Gluckman, 2007). Interestingly, research has been completed to better understand to what extent humans can recognize meaningful relationships with such a large society, such as the United States. Dunbar’s number, the result of a study that investigated the number of people the human brain can recognize as fully developed and complex people, is approximately 150 (Dunbar, 2010). Further exploration on this topic was completed by Malcolm Gladwell (2006), who posits that the neurology of tribalism is “unescapable” as the human brain is not adapted to functioning with large populations.

The benefits of tribalism can be seen in a variety of contexts. Sebastian Junger, in his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (2016), speaks to the importance of meaning and necessity that existed within tribal nations. He provides that humans do not necessarily dislike

hardship, calamity, or conflict. In fact, he suggests that we thrive on it as it makes people feel necessary (Junger, 2016). The drive to contribute to our immediate group can assist in the journey for human meaning, which facilitates feelings of belonging and loyalty (Junger, 2016). This is something that modern society, Junger (2016) suggests, has perfected—the art of making people not feel necessary. Junger (2016) discusses how individualistic societies are not capable of supporting individuals, and despite the heavy progress of these cultures, they are deficient in fulfilling the basic human need of feeling like a part of something greater. The United States military is a prime example of how necessity fosters interconnectedness and belonging.

Despite the various backgrounds, cultures, and races members come from, the military has a way of creating a cohesive group. Being a member of the military encourages diverse individuals to come together to form a unified group and agree to work together. They become acutely aware that much of the culture they have absorbed from civilian life is insignificant and unnecessary when lives are on the line. Further, they are provided with duties that are integral to the success of the group and can be equally costly. The meaningfulness of each member's duties and responsibilities facilitates a mindset that promotes cohesion and necessity (Junger, 2016).

Not only do tribes promote a harmonic sounding utopia, they facilitate group pressure that drives the behaviors of the members. Group pressure creates a foundation for morality, right and wrong, and how to handle those who go outside of those bounds (Junger, 2016). Further, group pressure provides guidelines as to how the masses should behave in situations, particularly ones that everyone wants it to go smoothly (i.e., ceremonies). Generally, moral behavior is accepted as a behavior that benefits the greatest majority of people or has significant benefits to the relevant group in the long-term (University of Texas, 2021). As the American tribe has evolved, there seems to be a disconnect on what moral behavior means, what its limits are, and

how it can be adapted to different scenarios. Not only is there a lack of understanding of moral behavior, but there is also no universal condemnation of “bad” or immoral behavior (Junger, 2016). An example of a relatively stable moral foundation born out of group pressure is the U.S. military. While there are certainly problems in the military, the military does provide a protocol for how to proceed when a moral or normed code is broken.

Meyer et al. (2016, p. 8) writes that military culture is “so profound that it can fundamentally change a service member’s worldview.” This is because there are a set of norms, morals, and ethical tenets that create the cohesiveness of the group and keeps them together, even during the toughest of times. Coll et al. (2011), explains that there are three often-overlooked virtues of military culture that are foundational in how their system operates: intra-group peacefulness, restraint, and obedience. These three tenets guide service members in their missions and are engrained into them from the beginning of their service. Although there are other values of military culture that may seem more obvious or imperative, they are all derivatives of these foundational three. Furthermore, the importance of obedience and restraint continue to facilitate the group pressure and ensure that there will not be any disruptions in the function of the group.

Finally, Junger (2016) provides the idea of “collective healing.” That is, it is the responsibility of a society to come together and heal a trauma and not induce further trauma. Perpetuating and creating further trauma can be insidious and sometimes undetectable. However, the act of avoidance, indifference, or generally turning away from the problem maintains the struggle of the individual (Fuller, 2017). The act of collective healing requires the acknowledgment of wrongdoing before any action steps towards healing can begin. Once the accountability for the hardship has been taken, the collective group can embark on the process of

restoration and repair (Huxta, 2021). This is a vital stage for a society to continue to evolve, and is integral for the maintaining of cohesive, meaningful tribes.

### **Understanding Mass Shootings through Tribalism**

Understanding a mass shooter on an individual level has been generally unsuccessful. The theories of tribalism and social drama are lenses that can be utilized to gain a stronger understanding of mass shooters. By taking a macro perspective, and including the present social context, society can potentially begin to understand this phenomenon. Tribalism, the sociological and anthropological concept of a group that is built from kinship, genetics, and a common ancestor to facilitate conformity (James, 2006), is one lens in which to conceptualize mass shootings. If we investigate what creates a mass shooter, they can be seen as an individual who has been alienated and the person feels they do not belong to a tribe. Alternatively, they ultimately found a tribe that supported their ideologies and promoted violence. To better appreciate how tribalism can apply to mass shootings, case example of Elliot Rodger and Anders Breivik will be presented.

Anders Breivik was a young white Norwegian male who believed Muslims were invading his country and attempting to overthrow native Norwegians as a means to gain political power (Seierstad, 2015). This was in 2011, a time where the Middle East was engaged in internal conflict and many refugees were fleeing and seeking asylum. Norway was a country that welcomed asylum seekers to help create refuge for immigrants. Breivik, enraged and distasteful of this concept, sought out a political group that wanted to oust immigrants and looked for different means to complete this mission. As his belief system became more ingrained, he began to attribute his perceived injustice to any individual or group who supported immigrant well-being. In the end, he attacked a youth camp that welcomed students interested in progressive

politics. He murdered 77 people in one of the most horrific mass shootings in world history (Seierstad, 2015).

Another example is Elliot Rodger who was a young white male who resided in Isla Vista, California. Rodger was known to be an active member of the counterculture of involuntary celibacy, also known as the Incels (DiBranco, 2020). He espoused feelings of rejection from women and believed that men were the superior sex (DiBranco, 2020). Once he joined the Incel counterculture, he integrated their vernacular into his belief system. Women were referred to as “Staceys” and men who were “wanted” were classified as “Chads” (Menzie, 2020). His feelings of resentment grew, and were exacerbated by the Incels, and resulted in him carrying out a mass shooting against women in Isla Vista, California, in May 2014.

The cases of Anders Breivik and Elliot Rodger are useful in understanding the application of tribalism to mass shootings, as well as the national response. In each of these cases, tribalism played out slightly differently, and highlight different aspects that could be used to gain a better understanding of mass shootings. Both cases will be used to demonstrate dimensions of tribalism and social drama theory to provide insight into these acts of violence.

Junger (2016) highlights that feeling meaningful and necessary within a tribe is essential to the individual’s functioning. In the case of Anders Breivik, his thoughts and contributions about immigration were generally unheard, as they were not accepted by the greater population (Seierstad, 2015). Perhaps this led Breivik to feel that his opinions were meaningless and did not matter. It can be difficult for an individual to propagate change within a large population of a nation. Junger (2016) provides that nations are particularly inept at making citizens feel necessary, but rather to feel disposable. As such, Breivik joined the Knights Templar. The group aligned with his perspectives, thoughts on immigration, and general worldview (Seierstad, 2015).

This allowed Breivik to have meaning within the group and to believe that the work they were doing was necessary. The common goal between Breivik and the Knights Templar facilitated a smaller tribe in which the aspects of meaningfulness and necessity were met.

Elliot Rodger's search for meaning and necessity mimics that of Anders Breivik. After years of real and perceived rejection from women, Rodger villainized females (DiBranco, 2020). This could be characterized as a lack of meaning and generalized feelings of inferiority. As the lack of meaning and continued rejection from women escalated in his mind, Rodger sought out others whom he could relate to. As previously mentioned, Rodger joined the Incel counterculture, which perpetuated and justified his demonization of women. By joining the Incels, Rodger found a sense of belonging, meaning, and necessity. In fact, after his act of violence in 2014 he is often cited by other Incels when perpetrating violent acts (BBC, 2018). This suggests that Rodger created such a high level of meaning and necessity that he is now idolized. He is even referred to as the "supreme gentleman," within the Incel community (BBC, 2018).

Another aspect of tribalism that Junger (2016) highlights is that of group pressure and how it facilitates a moral foundation. Both Rodger and Breivik joined groups that aligned with and supported their ideologies. These groups engage and encourage violent mentalities. The fracturing of the tribes both in Norway and America can provide ample opportunity for meaning and necessity; however, it can equally create novel issues when determining the foundations of morality and right and wrong. For example, Anders Breivik's membership in the Knights Templar allowed him to utilize the belonging and necessity aspects of tribalism to fixate on the injustice he perceived.

Morality ebbed and flowed dependent on the group Breivik belonged to and allowed for the justification for violence. As such, there is no moral underpinning for these values within the greater society that span across subcultures or tribes, as is being discussed in the scope of this paper. In fact, it is entirely dependent upon the individual or subgroup to hold values and morals as they see fit. In the case of Anders Breivik, his understanding of moral behavior was vastly different than the majority of Norwegians—that is, that it was acceptable to sacrifice innocent lives for the purpose of protecting his race and country. Perhaps Breivik perceived the lives he took as a necessary sacrifice as a means to meet his goal and did not view their lives as innocent or that they were human. Ultimately, he seemed to be losing grip on the tribe he had always known—Norwegians and he started to lack a sense of belongingness in this tribe. Presumably, this was supported by the Knights Templar and Breivik found it to be justification for his actions (Seierstad, 2015). The trajectory seen with Anders Breivik is very similar to that of Elliot Rodger. He joined the Incel counterculture that promoted further demonization of females, which subsequently facilitated and encouraged violence against them. The fracturing and dissolution of the moral foundation complicates the definition of right and wrong, and the means in which to achieve morality is endorsed.

As noted above, the concept of collective healing is also explored by Junger (2016). This is the idea that the society is responsible for working together to heal a trauma, be it for specific groups of people or for the entirety of the society (Huxta, 2021). Collective healing is best contrasted in the cases of Anders Breivik and Elliot Rodger, as each of the nations approached the issue in vastly different ways. From the perspective of the general population, Norway vacillated between blaming the individual, blaming the weapon, and blaming the tribe. However, Norway took this a step further. Rather than pointing fingers in different directions that brought

no resolution, they pointed the finger at themselves (Seierstad, 2015). Norwegians began to wonder how their society had created an individual like Anders Breivik and what could be done differently to prevent future tragedies. In this moment, Norway identified their most basic tribal level—that they are one nation, and thus one tribe, despite the actions of an outcast (Seierstad, 2015). Instead of it being based on the individual, it became generalized to the tribe and how the tribe could resolve the issue. This approach was likely facilitated by the fact that the vast majority of Norwegians are not too distantly related to each other, speak a common and unique language, and live relatively close to each other.

Alternatively, the United States took a different approach. While citizens also vacillated between blaming the perpetrator, the weapon, and the society, there was no resolution. America is wholly different from Norway; therefore, it is complicated to draw comparisons. There are numerous factors that impact how the United States would approach the idea of collective healing, such as the importance of individual responsibility and the Second Amendment. Ultimately, the United States discovered they could not integrate the various groups (Incels and general public; pro-gun and anti-gun) and accepted that as the nature of the country. As a result, the Incels became further demonized and criminalized, and the chasm between the counterculture and greater population grew—causing the tribes to become wholly independent of one another. Of course, Americans are not particularly closely related to each other, do not speak a common and unique language, and are not clustered together.

The unavoidable fact of tribalism and its invasiveness in our daily lives is further evident in our press and media. It is particularly true when discussing mass shooting tragedies and America's response to them. The 24-hour news cycle needlessly reports repeated, sensationalized information. This is done for many reasons including ratings, money, and

attention to a topic; however, the narrative never changes. At present, there is no standard for the American media when covering mass shootings (Meindl, 2017). There is a common saying of “if it bleeds, it leads” (Stoop, 2007). Unfortunately, this could not be truer with today’s massacres. Despite if the information is directly relevant to the audience, the 24-hour news cycle perpetuates the glorification of the wrongdoer and creates viewership. Media and news outlets are serving a tribe in that they are delineating the good people and the evil. The dichotomous categorizations miss the more complex idea that every individual is a product of numerous factors such as their history, background, and interactions. By turning the finger back at ourselves, we can ask how we—as members of the society—played a part in the tragedy. While the contribution was likely minute, responsibility for how we may have created a situation in which the person was rejected should be taken to understand how to overcome these situations in the future.

Social media, through the internet, creates another complicated set of factors. As previously mentioned, tribalism is a natural evolutionary advantage; however, it perpetuates information that is bred from those who think similar to us. That is, opposing information is not accepted by the tribe and often seen as wholly conflictual. In addition to the 24-hour news cycle, citizens are now inundated with information from social media. These platforms provide a stage for free speech, that feeds confirmation in one’s belief. This is due to the algorithm that these social media sites use (Javanbahkt, 2020). The selection of information fed to an individual is created by technology that assesses one’s online posts, search history, and social media interactions (Javanbahkt, 2020). The role of tribalism with the novel era of the internet has created a sense of cohesion within niche groups, which also include countercultures that potentially promote violence. Relatedly, the internet has altered how conflict is resolved or avoided. When people were foragers and conflict arose, it was difficult to change tribal

membership, and this urged resolution. Now with the advent of the internet, when conflict arises it is a simple click of a mouse and some keystrokes that can initiate a change in tribal membership. The individual can now seek out a new tribe, or alternatively, the larger tribe can easily expel a member.

There is a distinct bond that is created within countercultures. Countercultures have identified ways to make those outcast by society feel accepted and appreciated—they provided a sense of belonging and necessity. Where the larger tribe failed, the smaller band succeeded. When combined with violent attitudes and ideations, this brings about a cycle of accepted violence against others for principles that are seemingly irrelevant to the mass populace. This does not differ much from the formation of gangs, particularly when acts of initiation are required to retain membership. Suddenly, the violence required is acceptable for the belongingness and meaningfulness that would be received in return. The internet has opened a unique door that increases and enhances the likelihood of mass violence. Individuals can create a community of belonging more easily. This is best evidenced by the Incel counterculture, and with the case of Elliot Rodger. The Incel counterculture was built and perpetuated through the use of the internet. Chat rooms, forums, and other technological means of sharing ideas were used to justify violence as it fit their belief system. Perpetrators of mass violence may not feel connected to the larger tribe and seek out alternative means to fulfill meaning, cohesion, and necessity. In terms of tribalism, America's emphasis on individuality and the lack of connectedness has seemingly created divisiveness, destroying the larger tribe. As such, the larger identity of being American has been diffused.

### **Understanding Mass Shootings through Social Drama Theory**

Victor Turner's theory becomes relevant with mass shooters because the social context in which the tragedies occur cannot be ignored. Each of the four stages provide an opportunity for understanding, intervention, and prevention. The breach—when a member of a community breaks a rule or violates a norm—is the first link in the chain. Next comes the crisis, when an incident causes further widening of the breach and makes the violation readily apparent. The redressive action, or the redress, is the process that is carried out to attempt a resolution for the crisis. Finally, a society approaches reintegration or schismogenesis at which point the social fabric is hemmed or there is no resolution of the conflicting parties (Turner, 1974). Though not obvious while in the midst of a social drama, there are indications that signal which stage is presently occurring. In the cases of Anders Breivik and Elliot Rodger the stages of Social Drama Theory can be used to explore both the escalation of their violent acts and the subsequent reactions of their nations. While tribalism is helpful in attempting to explain how a mass shooter comes to be, as a result of their society, Turner's theory provides an explanation—and possible chance for change—as to how a society may respond to such a tragedy.

The first stage outlined by Turner is the breach, when stable social processes have been disrupted (Turner, 1974). In the case of Anders Breivik, the breach occurred when Norway began accepting immigrants for asylum. Though not obviously divisive among the nation, there were those that opposed the new immigrants' arrivals (Erlanger, 2011). Tensions rose among the population due to the drastic influx of immigrants and the noticeable changes that were occurring across various communities. As a result of his general distaste for those not of Norwegian descent, Breivik spoke out about his opinions and was continually cast out because of his extremist ideas (Seierstad, 2015). Conversely, the breach in Elliot Rodger's case is much harder

to identify. It could be suggested that the breach occurred after a being rejected by a woman at some point; however, this cannot be clearly deciphered.

The crisis is the second stage within the Social Drama Theory, in which the breach is aggravated and made more apparent (Turner, 1974). Throughout Breivik's childhood, he saw incidents in which he perceived the Muslim population to be taking his opportunities (Seierstad, 2015). When these incidents occurred, it not only aggravated Breivik emotionally, but highlighted and strengthened his dislike of Muslims. Alternatively, Elliot Rodger joined the Incel counterculture which endorsed the beliefs he held. Consistent with Incel terminology and ideology, Rodger believed that men were the superior sex and that women ("Stacys") only wanted certain men ("Chads"), who did not appreciate them (Menzie, 2020). His membership in the Incel counterculture further highlighted his misogynistic beliefs and made subsequent interactions and rejections from women more damaging.

The redressive action, or the redress, is the third stage. In this stage a process is being carried out, be it a mediation, legal or judicial changes, or a grand action (Boje, 2003). Anders Breivik and Elliot Rodger both chose similar redressive actions. That is, they chose to carry out violence. In each of these cases, their manifestos detail that their violent outbursts were attempts to bring attention to their respective issues (Seierstad, 2015; DiBranco, 2020). Their violent acts ultimately lead to the fourth stage of the social drama, schismogenesis or reintegration. In the fourth stage, there is an attempt to arrive at some sort of solution. Turner outlines two possibilities within this stage: reintegration or schismogenesis (1974). Reintegration is the process of reunifying the society and resolving the issue, whereas schismogenesis is the lack of such a resolution. In the case of Breivik's attacks and Norway's attempts to resolve the issue,

they achieved what Turner would identify as a reintegration. However, within the United States after Rodger's attack a seemingly irreparable schism arose.

In Norway, the populace went through the stages of grief and accepting that such a horrific tragedy had occurred on their soil (Stoltenberg, 2011). Initially there were attempts to understand the tragedy and this naturally led to blaming political parties, individuals, and the weapons used; however, Norwegians ultimately found a way to address the tragedy as one nation (Seierstad, 2015). Numerous reports highlight how Norway "is a land of consensus" and are determined to remain unified despite the tragedy (Erlanger, 2011). In this case, there was a hemming of the social fabric. That is, they punished the perpetrator as they saw fit, but took it a step further and identified what they—as a nation—did to create someone who would inflict such violence (Seierstad, 2015). After Rodger attacked women in Isla Vista, California, the United States did not follow the same trajectory as Norway. Rather, Americans typically blamed the perpetrator and the means by which he carried out the act, the weapon. Turner would identify this as a schismogenesis, as there is no resolution or hemming of the social fabric (1974).

While Turner's Social Drama Theory (1974) can be applied to the individual perpetrator themselves, it can also be applied to the response that the respective nation has to the violent attack. Firstly, there is the breach in which the shooter violates the social norm, law, and stability of the society. Secondly, there is the crisis which could vary depending on the society in which the attack is enacted on. For example, in the United States the gun debate becomes prominent and closely follows mass shootings. After the crisis is the redress. In line with the gun debate within the United States, law makers begin to push different gun control legislation. In fact, there is a 15% increase in gun legislation introduced following a mass shooting (Luca et al, 2020). The final stage of the Social Drama Theory is reintegration or schismogenesis, depending on whether

there is a resolution or not. While each of the stages of Turner's theory plays out in both the Rodgers and Breivik scenarios, understanding the final stage of the nation's reaction provides an alternative understanding. As previously suggested, Norway worked toward reintegration in the wake of Anders Breivik's attack. Alternatively, the United States remains in a schismogenesis stage of which there is no hemming of the social fabric. While there are various variables to account for, some are more obvious than others. Most noticeable are the general cultures of each of the nations, how that impacts their views of violence, and what measures they are willing to take to mitigate any future risk.

As previously stated, Norway moved towards the reintegration stage of Turner's Social Drama Theory. Despite moving through the expected stages of grief following the actions of Anders Breivik, they found hope and solutions through consensus and unity (Seierstad, 2015). The mindset of Norway certainly played a significant role in their reaction. The focus on consensus and unity, as well as the safety for their citizens, was paramount. This collectivistic mentality and sense of social responsibility can be seen across the world. For example, when Australia experienced their most deadly act of violence the country came together and agreed to ban most firearms (Alpers, 2017). Norway, though not taking such extreme measures toward weapons, took the same principle into their policies and legislation (Kolås, 2017). As such, Neuman (2021) asserts that Norway has only had one domestic terror attack since 2011.

In these previous examples, laws were created, or the problem was addressed as a way of reintegration and means to move forward. In the United States, however, Turner indicates that the country moves into a schismogenesis. The United States' founding documents further complicates any progression toward a solution. Namely, the Bill of Rights protects and empowers the individual citizen. The debate of social responsibility and individual freedom is

highlighted in the wake of a tragedy, particularly when a firearm is used to inflict violence. An obvious indicator of the United States' schismogenesis is the political stance of pro-or anti-gun ownership and regulation. In the wake of a tragedy, citizens tend to divide into camps based on their political beliefs. This is evident in the wakes of the Colorado STEM shooting and the Parkland High School Shooting (Dickson, 2019). As a result of our founding documents (i.e., of the values and rights they describe), it is unlikely that firearms will be banned as the Australians did. However, attempting to understand gun violence and mass shootings through research could prove helpful.

Until recently, there has been a congressional ban on gun violence research. The ban, seen as promoting gun control and limiting the Second Amendment, made interdisciplinary research impossible (Stark & Shah, 2017). This has hampered our nation's understanding of potential risk factors, preventative measures, and violence patterns. As a result of this ban, researchers, clinicians, and other professionals have been left to only theorize the potential causes and consequences of mass shootings. While theories can be useful in many ways, it makes it difficult to implement effective change. Thus, the country remains in schismogenesis.

### **Conclusion**

There are numerous ways to define a mass shooter or a mass shooting incident. Attempts to understand violent perpetrators on an individual has been largely unsuccessful in efforts to prevent future incidents. By examining these tragedies from a societal perspective, insights can be gleaned as to how to make wide impacting changes. Using the lenses of tribalism and Social Drama Theory, there can be a better understanding of mass shooters and the respective nations reactions. Through tribalism, and Junger's (2016) perspective, mass shooters are created from being cast out from the larger tribe. Ultimately, they lacked a sense of belonging, necessity, and

meaning. Turner's Social Drama Theory (1974) provides insights as to how a society responds to such a tragedy. The breach caused by the mass shooter and the subsequent crisis and redress illuminate fractures within the society. It is then up to the nation to find a way to resolve the fractures and attempt to move toward reintegration. However, not all societies are capable of doing this and they transition into schismogenesis. By having a frame to understand a society's reaction to a tragedy, and how the tragedy came about in the first place, can provide an initial step to making effective change. Dispelling the myths that the media perpetuates (i.e., violent madman, mentally ill, etc), understanding an individual's desire to belong to a group and feel necessary, and how society interacts with these tragic events act in imperative to working towards a safer society. While no direct interventions or study is discussed within the context of this paper, the mere insight and increased knowledge of how both individuals and communities operate provide food for thought the next time a mass shooting unfolds.

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