

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Envy and extreme violence

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Abstract

Envy is an emotion capable of producing distorted perceptions and cognitions. Intense envy is associated with adverse states such as shame, depression, inferiority, isolation, anxiety, paranoia, and even violent criminal behavior. The false logic of envy asserts that one has an unfavorable disadvantage, while obscuring the relative nature of advantage, so that the other appears enhanced while one feels diminished. This position generates resentment toward the other. There may come a point at which the envious person's goal is to harm the other's ability to enjoy the perceived advantages—the wish to destroy goodness as formulated by Melanie Klein. The psychodynamics are discussed by which destructive envy produces or enhances a persecutory mindset and desire for revenge so powerful that lethal violence is chosen as an option. The concepts of *obliterative envy* and *pseudo-spiritual transformation* are introduced, and forensic case examples are used to demonstrate how envy produces persecutory cognitions and facilitates the desire to “obliterate” what is perceived as an unjust, intolerable reality. This psychodynamic process follows an instructive pattern that may benefit forensic and other clinical mental health professionals, as well as practitioners of the increasingly recognized specialty of threat assessment and violence risk mitigation. To this end, the proximal and distal risk indicators of the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18), a validated structured professional judgment instrument for assessing the risk of lone actor terrorist attacks, are identified that correlate with the stages of progression toward obliterative envy and pseudo-spiritual transformation.

KEYWORDS

envy, extreme violence, forensic treatment, psycholinguistics, threat assessment

When the emotion of envy is chronic and intense, it is associated with numerous adverse states, such as shame, depression, inferiority, isolation, anxiety, paranoia and even violent criminal behavior. The false logic of envy convinces the individual that they have an unfavorable and immutable disadvantage—thus, the other appears enhanced while the individual feels diminished. This depressing, humiliating position generates resentment toward the other. Depending upon developmental experience and other psychosocial factors, the individual with envy may increasingly use projection, projective identification, and experience persecutory thoughts. There may come a point at which the envious person's goal is to harm or destroy the other's ability to enjoy the perceived advantages.

We discuss the psychodynamics by which destructive envy produces a persecutory mindset so powerful that lethal violence is considered or chosen as an acceptable option. In some cases, extremely envious individuals are willing to spitefully sacrifice their own lives in an act of violence. The act may be felt as revenge for some perceived or actual injustice, but the driving emotion is intolerable envy, consciously recognized by the attacker or not. Examples will be used from forensic cases to demonstrate how envy produces conscious persecutory thoughts and a desire to obliterate what is perceived as an unjust, intolerable reality. We also propose that many violent offenders function in the externalizing domain of the tripartite (three-part) dimensional spectrum of mental functioning and may have a biopsychosocial predisposition to a persecutory world view (Caspi & Moffitt, 2018; Knoll & Meloy, 2020). Our thinking is framed by Kleinian dynamics, forensic behavioral analysis and psycholinguistics. We conclude by reviewing the challenges of detecting severe envy and preoccupation with lethality in treatment and in non-treatment settings where threat assessment protocols may be applied.

The concepts of oblitative envy and pseudo-spiritual transformation will be defined and shown to play a role in extreme violence. *Oblitative envy* is the state of mind arising from overwhelming narcissistic rage and resentment, leading the individual to destroy the envied other, and simultaneously himself, to negate the detested situation in its entirety. *Pseudo-spiritual transformation* is the state of mind by which the perpetrator's personal grievance is justified and elevated to the level of a spiritual or religious imperative. These psychodynamics follow a general pattern that may benefit clinicians and threat assessment practitioners charged with identifying individuals at risk for extreme violence. Accordingly, we include references to the indicators on the TRAP-18, a validated structured professional judgment instrument (SPJ), that may be used to assess the risk of targeted violence among individuals of concern who are driven by such envy (Meloy, 2017). The TRAP-18 consists of 8 proximal warning behaviors—pathway, fixation, identification, novel aggression, energy burst, leakage, last resort, and directly communicated threat—and 10 distal characteristics—personal grievance and moral outrage, framed by an ideology, failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group, dependence on the virtual community, thwarting of occupational goals, changes in thinking and emotion, failure of sexually intimate pair bonding, mental disorder, greater creativity and innovation, and history of criminal violence. Validation of the instrument is substantial (Kupper & Meloy, 2021), and the proximal warning behaviors have been particularly useful in the threat assessment of all forms of targeted violence (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021).

1 | ENVY THROUGH TIME AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Despite progress leading to a fifth edition of the DSM, advances in psychopharmacology and psychotherapy, our understanding of the human emotion of envy remains incomplete (Ramachandran & Jalal, 2017). Nevertheless, envy has been recognized and cautioned against throughout human history—described as one of the most reprehensible emotions, anthropomorphized as a “snake,” compared to Satan, and is the first sin committed in Heaven and again on Earth (Khan & Ghani, 2018). Crimes flowing from envy “fill the police blotters of our time and every other historical

time and often make the headlines" (Anderson, 2002, p. 468). Although no studies exist to quantify the role of envy in violent crimes, the authors find that envy is a common psychological theme in many of the forensic criminal evaluations they regularly perform. Due to its relatively understudied nature, we must remain temporarily satisfied with clinical and forensic case descriptions suggesting the role of envy in malicious behavior and/or violence.

The lack of nuanced understanding of this basic yet common emotion, and especially detecting and treating it in clinical settings, may primarily be due to its sufferer's natural tendency to hide feelings of envy. To acknowledge envy is to declare one's felt inferiority, which in turn triggers additional feelings of shame (Ronningstam, 2005).

Envy is also long considered a social taboo, and is, in fact, condemned by most major religions. By most accounts, be they historical, philosophical or psychological, envy is associated with negative consequences. Among all the so-called seven deadly sins (pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, sloth), Milic (2019) argues that envy produces nothing but mental anguish and is devoid of even an initial burst of pleasure or immediate gratification. We would suggest that envy may hold within it both masochistic pleasure, and well as a fierce kind of sadistic pleasure when contemplating violence toward the envied.

Confusion of terms has long been the case where envy and jealousy are concerned; examples abound. For instance, "I am jealous of her good looks," is more accurately an admission of envy. Envy, in its simplest form, is defined in the dictionary as a "painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, joined with a desire to possess the same advantage" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2021). In contrast, jealousy is most often associated with romantic relationships and is characterized by a vigilance or protectiveness over a perceived advantage, such as one's relationship with an intimate partner. In jealousy, one feels entitled to some continued advantage which another rival threatens to take away. Romantic jealousy has been found to be positively correlated with feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and mate retention behaviors (Chin et al., 2017). Whereas in envy, advantage is perceived as belonging to the other; in jealousy, a rival is seen as threatening to take away the advantage (Anderson, 2002). Both envy and jealousy fall on a continuum from relatively common place and lacking destructiveness, to severe and deadly. Feelings of jealousy can be quite rational: "I get really jealous when she flirts with my boyfriend!" Admiration, recognized as the benign form of envy, can serve to foster respect for others and inspire self-improvement (Van de Ven, 2017). In the case of both tension states, it is a matter of degree—how much does the negative comparison lead the sufferer to experience painful feelings of inferiority and shame that result in a narcissistic injury too unbearable to tolerate? Is there the potential for narcissistic rage in its various manifestations, including violence? As the UK advice columnist Irma Kurtz wrote, "jealousy fights duels, envy poisons the soup (Kurtz, 1987)." Table 1 lists the comparative characteristics of envy and jealousy.

The etymology of the word envy is of particular interest given that its root is "invidia," or "invidere" (verb) which means "to look maliciously upon," or to "gaze maliciously" (Milic, 2019; Rosenberger, 2005). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Invidia was the personification of envy, and was described as a grotesque, emaciated figure with a tongue that

TABLE 1 Characteristics of envy and jealousy

Envy	Jealousy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically involves 2 people or one person and any number of others who symbolize envied goodness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically involves 3 people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hostility, destructiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vigilance, protectiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associated with a perceived disadvantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associated with the threat of losing a held advantage, for example, a sexual or romantic relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induces behavior to reduce, disrupt, or destroy other's advantage to reduce the envier's negative feeling states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induces mate competition and retention behaviors to prevent loss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulus is feeling of inferiority triggered by negative comparison with an advantaged other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulus is rational or irrational fear of losing a "possession" or relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both may be associated with depression, low self-esteem, affect dysregulation, reduced prosocial behaviors, possible violence, early attachment difficulties, adult attachment failures 	

dripped venom (Fantham, 2004; Minou, 2017). The etymology also suggests the ancient belief that eye and gaze was a powerful initiator of envy, and is associated with the origin of the concept of the “evil eye” (Broedel, 2003; Meloy, 1988). This notion of the evil eye likely served as a deterrent to envy-motivated violence in the ancient world (Kotze, 2017). Warnings against the harmful effects of envy extend from the biblical story of Cain and Abel, to the more modern allegory of the Grinch Who Stole Christmas (Milic, 2019). Such stories serve as reminders that unchecked envy, the green-eyed monster of Othello, can easily produce tragedy. Anglican priest and writer John Harris noted in 1676 that an envious man was “his own tormentor and executioner (Harris, 1676, p. 53).” In describing envy, Harris wrote: “Envie to the heart is like rust to the Iron, or blasting to the Corn; like the Vultures eating up continually the heart of Prometheus... it burneth the heart, and wasteth the Body, and is like the Worm that breedeth in timber, and consumeth it” (p. 54). Saint Augustine preached that the “diabolical sin” of envy is deadly to community life, especially if unconfessed and lacking repentance, as it denies others’ rightful accomplishments, responding to them instead with criticism and hatred (Augustine, 2006).

Moreover, envy is historically and consistently referred to as hidden and insidious (Epstein, 2003; Minou, 2017). Envy may often be denied because of its implication of inferiority, unwarranted malicious temptation in the envier, and especially its potential for destructiveness. Envy increases within the sufferer the likelihood of developing depression, lowers resilience, and destabilizes self-esteem (Xiang et al., 2020). Those laboring under strong envy are insatiable, competitive, and may be willing to sacrifice their own outcomes to diminish the envied person’s perceived advantage (Smith & Kim, 2007). In its more passive-aggressive manifestations, disguised envy prompts deception, withholds attention and praise, and reduces cooperation (Ronningstam, 2005). More severe envy motivates antisocial behavior, Machiavellian, and psychopathic behavioral tactics (Lange et al., 2018; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008; Parks et al., 2002).

More modern scholarship has posited a benign form of envy which serves an inspirational or motivating function—defined in the literature and recognized commonly as admiration—that is distinguished from malicious envy which is associated with hostility and destruction (Lange et al., 2018; Van de Ven, 2017). In contrast, other researchers suggest that such distinctions are unwarranted, and it is more helpful to approach study of the concept “as benign and malicious subsets of reactions to envy, rather than types of envy” (Cohen-Charash & Larosn, 2017, p. 182).

Social media has taken hold and intimately influenced societal well-being and life satisfaction. As with other regrettable consequences, the dynamics of envy are amplified by the internet. Gabbard and Crisp (2018) note the inherent narcissism of social media and the threat to authenticity posed by its emphasis on idealized presentations of life and self. As a result, people report greater feelings of envy and inadequacy. Modern society has systematically developed a set of habits and customs, most prominently social media, which appear to enhance such feelings, ultimately resulting in worsening mental health (Mujcic & Oswald, 2018). Even passively browsing Facebook can lead to negative social comparison, envy, social isolation and a significantly impaired sense of life satisfaction (Morawska, 2019). Younger persons who spend more time on social media are more susceptible to these effects than older persons. Research with iGen, the generation of young people who have come of age since the advent of the iPhone in 2007, shows an alarming increase in anxiety and depression in childhood and adolescence due to the constant comparisons to others compelled by social media (Twenge, 2017).

2 | THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ENVY

Melanie Klein was among the first to deeply explore envy, defining it as the wish to destroy goodness, and as primarily oriented toward destruction (i.e., the death instinct) (Klein, 1975). Klein first theorized that mature development required transition from the persecutory position (consumed with envy and shame) to the depressive position (guilt-ridden and self-punishing) in order to avoid feelings of victimization and narcissistic inaccessibility (Klein, 1975). Those with strong paranoid and narcissistic traits have been observed to suffer from a desire to destroy the goodness they perceive they have been unjustly denied. Such individuals seek to destroy the other’s ability to enjoy the whole

object pleasures of love or achievement (Zizek, 2008). Envy can be a primary driving emotion in some who go on to commit acts of extreme violence (Hyatt-Williams, 1998; Knoll, 2010a, 2010b).

Other main themes associated with envy in the psychological literature involve the envious person's perception of fairness and justice, narcissism, hostility, and grudge holding (Anderson, 2002; Milic, 2019; Nauta, 2009). Envy implies a pre-Oedipal, dyadic relationship, and so lends itself to the maladaptive defense mechanism of splitting, a generic defense that precedes more developmentally mature defenses, such as intellectualization, rationalization, and sublimation. Thus, the more severely envious person is prone to binary thinking, and the inability to reconcile both positive and negative attributes into a more balanced perception and understanding of himself and others. Such nonbinary thinking requires a tolerance of ambiguity, which is absent in such cases. The study of violent offenders using this theory suggests that impediments to psychological development may cause the offender to become relatively fixed in what Klein called the *paranoid-schizoid position* (P-S) (Hyatt-Williams, 1998). In the P-S position, the individual's worldview is based on feelings of mistreatment and frustration at what is perceived as intentional harm, injustice, or purposeful withholding of advantages. The P-S position is associated with the use of maladaptive defense mechanisms such as splitting, externalization, projection, and projective identification. Such individuals will have an impaired capacity for sympathy, empathy, regret, reconciliation or gratitude—emotions that necessitate an ability to represent others in one's mind as whole, real, and meaningful individuals. Via projection and projective identification (an incomplete projection wherein the projected content continues to threaten the self), such individuals perceive others as actively persecuting them by withholding the goodness, justice, or fairness to which they feel rightfully entitled (Grotstein, 1981).

As a result of their perception of intolerable injustice, some may become overwhelmed with a sense of loss that cannot be mourned (Feldman & De Paola, 1994). Grief is subsumed by personal grievance. There is then the potential for hostile revenge fantasies, followed by an unwillingness to forsake a martyrdom fantasy of ultimate and final revenge. Envy may defy common sense, yet its logic can be understood. Envious persons see the object of envy as big or advantaged, while they feel small and disadvantaged. This is a profoundly depressing and humiliating experience for the envious who are left harboring resentment and injustice, emotions which are often a product of depleted omnipotent fantasies (Anderson, 2002). Highly envious persons end up feeling deep emptiness, as the pain of envy results in a paralysis of intention where they feel disadvantaged facing life's basic and inevitable challenges in work, relationships, and identity formation. They may come to experience—whether acknowledged as compensatory or not—a “malicious glee” (*schadenfreude*) over other's misfortune, which can develop into an addictive like pursuit of sadistic joy over others' sorrows. Their defense of projection may hypertrophy to distort their perceptions of others as greedy, spiteful and intentionally persecutory. Becoming true “injustice collectors” (O'Toole, 2000), grudges over a perceived slight years ago are nursed as if they had only occurred yesterday. The capacity for viewing disadvantage as a relative concept is lost, replaced with a desire for revenge.

Various authors have addressed the complex relationship between envy and shame, the latter recognized as a powerful motivator of violence. In his career dedicated to studying extremely violent offenders, Gilligan (2003) concluded that,

...the basic psychological motive, or cause, of violent behavior is the wish to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation - a feeling that is painful and can even be intolerable and overwhelming - and replace it with its opposite, the feeling of pride. (Gilligan, 2003, p. 5)

Perpetrators of extreme violence do not typically use the word “shame” to describe their internal state. Gilligan, however, noted the many synonyms for the feeling of shame in our language, among them disrespected, insulted, slighted, rejected, and demeaned, or as professed in the vernacular, “You dissed me!” Shame is triggered when an individual is treated with contempt and regarded as inferior or worthless. Gilligan considered shame, envy, and jealousy as “members of the same family of feelings,” since they all stem from feeling inferior (p.5). Ronningstam (2005) noted that shame and envy are “considered the weeds in the garden of emotions,” but, “still pivotal in both healthy

and disordered narcissism” (p. 37). Although both are social and interpersonal, they are also intrapsychic and involve cognitive appraisals, comparisons, and interpretations of other people and situations. Drawing on the work of Lansky (1997), Ronningstam (2005) noted that in contrast to the dynamic of a negative comparison defining envy, shame is “a painful feeling of an interrupted sense of joy, relationship, status, or pride, because of exposure of one’s failure to meet standards or ideals” (p. 37). The key phrase here is not meeting “standards,” which suggests social pain over a perceived failure to meet some internalized level of value. Shameful tension may be both a variant of and a contributor to envy (Berke, 1985, 1986). Common to both states is their hidden nature, and their potential to trigger anger and urges to destroy as a means to restore an injured self. A vicious cycle may ensue, in which the envier is ashamed of feeling hateful, and then *hates himself* for feeling such negative emotions—which make him further aware of his inadequacy. In actuality, we suggest that these powerful negative emotions—shame, envy, hatred of others and hatred of self—are so interrelated that they may all be in play in the sufferer who chooses extreme violence.

Gilligan (2003) described his subjects as being more than willing to sacrifice their physical body in an act of apocalyptic violence because they had already come to feel “dead inside,” numb and feeling nothing (p. 3). This “death of the self” was the legacy of their suffering severe shame-inducing abuse in childhood (p. 4). Left without the capacity for self-love or to love others, acts of violence are attempts “to resurrect their dead self, and bring it back to life—to be born again, so to speak” (p. 4). This is consistent with many other descriptions of narcissistic rage and violence as attempts to restore self-esteem and prevent destruction of the self. Gilligan’s interpretations may not explain all instances of extreme violence, but they are consistent with what we call the *obliterative mindset*. The perpetrator has lost the capacity for undistorted judgment and to sublimate aggression. The “self” is already dead. He is now ready to override the survival instinct and fully embrace a drive toward death (Anderson, 2006).

3 | OBLITERATIVE MINDSET

The *obliterative mindset* (OM) is our term for overwhelming, destructive envy and resentment that motivates spiteful destruction of both self and other. The goal is to negate the detested situation in its entirety, while simultaneously enhancing the self. In the distorted logic of severe envy, a deep sense of victimization allows martyrdom and/or righteous vengeance to devalue the other and promote the self to heroic status.

The obliterative mindset is the end product of a nihilistic, downward spiral of the individual in the P-S position. He has become a misanthrope (Kupper & Meloy, 2021). At this end stage, the perpetrator is narcissistically inaccessible and rejects his present circumstances in their totality. This is another reason why suicide after mass or extreme violence is quite common and follows a type of logic—it serves the function of ending pain, humiliation and further narcissistic injury (Meloy et al., 2004; White, 2017). Intolerable conditions and even the imperfect self are wiped clean, leaving only the perpetrator’s final judgment, which is not open to appeal. The violent extremist warped by severe envy is drawn to a statement of self-affirmation to counteract overwhelming shame. By obliterating the unacceptable reality, his sacrifice seems worthwhile to him to re-establish his sense of self. Or as the violent perpetrator Elliot Rodger wrote: “Finally, at long last, I can show the world my true worth” (E.R. Manifesto, 2014). The paradox, however, is compelling: obliterating the actual self to realize just before death the perfect and omnipotent self.

The obliterative mindset is associated with the distal characteristic of Changes in Thinking and Emotion, a central indicator in the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18; Meloy, 2017), in that the development of fatalistic, destructive beliefs become more concrete and extreme (Meloy, 2018). Beliefs in the superiority of one’s cause become rigidly fixed and overvalued (Rahman et al., 2019).

4 | PSEUDO-SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Pseudo-spiritual transformation (PST) is our term for the perpetrator's belief that violent revenge, in response to a personal grievance, is being guided and sanctified by some transcendent power, typically of a religious or spiritual nature. PST serves to motivate and justify the evolution toward sacrificial revenge and transforms mere vengeance into an act with sacred meaning for the perpetrator.

In contrast, genuine spiritual transformation “constitutes a change in the meaning system that a person holds as a basis for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concerns”(Paloutzian, 2005, p. 334). Genuine spiritual transformation is typically not associated with violence, envy, revenge or other egotistic motivations. In this sense, genuine spiritual transformation is akin to the concept of *metanoia*—a transformative change of heart, particularly of a spiritual nature (Ellwanger, 2020). PST may involve beliefs and/or overvalued ideas that one has some religious or spiritual authority to enact extreme violence. These beliefs may involve themes such as: God has selected one to carry out a special mission of sacrificial revenge; God is assisting one's mission in various ways; one will die in a Christ-like manner as a sacrifice for a particular cause; or one's self is God-like and has transcended a corrupted, depraved humanity.

Pseudo-spiritual transformation is associated with the TRAP-18 distal characteristic of Ideological Framing. It can accelerate the evolution of Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage into spiritual or religious justification of revenge. Teleological thinking may be involved, or simply rageful arrogance. Regardless, both tend to conform to a regressive, self-centered view that one is morally right and beyond questioning as a soldier or martyr for one's cause.

5 | CASE EXAMPLES

We illustrate the process by which severe envy can result in extreme violence, as well as the concepts of obliterative mindset and pseudo-spiritual transformation, with a psycholinguistic analysis of three cases of extreme violence. We have chosen to initially identify the perpetrators by their full names for future research purposes, but will limit identifying them by their full names throughout the rest of each case study. At the end of each case we refer to various indicators on the TRAP-18, which, with the caveat of hindsight bias, were present, and are applicable to the assessment of violence risk posed by individuals experiencing severe envy. Since all three cases eventuated in violence (although the first case was, fortunately, a suicide only) they are all consistent with the TRAP-18 indicator of Pathway warning behavior: “any behavior that is part of research, planning, preparation or implementation of an attack” (Meloy, 2017, p. 20).

5.1 | Case 1 – MH

5.1.1 | The obliterative mindset

On June 4, 2004, the city of Granby, Colorado, witnessed an extraordinary act of revenge by one of their own citizens, Marvin Heemeyer (MH), the town welder and muffler repairman. Over the past year and a half in the secrecy of his shop, MH had modified a massive bulldozer into a steel and concrete fortified tank. The dark-armored vehicle was outfitted with video cameras and monitors, three gun-ports fitted for a 0.50 caliber and two other rifles, and even air conditioning. Smashing its way through the streets of Granby with MH sealed inside at the controls, the huge, meticulously modified Kubota tractor resembled the ancient and feared Behemoth—an enormous chaos-monster.

For years, MH had argued with town officials and the owners of several businesses over various issues, including zoning approval for land he had purchased. At the end of his rampage, MH had demolished the town hall, a former mayor's house, the office of the newspaper that had editorialized against him, a concrete plant that he claimed had

blocked access to his shop, and other buildings owned by townspeople he had targeted. He fired at a large propane tank but was unable to cause an explosion. MH exchanged gunfire with police, the tank being impervious to the more than 200 rounds officers fired at it. The destruction only stopped when MH's bulldozer became trapped in the basement of the hardware store he was trying to demolish. He then shot himself to death with a handgun while still inside his skillfully constructed war machine.

In the weeks and months prior to his attack, MH left a number of writings on the wall of his work shed, as well as audiotapes explaining his motivation for the attack. The tapes were about 2.5 h long, with the first recording made on April 13, 2004, and the last recording made on May 22, 2004, less than 2 weeks before the rampage. The following linguistic samples are taken from MH's tapes and transcripts of the tapes (Sky-Hi, 2017; TREAD, 2020). Having sold off his property and given away other holdings, MH had purposely reduced his financial status as much as possible, allowing him to deny restitution for his victims. Although MH himself does not use the word "envy" to identify the source of his rage, we see that his vengeful destructiveness is indeed envy-driven and exemplifies an oblitative mindset, as revealed in his writing: "Everything is gone. What I own is just gonna be a pittance compared to what I am going to take." The distorted logic of severe envy can be seen at play in MH's statement: "It's a kind of a community that in order for you to get ahead, you have to keep the neighbor down. It's not...you know, building yourself up on your own merit, it's tear the other guy down." There is no ambivalence or relativity at this point for MH. His world is split into only those who are building up and those who are tearing down. Deep in his persecutory position, MH gives about as clear an explanation, in our opinion, of the logic of violent, destructive envy as can be found in such cases:

I believe in a level playing field of competition. If you want to change that level playing field of competition to your advantage, basically, you give me license to do that also when my opportunity comes around. You have given me license through your example to do what I need to do. When I do this, that levels the playing field in my favor, so now we've got a lopsided playing field because when I come back at you, I'm gonna destroy your side of the playing field.

MH perfectly describes the zero-sum logic of envy, and how it ultimately leads to a desire to destroy the other. That he is no longer concerned with self-preservation makes it clear that he reached the oblitative mindset. At this point, his main driving concern is delivering a message of shock and awe that cannot be answered, at least not to MH while he is still alive. His focus on competition is made clear, and is supported by descriptions of him as a highly competitive individual by those in his social circle. But in the competition for value and status in his community, he can never feel satisfied. In the documentary of MH's rampage—entitled "Tread" and available via streaming—many townspeople come forward to provide some reality testing for MH's persecutory beliefs. No evidence was presented to clearly support a paranoid delusion or psychotic symptoms, only non-bizarre, cognitively biased beliefs about how others have treated him. Regardless, it may be helpful to conceptualize MH's paranoia as on a continuum. His persecutory worldview may not have caused him to develop a clear paranoid psychosis, but did result in him perceiving town decisions that were unfavorable to him as purposeful acts of malice. Indeed, forensic psycholinguistic analysis has shown that the psychology of paranoid violent extremists can be understood as existing on a continuum of paranoia ranging from mistrust to frank paranoid delusions (Knoll & Meloy, 2014).

MH's fellow townspeople concluded that his anger and felt humiliation had affected his interpretation of events. As stated by the local news editor,

I dealt personally with [MH].... I was in the unique position, kind of seeing how all these events, where to [MH] it sounded like people were picking on him... I saw them happen first hand, and that's not what I saw.... [MH].... had definite bad feelings about not being able to sell his property at the high price he wanted. The irony in that is that he did sell his property for a very high price, finally. But [MH] had already decided ... he was going to get back at the town It didn't matter to him at that point. (Brower, 2018; TREAD, 2020)

Various townspeople interviewed in the documentary note how MH had been given numerous financially appealing options, including an offer of six times what he paid for his land. The object of MH's envy was his perception of the success of several businessmen whose family had lived in the town for generations. Offers to provide MH with a financially advantageous resolution held no sway since he was fully in the grip of an obliterative mindset. Or, as the town news editor stated, "He had a way out. He had a way out to make some good money and, and go on about his life, but he chose that path for whatever reason." Instead, he narrowed his focus and proceeded according to the dictates of violent envy and revenge.

5.1.2 | Pseudo-spiritual transformation

In his audiotape, MH gives a precise time and description of when he first began to conceptualize his violent revenge as preordained by God:

When I was sitting in the hot tub... I was weeping. And a peace came over me where I knew God wanted me to do it. And I didn't understand. I said, "Why did you ask me to do this? Is that why I've never been married, so I didn't have a family? Is that why I've always been successful so that I would realize my rewards for doing this task?"

This statement is not only a clear demonstration of PST—an evolution from secular to spiritual warfare, but also an example of teleological thinking: the attribution of purpose and a final cause to natural events. An example would be, clouds rain so that plants can grow (Roberts et al., 2020). Teleological thinking is associated with proneness to believe in conspiracies, default religious perspectives and non-scientific thinking (Galli et al., 2020; Wagner-Egger, Delouée, Gauvrit & Dieguez, 2018). It may be that MH was prone to conclude that secret or malevolent reasons were behind the townspeople's actions; and as well, that such actions were supernatural signs that God wanted him to behave a certain way in response to the perceived insults. Tied to these signs of PST is MH's statement that "a peace came over me...", perhaps describing an almost spiritual feeling of relief after having finally resigned himself to die. Such descriptions of emotional reprieve have been associated with anticipatory and relief-oriented permissive beliefs in suicidal crises (Del-Monte & Graziani, 2020). Perpetrators of mass murder and other forms of targeted homicide-suicide have similarly described a state of peacefulness and relief that arises once they have come to terms with their own death as not only inevitable and acceptable, but planned, either by their own hand or as a "suicide-by-cop." Beyond this, MH's statements primarily contain justification for his extreme violence. His teleological thinking then works to retrofit various aspects of his life to further support his violent intent and eliminate any remaining ambivalence.

MH proceeds to strengthen and amplify his violent intent via a combination of PST and teleological thinking: "I wasn't supposed to get caught! God built me to be here to prove to you that what you have been doing for God knows how many years is wrong." This somewhat confusing statement suggests that he has extinguished most, if not all, of his guilt feelings over planning his violent rampage. God has sanctioned it and enabled him for a morally supported reason—what others have been doing is wrong. He appears to have relied upon this thinking to a significant degree, arising to the level of posting affirmations to himself in his workshop. Sheriff's investigators found the following handwritten notes posted on the wall of his workshop where he built his tank:

- "It's interesting how the dozer was the only thing that did not sell at my auction. It was not until later I discovered it would just fit in the storage building."
- "It's interesting how sales tax has not jumped significantly since the start of the plan."
- "It's interesting how I never got caught. This was a part-time project over a one and one-half year time period."

Each of these affirmations contains examples of teleological thought and imply that very specific things happened as a result of the guiding hand of God. It seems likely that these affirmations served to inspire and motivate MH while he performed the task of building his behemoth. MH's personal realization that God was working through him clearly served to reinforce his beliefs and intent to the point that they were beyond questioning. He had firmly concluded that his extreme ideas were "what God has inspired me to do."

MH's PST adds to his conviction of moral authority and vengeance: "God built me to be here to prove to you that what you have been doing ... is wrong." MH applies PST much like a salve to his injured narcissism, adopting the belief that divine forces will work through him—not for peace or resolution—but to prove others wrong through an act of cataclysmic violence. Indeed, "God built" him and he, in turn, would build God's behemoth like Noah built the Ark. Not only did God build him for a mission, but God "expects me to do something to those who kept me... from getting what I deserve." This statement suggests his intensifying envy, often apparent in pathologically narcissistic states and traits (Kernberg, 1992). What MH deserves is beyond question, and now God expects him to harm the objects of his envy. The conviction of transcendent moral and spiritual righteousness is a common justification for violent lashing out by those in the persecutory position. Resolving the crisis nonviolently would require more psychological degrees of freedom and capacity for gratitude and empathy than MH possessed. To him it would be an intolerable sign of weakness and inferiority (Gilligan & Richards, 2021). His choice of narcissistic infamy over prosocial resolution was the only option he could perceive; an option more palatable for him because his self-centeredness is spiritually sanctified.

5.1.3 | The MH case from the perspective of threat assessment and the TRAP-18

MH spoke passionately on his tapes about having "righteous anger" and feeling mistreated. At one point, he analogizes his situation to a wild animal backed into a corner: "In nature, wolves, coyotes, they have their territory.... And a male... will definitely protect his territory. If he doesn't, he'll be overrun. Now, if an animal will do this, why wouldn't a man?" These envy-laden rationalizations are consistent with the Last Resort proximal warning behavior on the TRAP-18: "increasing desperation or distress...forcing the individual into a position of last resort. There is no alternative other than violence" (Meloy, 2017, p. 32).

The year and a half MH spent diligently and secretly building his machine of destruction exemplifies the accelerated activity of Energy Burst, another proximal warning behavior on the TRAP-18 (Meloy, 2017). He had helped maintain his high level of motivation by watching revenge-themed movies and posting notes of affirmation and encouragement to himself. One particular statement of MH's is a reminder that threat assessors should think about Creativity and Innovation, another indicator in the TRAP-18, in pathway preparations: "It is interesting to observe that I was never caught." Several visitors to his shop didn't notice that the bulldozer was undergoing some curious modifications. This surprised him. There, in front of them, was a "dot" that no one connected to his long simmering grievance. We are usually looking for increased involvement with firearms and related paraphernalia or bomb making materials as evidence of pathway behaviors. This is not always the case. It is important to consider the subject of concern's particular skill set or interests. Fixation on a cause, another proximal warning behavior in the TRAP-18, especially over a long incubation period allowing violent intent to grow, can be a satisfying experience as different creative ways to do the deed are considered and secretly savored.

This case is also an example of why threat assessors should pay careful attention to the degree of *actual* public humiliation that an individual of concern has undergone, or may be subjected to, thus increasing his feelings of shame and further inflaming narcissistic rage and the potential for an attack. MH argued his case alone in city council meetings. The buildings he attacked included the city hall, businesses of his rivals, and other facilities in Granby that he once enjoyed himself but had subsequently been spoiled for him. All this contributed to his envious but pride-restoring act of revenge. We note, anecdotally, that there are cases where the perpetrator returns to the actual geography where he was stripped of his dignity. He attacks or destroys at the same location—or "stage"—wherein those who have declared him unworthy and rejected him from their community, an act which also reverses the power structure

of authority and social dominance (Newman et al., 2008). As poetically described by Gilligan and Richards (2021), the most direct, immediate and literal way to wipe tormentors' mocking smiles from their faces is to make them weep through violence.

MH's PST would be associated with the TRAP-18 (Meloy, 2017) distal characteristic of Changes in Thinking and Emotion. These changes are often complex, and appear to occur in three domains: interpersonal relations become more limited and isolation increases; there is evidence of fantasy that is both grandiose and violent (often leaked through social media); and emotions shift from just anger, to also contempt and disgust for the target. We also see continued TRAP-18 evidence of the proximal warning behavior of Fixation, in this case motivated by extreme overvalued beliefs (Meloy & Rahman, 2020). Fixation, a preoccupation with a person or a cause that is accompanied by deterioration in work and love, is often the first proximal warning behavior to appear in a case of targeted violence (Meloy et al., 2021).

Finally, MH's selling off his property and giving away other holdings prior to the attack is identifiable as a "final act" on the pathway to targeted violence (Calhoun & Weston, 2003). Such acts may also be a behavioral expression of Last Resort warning behavior on the TRAP-18. Although such behaviors have nothing directly to do with preparations for violence, they have great meaning if assessors know enough about the context and other violence risk indicators. Some final acts are commonly recognizable, such as saying goodbye to a relative or friend, and often puzzling to the unknowing recipient. But many final acts are idiosyncratic to a particular case, their logic known only to the assailant. Last Resort proximal warning behavior is defined as a violent action and time imperative: the person must act, and he must act now. Such warning behavior is often precipitated by a triggering event—often a loss in love or work—or one that is anticipated, and is sometimes accompanied by feelings of desperation or distress (Meloy, 2017).

5.2 | Case 2 - ER

5.2.1 | The oblitative mindset

In 2014 a 22-year-old college student who had stopped attending classes at Santa Barbara City College for the past year, became increasingly fixated on his "Day of Retribution"—an act intended to "destroy everything I cannot have" (Manifesto, 2014). Elliot Rodger (ER) killed six young people, injured 14 others and then killed himself with a handgun as sheriff's deputies approached his car in the college community of Isla Vista. ER had great difficulty with social interactions since about age 10, which worsened with his sexual awakening in adolescence, and grew more severe through his high school and college years. He was prescribed anti-depressants around age 15, apparently related to suicidal issues, and at age 16 was diagnosed as having pervasive developmental disorder, an earlier designation (DSM-IV) of characteristics and issues associated with autism spectrum disorder. Undiagnosed and untreated was his narcissistic personality disorder, specifically the shy but hypervigilant subtype, and the debilitating degree of his pathological envy (White, 2017). His writings and videos made it clear that he had been nurturing deep resentment over his inability to establish sexual or intimate partners. His anger and frustration were exacerbated when he saw other young men enjoying a young woman's company. The manifesto he left, "My Twisted World," is a clearly written self-description of his transformation from an entitled, angry, sexually frustrated young man to a "God" who would fantasize about a world devoid "of the existence of women," and where "there will be no desire for sex." (His personal document has since become canon for members of the Incel [involuntary celibate] movement). Such intense devaluation of the desired object suggests envy powerful enough to push him into the oblitative mindset. Unlike most other mass murderers who leave legacy writings pronouncing their grievances and motives, ER repeatedly used the word "envy" to describe his misery. He understood the difference between envy and jealousy, which he also experienced at an early age when there would be a third boy on playdates with his best friend (E.R. Manifesto, 2014).

Just before going on his violent rampage, ER emailed his 137-page manifesto to his parents, his life coach, some acquaintances and professors, and other medical and mental health providers. He also uploaded to the Internet his

self-made video entitled *Retribution*, in which he chillingly described how he would “slaughter all the hot girls” who had denied him sex. He clearly stated his motive as the injustice of other couples enjoying what he perceived to be “amazing and blissful” lives while he was unable to find an intimate relationship. ER planned his “day of retribution” in careful detail. He first stabbed to death his two roommates and then a friend of theirs who arrived later to the apartment. He then planned to shoot all the girls at “the hottest sorority at UCSB.” However, the front door of the sorority was locked, so instead he returned to his BMW and shot three girls on the sidewalk as he drove by them, killing two and seriously injuring the third. He then drove through the commercial area of Isla Vista, either shooting at people or ramming them with his car. One student was killed, and others sustained serious injuries before the incident ended with his suicide. The linguistic samples are taken from ER’s YouTube videos, his manifesto, and the investigative report of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office (White, 2017; E.R. Manifesto, 2014).

Upon his arrival to Isla Vista nearly 3 years prior to the incident, ER went to a Starbucks coffee shop there, where he became “livid with envious hatred” upon seeing a couple kissing. He proceeded to throw his coffee on them. What he actually fantasized doing was to “kill them slowly... strip the skins off their flesh.” The sight of a couple enjoying themselves brought out sadistic urges to destroy them, but not before torturing them by removing the very organ they would use to enjoy each other—their skin. Although fully conscious of his envy, he did not appear to show any deeper insight into how it had distorted his perceptual, cognitive, affective, and intentional function. Nor did he have any faith in professional help, describing his psychotherapy experiences as “worthless advice.” ER was fully immersed in a persecutory mindset from which he either could not or would not escape: “I cannot go out of my room without seeing a young couple that would make me feel envious and enraged.... There is no more life to live. The Day of Retribution is all I have” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 131). With no relief from the torment of his envy, and having resolved his ambivalence about suicide, he embraced the oblitative mindset, concluding that violent, sacrificial revenge was his only option.

Powerful destructive envy may result in distorted perceptions and feelings that the denied goodness is so idyllic as to induce ecstasy in others. For example, when destructive envy became a prominent part of ER’s mental life, he wrote, “When I think about the *amazing* and *blissful* life I could have lived if only females were sexually attracted to me, my entire being burns with hatred [emphases added].” As ER experienced more changes in his thinking and emotions, he no longer questioned the stark contrast between his pre-oblitative mindset of sex as his most desired goal, and his oblitative mindset of sex as “evil and barbaric.” This is a very significant change in thinking, which ER wrote “was a major turning point” for him. He notes that this change made him feel greater “anger,” as well as “stronger inside.” This maladaptive shift in thinking—a binary product of splitting as a psychological defense—allowed him temporary relief from unrelenting painful feelings of inferiority and humiliation. Once the object of desire and envy are re-imagined as objects of contempt and disgust, all the maladaptive defense mechanisms such as splitting, projection and projective identification can come into play with greater intensity. Just as MH described the true nature of destructive envy so well, so does ER, with jarring precision: “If I cannot have it, I will destroy it.”

The murderous nature of ER’s envy, overtaking any feelings of love, is particularly striking in his plan to kill his younger half-brother, an innocent 8-year-old boy. ER admitted he was fond of him, taking him on outings when home from city college, “where I began to really bond with the boy” (Manifesto, 2014, p. 116). But ER’s view changed as he began to increasingly perceive his brother as attractive and more socially at ease than ER ever was:

I realized how much different my brother... was from me at that age. While I was shy, short, and physically weak; [he] was tall for his age and very social. He had no problem going up to other boys at the playground and making instant friends. I began to form a bitter envy toward him, *though I hid it really well* [emphasis added]. My little brother had all the potential to grow up to be a popular kid and live the life I was never able to live. I cursed the world for granting my little brother so many more advantages than me. I tried not to let this ruin my relationship with him.

Later, during the summer before he carried out his mass murder, ER was at his father's home, where his stepmother boasted that her son, ER's half-brother, had been contracted to appear in T.V. commercials. ER claimed she talked about the boy growing up to be a successful actor and that he would have no problem with girls, sealing ER's decision to kill someone due to his perception of having been surpassed by them in his pursuit of goodness in life:

That was the day that I decided I would have to kill him on the Day of Retribution. I will not allow the boy to surpass me at everything, to live the life I've always wanted. It's not fair that he has the chance to have a pleasurable life while I've been denied it. It will be a hard thing to do, because I had really bonded with my little brother in the last year, and he respected and looked up to me. But I would have to do it. If I can't live a pleasurable life, then neither will he!

Fortunately, this never happened. ER planned to go home and kill his stepmother and half-brother the morning before his Isla Vista attack, while his father (whom he did not want to kill) was on a business trip. However, his father never left, so ER abandoned this part of his plan.

Having reached the obliterative mindset, ER noted that his own sense of justice demanded he must punish others who have access to the goodness (now seen as evil and persecutory). He stated, "It was all fueled by my wish to punish everyone who is sexually active, because I concluded that it was not fair that other people were able to experience sex while I have been denied it all my life." That he would sacrifice his life no longer concerned him, as his plans now held a greater value for him—revenge, power and showing others his "true worth."

5.2.2 | Pseudo-spiritual transformation

Whereas MH's PST acted to bring about a realization that God was working through him, ER's PST transformed him into a God. He wrote: "I am not part of the human race. Humanity has rejected me.... and now I know why. I am more than human. I am superior to them all.... Magnificent, glorious, supreme, eminent... Divine! I am the closest thing there is to a living God." ER's envious narcissism compelled him to consciously become a divine and glorious God in order to assuage his severely diminished sense of self. This must have provided a temporary, albeit "malignant narcissism"—a phrase coined by Kernberg (1992) to describe a paranoid and narcissistic character pathology. This amounts to a type of character armor protecting him from his unrelenting feelings of persecution: "I am not meant to live such a pathetic, miserable life.... I will not bow down and accept such a horrific fate." Splitting, projection, and projective identification are the underlying defense mechanisms in ER's PST, converting his view of himself as a pathetic being into a powerful, punishing God. Further, he is justified in doing so, since he has split off the other into an all-bad nemesis: "Humanity is a disgusting, depraved, and evil species.... I will truly be a powerful God, punishing everyone I deem to be impure and depraved."

Because ER's PST is so heavily weighted with pathological narcissism, its underlying envy-based dynamics can be seen quite clearly: "If humanity will not give me a worthy place among them, then I will destroy them all. I am better than all of them. I am a God. Exacting my Retribution is my way of proving my true worth to the world." Here again, the grandiose and omnipotent defenses against persecution are the sanctified drivers of a death wish to destroy goodness and obliterate the self. It has been previously observed that some violent extremists "come to embrace a self-styled image ...based on negative self-perceptions" which they often fashion into a recognizable suit of "black armor" (Knoll, 2010a, 2010b, p. 92). For example, SC, the subject of the final case study to follow, referred to himself as "the question mark" kid and garbed himself in ominous pseudocommando (Dietz, 1986) gear. ER followed suit, but in place of genuine black armor, his narcissism demanded he become a supreme, god-like actor who intended (unsuccessfully) to behead some of his victims, and who used his BMW to crush other young people in his path. "I must be destined to change the world, to shape it into an image that suits me! (Manifesto, 2014, p. 56)."

5.2.3 | The ER case from the perspective of threat assessment and the TRAP-18

The ER case is rife with examples of the proximal warning behavior of Fixation on the TRAP-18: “an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause, accompanied by a deterioration in social and occupational life” (Meloy, 2017). Such extreme overvalued beliefs are binary, simplistic, and absolute; and are magnified and relished by the offender prior to an act of targeted violence (Rahman, 2018). ER’s manifesto is an endless screed of his preoccupations with his grievances and his violent fantasies. Recall his being “livid with envious hatred” upon seeing a couple kissing at Starbucks, and wanting to “kill them slowly... strip the skins off their flesh.” His misanthropic state of mind, driven by an extreme overvalued belief that humanity was “disgusting and depraved,” perhaps a delusion at this point, is also a strong Fixation indicator. Framed by an Ideology is also apparent among the TRAP-18 indicators in the emergence of this misanthropic belief system, somewhat inchoate but intensely felt, prior to his attacks (Kupper & Meloy, 2021).

When ER saw the couple kissing at Starbucks he also wanted to kill them, “slowly.” What he actually did was throw coffee on them (and, incidentally, at great risk of physical retaliation). Such a behavior is an example of the proximal warning behavior on the TRAP-18 of Novel Aggression: “an act of violence that appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway and is committed for the first time” (Meloy et al., 2012), and is done to test one’s violent capability.

ER’s narcissism and grandiosity demanded he become a supreme, god-like actor who intended to viciously kill innocent people in various sadistic ways. “I must be destined to change the world, to shape it into an image that suits me! (Manifesto, 2014, p. 56),” is a statement that signals the proximal warning behavior of Identification on the TRAP-18: “a psychological desire to be a pseudocommando, have a warrior mentality, closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identify with previous attackers or assassins, or *identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system*” (Meloy, 2017). A key predictive finding in threat assessment research is a subject moving from Fixation (what I think about all the time), to Identification (whom I become) (Meloy et al., 2019). The ER case is a clear example of this evolution and escalation toward violence.

5.3 | Case 3 – SC

5.3.1 | The obliterative mindset

In 2007, a senior class student at Virginia Tech shot to death 32 students and faculty members (Virginia Tech Review Panel, April 2007; Summary of Key Findings, August 2007). He wounded 24 more, and then died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The Virginia Office of the Inspector General for Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (OIG) conducted an extensive investigation, finding that Seung Hui Cho (SC) did not raise concerns among his peers until late in 2005 when he was perceived as threatening (Stewart, 2007). He was seen by the campus police after other students had made complaints of harassment against him. SC had engaged in several incidents of stalking in which he awkwardly pursued a female peer, which resulted in verbal warnings by the campus police. In one of these stalking incidents, SC wrote on the door board of his female interest a line from the play *Romeo and Juliet*. After the police gave him a warning, SC sent an instant message to his roommate that implied suicidal thinking. SC was temporarily detained in a behavioral health unit and medically treated with a minor tranquilizer. The following day SC was evaluated by a psychologist who found him mentally ill, but not an imminent danger to himself or others. Several hours later, he was released with an appointment at a counseling center for later that day. However, SC never complied with the order for mandated outpatient mental health treatment (Schulte & Jenkins, 2007).

No further concerning incidents were reported until the shootings one and a half years later. The OIG investigation reported that after SC’s psychiatric evaluation, his peers described him as isolative and rarely making eye contact. Peers did not observe any evidence of confused thinking, odd behavior or agitation; however, most peers felt that

they did not know much about him. On the day of the shootings, NBC reportedly received a package containing an 1800-word video manifesto on CD, along with 43 photos, 11 of them showing SC aiming handguns at the camera (Knoll, 2010a, 2010b). In two other photos, SC appears to be mimicking suicidal behaviors, pointing a handgun at his right temple, and holding a hunting knife to the side of his neck. The following linguistic samples are taken from SC's video manifesto. SC's statements contain examples of externalization of blame: "You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option. The decision was yours. Now you have blood on your hands that will never wash off," suggesting he harbored the fantasy that they would remain tormented by guilt that could never be alleviated.

Similar to ER's hyperbolic descriptions of other's malevolent intent and access to goodness, SC portrays others as having committed extraordinary acts of persecution: "You have vandalized my heart, raped my soul and torched my conscience. You thought it was one pathetic boy's life you were extinguishing." This is followed by equally inflated perceptions of others having access to Dionysian levels of enjoyment: "You had everything you wanted. Your Mercedes wasn't enough, you brats. Your golden necklaces weren't enough, you snobs. Your trust fund wasn't enough. Your vodka and cognac weren't enough. All your debaucheries weren't enough. Those weren't enough to fulfill your hedonistic needs. You had everything." The metaphors and descriptors SC uses describe the other as a sadistic persecutor who purposely selected him for torture. His use of the term "pathetic boy" exposes his fragility and low self-worth (DePue, 2007). The primitivity of SC's splitting, and more specifically projective identification (others carry the aggression and violate him) can be clearly seen. SC sees the envied others as having access to unlimited good, while also torching, raping and vandalizing him. Despite his attempt to disparage them, it is painfully clear that his envy reached an extreme, nihilistic point: "Oh the happiness I could have had mingling among you hedonists, being counted as one of you, if only you didn't [expletive] the living [expletive] out of me." Returning to Kleinian theory, at the paranoid-schizoid developmental stage, the subject may hold the view that if the wished-for goodness is not forthcoming, it must necessarily be the case that it is being *purposely* withheld.

With others fully devalued, SC could reason that his sacrificial revenge was justified. He then felt a sense of justice by transferring his immense pain onto others: "By destroying we create.... the feelings in you of what it is like to be the victim, what it is like to be fucked and destroyed." SC's splitting and projection are on full display here, and he is now ready to adopt the distorted view that he is a martyr acting for a higher purpose, as we next explore.

5.3.2 | Pseudo-spiritual transformation

SC's PST developed similarly to ER's. It was bolstered by his narcissism to the extent that he reimagined himself as God, or a holy martyr: "Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people." His PST acts to transcend a mere all-good hero and give birth to a God who makes a "heroic" sacrifice to save and "inspire generations." Extreme splitting is required when PST furthers the violent extremist's goals by turning him into a God. SC must refer to his innocent victims as "Hedonists, Sadists, Rapists," and "Terrorists" who can never know the Christ-like experience of "giving up your lives for a cause."

SC was clearly Biblically influenced and had attended Church with his family in the past. His religious influence is seen in his statement: "Like Moses, I spread the sea and lead my people—the Weak, the Defenseless, and the Innocent Children of all ages... to eternal freedom." Here, SC continues to frame his intent as a religious endeavor and himself as possessing supernatural ability. SC goes on to refer to himself as a "martyr" who will be punishing the "Apostles of Sin." The distorted logic of his severe envy leads him to see others' social advantages as god-like, which he must then psychologically reverse: "Do they wanna fuck us and pretend to be Jesus Christ? I say we're the Jesus Christs, my Brothers, Sisters, and Children." SC insists here that he is the true divine influence who is sacrificing himself for his "flock."

5.3.3 | The SC case from the perspective of threat assessment and the TRAP-18

Fixation is prominent in the SC case—he was totally immersed in his grievance issues and embracing violence as justified; his school work progressively deteriorated. Identification and Pathway are also prominent with his increasing involvement with firearms, more powerful ammunition and practicing at a firing range. One statement in his manifesto tirade is a classic example of Last Resort thinking: “You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option. The decision was yours.” Before going to the classrooms in Norris Hall where he killed most of his victims two and a half hours later, he first killed a woman in a residence hall and the residence assistant who responded to the noise (Kaine, 2009). This can be considered an example of Novel Aggression: He was testing his violent capability with one, and then a second victim, before he moved to a classroom where he knew there would be many human targets.

6 | DETECTION, TREATMENT, AND PREVENTION

How can a deeper understanding of the psychodynamics of envy and extreme violence help us to prevent such horrific acts? Individuals who raise concern about violence risk may be encountered by professionals in two ways. First, in traditional settings for mental health treatments; and second, in non-treatment settings such as workplaces, schools, institutions of higher learning, and a host of public, political, and governmental venues. Threat assessment practitioners and threat management teams are increasingly present in these latter organizational settings and within law enforcement.

Those who find their way to health care settings are presumably more inclined toward self-preservation than self-destruction or destruction of others. Their presenting issues related to narcissism may be depression, low self-esteem, and interpersonal conflicts. Some are referrals from spouses, employers, or licensing boards (Gabbard & Crisp, 2018). The patient's underlying envy is concealed, and so may be the contemplation of suicide—what clinicians are more likely to probe rather than risk of harm to others (Polledri, 2003). More severely narcissistic patients are prone to suicidal behavior because of their extreme vulnerability to negative feelings when faced with loss, criticism, and humiliation (Gabbard & Crisp, 2018; Kernberg, 1992; Polledri, 2003; Ronningstam, 2005). Contemplation of suicide may be a way to regulate negative affect for some. These patients may or may not be depressed, and feelings of depression could be defended against with grandiosity. An acute narcissistic injury in the patient's life could trigger a suicidal crisis in the absence of a depressed state. Ronningstam (2005) discussed the various meanings of suicidality in narcissistic patients, among them, an illusion of control and mastery (as well as preserving the perfect self), a shield against anticipated narcissistic injuries (death before dishonor), and an act of revenge: an individual may commit suicide to spite someone else. These various motivations relate to a key issue in the treatment of the severely envious narcissistic patient: the clinician's empathic help—their “goodness”—will stimulate the patient's envy and feelings of inferiority. The patient cannot sufficiently introject the therapist as a good object. Instead, as a defense, the patient begrudges the therapist's talents and denigrates the therapy, thereby spoiling it. He may pronounce boredom with the sessions or withdraw from direct engagement; his envious hatred may be hidden underneath an attitude of indifference. Alternatively, he may attempt to compete with the therapist, claiming superior knowledge or understanding (Abraham, 1927).

Kernberg (1992) noted that in cases of malignant narcissism, chronic suicidal preoccupation may be accompanied by a cold, vengeful satisfaction, a powerful secret held over the analyst, and if necessary, a way to execute control. The core psychodynamic is that the patient's experience of the helpful analyst may evoke feelings of shame caused by anticipated dependency and envy of the therapist's abilities, therefore raising the risk of suicide. Another risk, if treatment is not preemptively terminated by the patient, is the clinician giving up. This may occur consciously or unconsciously and is typically frustrated by countertransference feelings of failure and denigration—the legacy projection of the contemptuous patient. But there is also the risk of violence toward others. Polledri (2003) noted, based on cases

of forensic psychotherapy, how undetected envy-driven rage “only discovered too late,” led to the murder of relatives and others (Polledri, 2003, p. 196). Consistent with our concept of oblitative envy, Polledri went on to state:

...most envious individuals suffer from an encapsulated murderous aspect of their personalities. If this concealed enclave is suddenly detonated by external circumstances, homicidal or suicidal violence can erupt. This condition stems from a deficient attachment, a lack (in varying degrees) of a life force, or of a positive experience learned in earliest infancy (p. 196).

Psychodynamic psychotherapy has been shown to be superior to other modalities, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, in the treatment of complex mental disorders (Leichsenring & Rabung, 2008; Shedler, 2010; Steinert et al., 2017). Treating individuals with more severe personality disorders may help lessen the risk of violence (Klein, 1975; Polledri, 2003). However, the undertaking is not for less experienced therapists (Meloy & Reavis, 2007). Although the details of treatment strategies are beyond the scope of this article, we underscore the attention required on the part of the clinician and the careful, eventual teasing out of underlying feelings of shame. Gabbard and Crisp (2018) identify the many potential missteps to anticipate in treatment, emphasizing the need to balance confrontation and interpretation with empathic validation and advice, and that, “timing is of the utmost importance in the gradual confrontation of the grandiose self” (p. 123). They offer a succinct description of how the negative dynamics of comparison and the torture of envy may be addressed in treatment with patients who demonstrate a capacity for growth:

In the zero-sum game of envy, there is a myth that if someone has something good, the other person is diminished. A major goal of therapy is to help patients see that self-esteem is not dependent on what someone else has and that their accomplishments are not connected to those of others. The therapist works to interpret to the patient that his zero-sum view undermines the chance in his life that he and others can simultaneously feel successful and gratified (pp. 128–129).

The second arena where individuals of concern are encountered is in non-treatment settings, by threat assessment practitioners and teams in organizational and community contexts. Subjects who have completed attacks may be the disgruntled employee, the school shooter, the public mass murderer, the public figure attacker, or the domestic terrorist. The violence prevention practice of what is increasingly referred to as threat assessment and threat management has come to the fore and been refined over the past 3 decades to identify and manage such subjects prior to an attack (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). Practitioners of this specialty are typically mental health, law enforcement and security professionals who are tasked with identifying individuals at risk for predatory, targeted violence in a variety of settings. The subjects in these arenas are less likely to have ever been treated psychotherapeutically, let alone benefited from it. They have often recently suffered some destabilizing loss, rejection, or setback—a humiliation—to which they are reacting badly and noticeably. They may rarely express their issue as one of debilitating envy, but their negative comparisons and hateful fixations on their targets are its manifestations. Individuals may be reported to multidisciplinary threat assessment teams due to their overt expression of threats of violence or fear-inducing aggressive behavior or communications. Investigators are interested in their motives for violence, their psychology and psychiatric diagnoses, and the more distal characteristics and behaviors associated with eventual attackers. Of primary importance is the search for evidence of a conscious decision to carry out a violent act, the more proximal warning behaviors of an impending attack, and especially operational preparations that must accompany such intent, however simple or elaborate (as in the case of MH).

The intricacies of psychodynamics may be less important than the red flags of overt expressions of intent to harm, evidence of the subject's conscious decision that violence is justified, the dismissal of nonviolent alternatives, and the means to carry out serious or extreme violence at great personal cost. In essence, there is a willingness to embrace death or life in prison (White & Meloy, 2016). The everyday challenge for threat assessors is to identify the

indicators of very low probability events that, if they do occur, are catastrophic. False positives are common—statistically most people who make threats and reveal some risk factors do not actually carry out a threat—but no one wants to miss stopping an act of extreme violence. Efficiencies in screening are necessary and are aided by increasingly sophisticated algorithms that narrow the population of likely assailants. Practitioners make use of evidence-based assessment tools such as the TRAP-18 (Meloy, 2017), ultimately relying on their clinical or professional judgment to develop opinions of risk that inform prevention strategies. Understanding the powerful psychodynamics of severe envy, the oblitative mindset and pseudo-spiritual transformation, contribute to the knowledge base for threat assessment practice. Threat assessment clinicians on these teams may identify the signs of envy, often subtle or revealed indirectly, and its influence on a subject's violent motives.

7 | CONCLUSION

Despite its prominent role in violent extremism, as well as everyday crime, envy has remained relatively unexplored in forensic mental health analyses of these horrific acts. In this article, we have reviewed the psychodynamics by which destructive envy results in a persecutory mindset. When the desire for revenge is powerful enough, such individuals may conclude an act of lethal violence is wholly necessary and the only logical remedy, even if it means sacrificing their own lives. We performed forensic psycholinguistic analyses in three cases of extreme violence to illustrate the psychology of envy. To further clarify the process, we introduced two envy-related concepts: oblitative envy and pseudo-spiritual transformation. Oblitative envy describes the process by which envy, and its related mental and emotional states, are negated through an act of extreme violence. This act of extreme violence risks the lives of both self and other while providing a relatively brief period of shelter from intense narcissistic injury. Pseudo-spiritual transformation is the perpetrator's belief that violent revenge, in response to a personal grievance, is being guided and sanctified by some transcendent power, usually of personal religious significance. Understanding the relationship between envy, in all its manifestations, and extreme violence will continue to be an important subject for further study.

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