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Mass Violence in Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder: A Case Analysis of Anders Breivik using the “Path to Intended and Terroristic Violence” Model

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Abstract

Objective: There exist significant gaps in our understanding and knowledge of the contributory factors which give rise to the development of a mass shooter.

Method: A case analysis is presented of Anders Behring Breivik who engaged in a bombing and shooting spree in Norway on July 22, 2011.

Results: The case analysis presents that he has diagnoses of Asperger's Syndrome, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and Antisocial Personality Traits/Disorder. Additionally, a forensic profile is presented that a narcissistic decompensation contributed to him developing a depression, followed by rewrite his life story where he is a hero defending Europe against a conspiracy. However his personal and political grievances and violent ideation placed him onto the Path to Intended/Terroristic Violence, which culminated in the attacks in Norway.

Conclusions: The present study suggests that there may be an association between NPD and violence, similar to other studies. However, the factor of narcissistic decompensation (possibly co-occurring with an Asperger's coping strategy) was presented as a critical component of NPD that mediated its relationship with violence.

Keywords: Anders Behring Breivik; Narcissistic Personality Disorder; mass shooting; Path to Intended/Terroristic Violence

A review by Im (2016) indicated that despite numerous case reports suggesting an increased risk of violence in individuals with ASD, there are no prevalence studies that support this assertion. Rather than the perpetrator of violence, individuals with ASD may be more likely to be the victim (Sobsey, Wells, Lucardie, & Mansell, 1995). Importantly, no studies exist which support the theory that individuals with ASD are more violent (Im, 2016). While most people with ASD are law abiding (Frith, 1991; Tantam, 1991), there is a small subgroup who do become involved with the criminal justice system (Murrie, Warren, Kristiansson, & Dietz, 2002) and an even smaller subgroup of people with ASD who engage in violent offending behaviors. A plethora of studies have highlighted that other factors (such as childhood neglect) are also important factors that need to be considered as potentially contributing to the extremely violent behavior in this small subgroup in addition to the diagnosis of ASD. Simply having a diagnosis of ASD by itself does not lead an individual to engage in extremely violent behaviors (Allely, Minnis, Thompson, Wilson, & Gillberg, 2014). There have been a small number of papers which have suggested that there is a very small subgroup of individuals with ASD who display extremely violent behaviors (Fitzgerald, 2010; Allely, Minnis, Thompson, Wilson, & Gillberg, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2015; Allely, Wilson, Minnis, Thompson, Yaksic, & Gillberg, 2016). Allely and colleagues (2014, 2016) described a very small subgroup of people with ASD who have also been described in a theoretical paper by Faccini (2016). In his paper, Faccini integrated two separate models to try to understand the intended mass violence in individuals with ASD (using the case of Adam Lanza). In order to attempt to identify and understand the path to a mass shooting event in a very small subgroup of people with ASD, the three factors of autism-based deficits, psychopathology and deficient psychosocial development was adapted to also include the “Path to Intended Violence”.

Path to Intended Violence Model to Understand Mass/Terroristic Violence

Calhoun and Weston (2003) proposed that “intended violence is a process of discreet, sequential, recognizable behaviors.” They named their practical model for threat assessment the “the path to intended violence” and stated that hunters “move from feeling a *grievance*, to developing the *idea* that only violence can resolve the injury, to *researching and planning* the attack, to *making preparations* according to the dictates and the opportunities available, to *breaching* the target’s security (however primitive or sophisticated that may be), and then to *attack*.” The six behavioral steps or stages include: holding a grievance (for e.g., a perceived sense of injustice, a threat or loss, a need for fame, or revenge), ideation (considering the only option to be violence, discussing one’s thoughts with others, or modeling oneself after other assailants), research/planning (collecting information specific to one’s target, or stalking the target), preparations (for e.g., collating one’s costume, weapon(s), equipment, transportation, or engaging in “final act” behaviors), breach (for e.g., assessing levels of security, devising “sneaky or covert approach”), and attack (as described in detail in Faccini, 2010).

The Path to Intended Violence model, initially developed to assess “lone assassins targeting high profile protectees” (Olson 2005), has also been identified to be used in assessing progression along the Path to Terrorist Violence (PTTV). Olson (2005) proposed that the same steps that could lead one towards Intended Violence could also be used to assess the threat of a radical group progressing towards terroristic violence. Olson (2005) states that “it is a valid threat assessment model”, and can indicate “a terroristic violence potential by determining where on the PTTV a group is located based on an examination of group grievances, ideations and actions necessary to mount an attack”. Essentially the grievances that can comprise the first step on the path can consist of an individual’s personal grievances (stemming or exacerbated from mental illness or personality issues) and/or an extremist group’s political grievances, or in some cases the interaction of both personal and political grievances combined, as in the case of Anders Breivik.

Narcissism and Mass Violence

To date there has been relatively limited investigations of narcissism and violence (e.g., Twenge & Campbell, 2003; Blinkhorn, Lyons, & Almond, 2016; Lambe et al., 2016). Individuals diagnosed with narcissism have been found in one study to be prone to increased anger reactivity in response to failure and social rejection (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). In a recent review, Lambe and colleagues (2016) identified twenty articles which described twenty-five separate samples. The findings of this review suggest that narcissism is a useful construct in understanding the underpinning mechanisms of violence. The findings from the studies identified in this review are also consistent with the theory that narcissism may be a useful alternative to self-esteem in attempting to understand violent and aggressive behavior (Lambe, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Garner, & Walker, 2016). Since psychopathology has been shown to interact with autism-based deficits (and possibly Eriksonian Psychosocial Deficits) in contributing to violence, narcissism has been identified by some researchers as being characteristic of some shooters in neuro-typical individuals. However, narcissism has been completely overlooked by the literature linking autism-related deficits and violence, or as a risk factor. For instance, Bushman and Baumeister (1998) suggest that people who receive threats to their ego have a tendency to react with aggression to the source of this threat. Crucially though, Bushman and Baumeister (1998) found that in narcissistic individuals these reactions are particularly strong (Bezuidenhout & Wharren, 2013). Fitzgerald (2015) described the case of Eric Harris, one of the Columbine school shooters. Fitzgerald (2015) proposed that Eric had what he coined “Criminal Autistic Psychopathy” with a narcissistic personality and depression. A Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) analyst argued that Eric Harris was a classic psychopath and had a "messianic level superiority complex and hoped to illustrate his massive superiority to the world" (Cullen, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2015).

To date, there have been a modest number of studies which have indicated that school shooters are frequently considered to be narcissistic (O'Toole, 1999). However despite this, relatively few studies have empirically investigated this (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2014). One such empirical study was carried out by McGee and DeBernardo (1999) who examined eighteen school shooters in the United States. Their study suggested that the risk factor for school shootings includes a narcissistic attitude of superiority as well as a mixed personality disorder with elements of paranoia, antisocial behavior and narcissism. Another study found "evidence of narcissism" (p. 200; translation by the authors) in six out of seven German school shooters (Hoffmann, Roshdi, & Robertz, 2009). Narcissistic traits or narcissism have been posited to be a potential risk factor (in addition to other risk factors) for school shooting events (Köhler & Kursawe, 2003; Robertz, 2004; Scheithauer & Bondü, 2008). Bondü and Scheithauer (2014) carried out a study based on police files (which included expert psychological evaluations for example) on seven school shootings which took place in Germany in order to investigate whether there was any symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD,) as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.; DSM-IV). They found that for seven school shootings, three of the four school shooters, who had received treatment for psychiatric disorders prior to the shootings, displayed detached symptoms of narcissism. However, a diagnosis of NPD was not found in any of the offenders; Narcissistic traits were exhibited in two of the other three offenders. In one of the two cases, a diagnosis of NPD would have been met given the number of symptoms. Prevalence of NPD in the general population is under 1% but the prevalence is elevated in clinical samples, between 2% and 16% (DSM-IV-TR, APA, 2000). Bondü and Scheithauer (2014) findings of NPD in one of the seven school shooters indicates that the prevalence of NPD in school shooters is nearer to the prevalence of NPD found in clinical samples as compared to the prevalence in the general population. Therefore narcissism may be a risk factor (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2014). Lastly, Langman (2009) found that narcissism was exhibited in one fifth to one seventh of school shooters. Therefore, simply having a diagnosis of NPD or narcissistic traits is not a necessary condition for motivating a shooting by itself.

Narcissistic Rage and Mass Violence

Chung (2014) reported that narcissistic rage and in particular narcissistic wounds represents the “common thread” regarding the motives of mass shooters in the United States over the past 15 years. Chung (2014) refers to the famous psychoanalyst Kohut (1972) in his description of narcissistic wounds and rage as “the fragile sense of self that is oversensitive to perceived rejection or slights (narcissistic injuries), and sometimes results in uncontrolled, violent rage”. Furthermore, Malmquist (1996) presented a critical, mediating mechanism of “narcissistic rage” as accounting for the relationship between narcissism and homicide. Malmquist’s view involves the person with a Narcissistic Personality accumulating injuries to their self-esteem due to injustices over time. Due to the suffered “wounds”, the person starts to form ideation that “he must rectify the situation by destroying those who have injured him as a way of rectifying the situation”, and to regain a sense of control over his life. However the quality of this righteous act may involve having the perpetrators of the injustices, suffer, be harmed and destroyed. Subsequently, xxx and xxxx (under review) applied the concept of “narcissistic rage” to the mass violence perpetrated by Elliott Rodger. Essentially, the injustice that Rodger’s suffered throughout his life, or grievances, set him on the first step of the Path towards Intended Violence. Thereupon, his ideation that women, and the men that they were attracted to, should be made to pay for his suffering via violence. In addition, once the violence-only decision was made, Rodger then engaged in researching and planning, preparing, breaching security and finally in attacking others during his Day of Retribution. In the case of Rodger, not only could narcissistic rage and progression on the Path of Intended Violence account for his violence, but the presence of Asperger’ or High functioning Autism (identified by his mother or in court divorce documents) also contributed to his difficulties; however not enough information was made public to be able to clinically evaluate the claim that he indeed had an ASD.

Overall, so far the grievance step of the Path of Intended Violence can consist of a sense of threat, injustice, loss, destiny, revenge, fame etc. Faccini (2016) proposed that Lanza's sense of threat, and loss (from a combination of his autistic and mental health issues) placed him on the Path of Intended Violence. However, the grievance step can also encompass Roger's sense of threat and injustices, and then his ideation that women and their male partners should be made to suffer, through violence, as clearly on the next step of the path. Basically, the grievances experienced throughout his life aroused his "narcissistic rage" and its accompanying ideation to use violence to make the perpetrators suffer for retribution, subsequently, he engaged in the remaining steps of the Path toward Intended Violence (xxx and xxx, under review). In this way, it is proposed that whether autistic sensory issues and abnormal fixated interest and psychopathology (as in the case of Adam Lanza) or arising from injustices, loss and threat to one's self-esteem and eliciting narcissistic rage (as in Elliott Rodger's case), can place the person with autism on the path towards intended violence. The Path towards Intended Violence model's grievance step is both broad enough, and the path specific in its discreet steps, to be able to account for each person's grievances, ideation, violence-only decision, and progression towards an attack.

Although Narcissism has already been identified as existing in some shooter's profile, another facet of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, namely narcissistic decompensation is of central importance in understanding the path Breivik undertook in waging his personal and political "war". This article is noteworthy in that it proposes that Breivik had Antisocial and Narcissistic Personality Traits/Disorders respectively, but that a narcissistic decompensation with the component of re-writing one's history, and attributing his decline to a persecuting world and conspiracy, while repairing his self-esteem, propelled him along the Path to Intended/Terroristic Violence. Of particular note, it is not only that the existence of the personality disorders, and Asperger's Syndrome, contributed to his attacks. Essentially, a "narcissistic decompensation" and its overlap with the grievance and ideation steps of the Path to Intended/Terroristic

Violence were the critical components (where then he engages in the subsequent steps of the Path) that account for his attacks

In developing the case analysis, the authors did not personally examine Anders Breivik. They relied on public sources of information such as Asne Seierstad (2013) *One of Us: The Story of a Massacre in Norway and Its Aftermath*, Aage Borchgrevink (2013) *A Norwegian Tragedy* and Breivik's self-published manifesto, "2083: A European Declaration of Independence". The presented profile is mainly based on the information and account provided by Seierstad (2013) because of her thorough research, which she reported was based on witness reports, family reports, Breivik's reports to police and in court, Breivik's diary and manifesto, and the thoughts and observations of the surviving victims; however, Borchgrevink's (2013) account also provided important details that were not identified elsewhere. The importance of deriving a forensic profile of Breivik was motivated by the fact that not much information exists regarding the forensic profiles of persons, with a possible ASD and personality disorders, who commit mass violence. The forensic profile that is presented is an "informed speculation" (since the psychiatric and psychological evaluations of Breivik are not publically available), but noteworthy, given the paucity of information for these individuals, and the importance in understanding their path towards mass violence, and its possible prevention for both professionals and the public.

Mass Shooter Case: Anders Behring Breivik

On 22 July 2011 Anders Behring Breivik was responsible for killing of 77 people during the bombing of government buildings in Oslo and the shooting spree on the island of Utøya. He was sentenced to 21 years in prison on August 24, 2012.

Possible Developmental Trajectory

Although not based on a personal examination of Breivik, one can speculate on his developmental trajectory given the detail that Seierstad (2013) and Borchgrevink (2013) delineate. Due to a possible unpredictable style of parenting, involving pushing him away and at others times inviting contact, an ambivalent style of attachment may have developed between Breivik and his mother. As a result, the oppositional behavior and aggression shown to his mother, and not evident in other settings, might suggest a Reactive Attachment Disorder (Borchgrevink, 2013). For instance, as a young child of two years, Breivik was described as an angry boy who hit his mother and sister. He also exhibited defiance, running away from his mother during outings, difficulties making friends, attention seeking behaviors, “no language to express his emotions”, and as “lacking empathy” (as per Child Psychiatrist Per Olav Naess). This description may also be consistent with an oppositional defiant disorder. Furthermore, Seierstad (2013) describes Breivik’s early behavior as including being cruel to animals such as when he squashed ants, poked rats with pencils and pens, and drowned bumblebees, and his neighbors being leery of him when around their cats and dogs. Borchgrevink (2013) quotes Breivik’s mother as saying that he is “restless and lately more and more violent, capricious and full of unpredictable quirks...hyperactive”; also the observation of the State Centre for Child and Youth Psychiatry involved “(he) sits passively with toys, wanders aimlessly, kept a distance from the specialist who was in the room with him...when playing shop games with other kids, it was the functioning of the till that interested him, not the game around it. He lacks imagination and empathy” (cited in Borchgrevink, 2013). He was also described, at this time as clumsy.

As an adolescent, Breivik does not follow rules as exemplified by when he “tags” over more prominent artists’ graffiti. Around this time, he also inappropriately urinates in a corner of the basement recreation room (which earns him a nasty reputation), and even urinates on a woman’s property as punishment for her reprimanding him. He bullies others in school, is arrested several times for writing graffiti (and is

suspected of stealing colored spray cans), tries to be part of a gang, hits others, and mimics the tougher boys in their expressions. Overall, he drops out of secondary school after only three years. These behaviors suggest that he progressed to engaging in conduct disordered behaviors. Furthermore, Breivik then started to engage in adult antisocial behavior. He started to lie about his pursuits and accomplishments (i.e. having completed an MBA course, and is taking part in the Progress party's course in preparation for a political career) among other lies. Also, he acquired a good knowledge of weapons, developed a business of making fake college diplomas, avoided paying his taxes, engaged in money laundering, abusing steroids, and plagiarized others' literary works. According to Ulrik Fredrik Malt, Breivik evidenced "a lack of ability to experience guilt and learn from experiences or punishment. It is possible there was a problem there...and lack of empathy and (that he has) unique rights" (quoted in Seierstad [2013]). In addition, Breivik is believed to have autism or Asperger's Syndrome which is discussed under Forensic Examinations. Furthermore, in addition to antisocial traits/disorder and autism/Asperger's Syndrome, he also evidences a Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Forensic Examinations

Breivik went through two forensic evaluations. As part of his first psychiatric evaluation, which was conducted by Torgeir Husby and Synne Sørheim, he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Thus he was considered to be legally unaccountable. However, the diagnostic conclusions reached by the first psychiatric evaluators were overruled by a second team of psychiatric evaluators which was carried out by Agnar Aspaas and Terje Tørrissen (Tørrissen & Aspaas, 2012). They instead diagnosed Breivik as having a severe NPD comorbid with pseudologia fantastica (pathological lying) (Newmark & Kay, 1999).

They argued that he was not psychotic during the time of his attack nor during their psychiatric interviews. Interestingly, the second evaluators' main diagnosis of NPD was not reviewed in any detail during the court proceedings (Melle, 2013; Bortolotti, Broome, & Marni, 2014). Therefore this second group considered Breivik to be legally accountable. Bjørkly and colleagues (2014) discussed in their paper the

courtroom controversies concerning violence risk assessment in the case of Breivik (Bjørkly, Hartvig, Roaldset, & Singh, 2014).

Additionally, there are strong arguments that Breivik may also have had Asperger's Syndrome (e.g., Allely et al., 2014). One of Norway's most prominent psychiatrists, Professor Ulrik Fredrik Malt of Oslo University, told the court in Oslo that it was plausible that Breivik had Asperger's, Tourette's, and a NPD; he also claimed that paranoid psychosis could not be completely ruled out. Support for his proposed diagnoses was the lack of emotion Breivik exhibited when he discussed those he killed, his memory for details, his obsession with numbers, his hypergraphia (obsessive writing) and his monotonous tone of voice as well as his struggles to understand social signals. He has problems getting to grips with what others think and feel" (Mass killer Breivik may have rare forms of Asperger's and Tourette's Syndromes, says Norway's leading psychiatrist, 2012). Furthermore, Breivik was seen for a child psychiatric evaluation when he was about four years old, and the psychiatrist at the time, Per Olav Naess of the Centre for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, also believed that Breivik had the condition Asperger's Syndrome.

The second group of evaluators' psychiatric conclusions have been supported by others. For instance, Dr. Rosenqvist also argued that Breivik was suffering from a malignant NPD who even during the first few weeks of his incarceration, attempted to maintain a sense of grandeur and importance, an appearance that he attempted to convey particularly during the court proceeding (Leonard, Annas, Knoll, & Tørrissen, 2014). During his trial, Breivik's narcissism and arrogance was evident on numerous occasions – and he also demonstrated a high degree of self-obsession. For example, he lectured a testifying professor in toxicology who was testifying about the effects of ephedrine, acetylic acid, anabolic steroids, and dehydration. Breivik stated that the professor may not have read the proper international literature. Breivik also proudly compared himself to Vidkun Quisling. During the Second World War, Quisling

betrayed Norway by joining Hitler (Leonard et al., 2014). Breivik is also reported to have said that he had plastic surgery in order to achieve a more Aryan appearance (“Norway Massacre: the real Anders Behring Breivik,” Sunday Telegraph, July 31, 2011). He is reported to have had regret over the surgery saying that he previously “had a great Nordic nose” (“Anders Behring Breivik regrets loss of ‘Great Nordic Nose’,” Telegraph, November 30, 2011). On one evening when he was preparing for his attack, he went to a restaurant to get Chinese takeaway he reported in his log that: ‘There was a relatively hot girl in the restaurant today, checking me out.’...‘Refined individuals like myself are a rare commodity here so I notice I do get a lot of attention. It’s the way I dress and look. They are mostly unrefined/uncultivated people living here. I wear mostly the best pieces from my former life, which consists of very expensive brand clothing, Lacoste sweaters, piques etc’ (Seierstad, 2013, pp. 241). In Breivik’s self-published manifesto, “2083: A European Declaration of Independence” which he posted online (Berwick, 2011) he, on numerous occasions, refers to his good looks. At the end of the manifesto he included a number of posed pictures of himself in various uniforms, etc. These pictures have been widely used by the media and therefore he has been shown in the public domain exactly how he wants to be seen. He had also prepared by practicing extensively for the possible interviews he might do following the attacks (Pantucci, 2011).

Narcissistic Decompensation

Up until the age of 27, Anders Breivik experienced a number of major stressors including a difficult relationship with his mother, the absence of his father in his life, wanting to be a millionaire by alternating between legitimate and criminal means, having his sexual identity questioned, difficulties with dating women and abandoning his pursuit of the “ideal woman”, and being rejected by gaming elite circles as well as the political elite; in sum, his life experiences up until this point culminated in failed attempts to gain a positions of status and power, acceptance and admiration from others. Thereupon at the age of 27, Breivik moves back in with his mother and experiences a “narcissistic decompensation”.

A narcissistic decompensation can occur when someone with a NPD experiences significant crises and major injuries to their self-esteem. Vaknin (2015) reports that a narcissistic “decompensation occurs when there is a significant discrepancy between the person with NPD’s grandiose fantasies, under the reality of the situations”, that they may have only have achieved average or mediocre accomplishments. Since the person does not get the validation from reality (i.e. admiration, grand attention, adoration) that they so desperately desire, they experience a “decompensation”. The Narcissistic Decompensation can consists of a depression marked by psychomotor retardation, disrupted sleep patterns, becoming perseverative in one’s speech or writings, pursuing an addiction, and expressing a sense of outrage. As a result, the person isolates himself due to the harsh reality that he is not of grand power or status, and may turn to himself to feed his own grandiosity, by supplying his own sense of adoration and attention. The longer that the decompensation lasts, the narcissistic glorifies the past and may even rewrite his life story and become his own audience (providing narcissistic validation); this path is described as “the delusional narratives solution” where he “constructs a narrative where he is the hero” (Vaknin, 2003). Also during this time the person can become obsessive, repetitive, and paranoid. The paranoia can be expressed by him “concocting a persecuting world, incorporating in it his life’s events and his social milieu”. Furthermore, the decompensated narcissist attributes his decline to the conspiracy, and then in a most desperate state, “embarks on an orgy of self-destruction intended to generate alternative supply sources (attention) at any cost”. At this point the narcissist has engaged in the “paranoid schizoid solution” where there is a conspiracy identified and he withdraws from people” (Vaknin, 2003). However, Vaknin (2003) also identifies the “reality renouncing solution” where he renounces the reality of his situation and becomes “full-fledged antisocial...by acting criminally and by jeopardizing their safety, lives or property”.

The concept of decompensation is somewhat similar to the concept of “unfreezing” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014). Basically “unfreezing” was identified by McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) as “a personal crisis of disconnection and maladjustment...a loss of connection and status”, which with the

characteristics of grievance, depression and weapons knowledge were common among school shooters and assassins. Essentially, “grievance is a motive for the violence, weapons experience provides a means, and depression and unfreezing lower the opportunity cost of violence as the perpetrator has less to lose”. The point that unfreezing makes it easier to make the violence-only decision, it does not take into account all of the previous appropriate and non-violent actions, that the person may have tried, that have led to the decision that violence is the only option left. Although the general conceptualization is similar, the detailed description of the decompensation of a NPD (with an additional Antisocial Personality Disorder) coupled with progression along the Path towards Intended/Terroristic Violence is a finer analysis of the motivation, beliefs and actions of Anders Breivik’s violence.

Also Tony Atwood’s (2015) concept of reacting to one’s Asperger’s Syndrome via depression and isolation, arrogance and “God Mode” may be relevant when viewing the decompensation with elements from an ASD. Atwood (2015) presented that there are certain “compensatory and adjustment strategies to being different” as a child with Asperger’s syndrome. He identified developing a depression (with isolation), an escape into imagination, and denial and arrogance etc. In regards to “escape into imagination”, “under conditions of extreme stress, the propensity to escape into an imaginary world can lead to an internal fantasy becoming a “reality” for the person with Asperger’s syndrome. The person may be considered as developing delusions and being out of touch with reality”. Also Atwood (2015) described “denial and arrogance” as the individual denying that a problem exists, and going into “God mode” where they believe that they are “an omnipotent person who never makes a mistake, cannot be wrong and whose intelligence must be worshipped...(also they may rely on) intimidation, and arrogant and inflexible attitude, and can become intoxicated by such power and dominance, which may lead to conduct problems”. Overall, the strategies of escaping into imagination, denial and arrogance, and developing a depression and subsequent isolation may also apply in the case of Breivik, and may co-exist, or being reinforced, by the narcissistic decompensation.

Narcissistic Decompensation and Overlap with the Grievances Step

In Breivik's case, his narcissistic decompensation began at the age of 27 possibly lasting for two to three years. At this time, he moved back to live with his mother, would spend 16 to 17 hours playing online videogames, did not work, avoided socializing with friends, quit working out, consumed a poor diet or spent little time eating, and did not care for his appearance by no longer dressing up, instead looking unkempt and grubby. Then at a certain point (possibly after being rejected by the online ganging elite), he stops playing videogames and in an obsessed and most focused manner, starts rewriting his life story, substituting grand accomplishments, status and connections for his otherwise mediocre life experiences. For instance, he described himself as once being part of one of the toughest gangs and a prominent graffiti artist with works all over the city, which is far from the truth. Furthermore, he then reconstructs the view of himself as he is a high ranking Freemason, etc. Also during this time, he becomes more fixated on his ideas that there is a conspiracy among Islamic immigrants to take over Europe, calling it the "Islamization of Europe". In addition, he goes on to denounce the multicultural movement, cultural Marxism, and feminism while criticizing the Labour Party for allowing these movements "to take power in Europe", "and "ruin our country". In addition, it is during his writing of the Declaration of Europe's Independence that he starts to position himself as a revolutionary leader of a movement to fight against these conspiracies. It is at this point that he writes about his plan to lead a violent movement, after having made the violence-only decision. In particular, he fashions himself as a revolutionary crusader on a righteous war and details plans to mobilize against the government and different groups in order to fight for Europe. In this way, not only does Breivik rewrite his life story, in an autobiography, peppered with accomplishments and status that he did not attain, but in Part 3 he fashions himself as an international political leader and patriot (with ties and connections with Christian extremists, the English Defense League, Nazis, Freemasons etc.). The degree that Breivik stands outside of himself, so to construct his image in a grand manner, is reflected in him even interviewing himself (and examples of using himself as

his audience to fuel his self-esteem), and writing a note to self, before leaving for the attacks wishing “good luck and give them hell”. Furthermore, he also hires an organization to cleanse the online profiles of him post-attack, so that his grand image is preserved. In addition, to further reinforce his status he photographs himself, and posts the pictures on line, of himself in a Freemason uniform, as a Knight Templar, as a Norwegian gentleman, in a biological warfare suit and as carrying weapons. In this way, the “persecution” and conspiracy theories that Breivik taps into, that are also shared by other extremists, is incorporated in his writing and mission to preserve his personal (grand) identity, and Europe. In these ways, Breivik engages in a path marked by elements of the “delusional narrative” (constructs himself into a hero), and “reality renouncing” (dismisses reality) and then acts in an antisocial manner by devising a conspiracy and a plan for a violent revolution; however it is also possible that his actions also reflect paranoia and a schizoid stance (“paranoid schizoid solution”), and the explosive aggressive behavior consistent with the “paranoid aggressive (explosive)” solutions to a lesser degree (Vaknin, 2003 identified these four paths subsequent to decompensation).

Step Two on the Path-Ideation

Overall Breivik’s political ideology seems to go through different stages towards extremism in reaction to rejections. For instances, at the age of 18 he spent time on the internet sharing his political views. Subsequently when he was not accepted as a leader for the Progress Youth Party, his betrayal was expressed via sharing more negative views regarding the party. Also, when Breivik started to fixate on the threat of the “Islamization of Europe”, he didn’t talk about anything else to his friends (whom he just started to see again), and posted his views on extremist websites that reinforced his “conspiracy theories” and the belief of the threat that they posed to Europe. It is also at this time that he turned 30 years old, re-writes his life story, and reached out to his idol Fjordman and the Progress political party with his idea of a National newspaper. Due to being ignored by Florjman, and the rejection of the idea of his national political newspaper, he started criticizing Fjordman’s views, believed that dialogue was ineffective, and appeared to make the decision that violence is the only option to address his personal and political

grievances. He started to write the third part of his book, the Declaration of War; whereas Part 1 and 2 suggested non-violent means to resolve the conflict, Part 3 clearly advocated for the use of violence via a revolution. In addition to a perception of threat, Breivik's need for recognition and fame was expressed in him fashioning himself as a revolutionary, political leader calling for violence to produce change (both before and after the attacks); in essence he wanted to create a following. In addition, significant losses and rejections had been experienced through his life. His long list of losses include having an ambivalent attachment to his mother, the absence of his father in his life, being ridiculed and ignored by peers while in school and growing up, his parents not being there for him while he was growing up, and being thrown out of a youth gang. Furthermore, he was rejected by a prominent graffiti gang, an elite gaming organization, not elected as a leader for the Progress Youth Political party, rejected by Eva a childhood friend, and then Natasha a mail-order bride (where he then renounced the idea that he could find an "ideal woman"). Overall, Breivik's losses, need for fame and sense of threat comprised his personal and political grievances, but also solidly placed him on the first step of the Path towards Intended/Terroristic Violence.

Subsequently with Breivik spending three years writing his "Manifesto" in Part III: The Declaration of War, he shared his ideas regarding his three step plan for a revolution. His three phases, outlined in his 1,518-page "Manifesto" entitled "2083: A European Declaration of Independence", included a civil war breaking out followed by an "advanced resistance being lead against the government", and then the execution of different groups of traitors. In addition, since he had already made the violence-only decision, he gives instructions and strategies on how to wage war. Clearly Breivik was at that time on the ideation step of the Path towards Intended/Terroristic Violence. The sense of mission for Breivik, who regarded himself as a patriot, was clearly communicated when he made the following plea: "I'm depending on you to distribute the book or some/all of its contents to as many patriotic European political activists as possible. Let them know what is going on and what is required of each and every one of us. After all, we do not only have a right to resist the current development, it is our duty as Europeans to prevent the annihilation of our identities, our cultures and traditions and our nation states! (p 6) I am

100% certain that the distribution of this compendium to a large portion of European patriots will contribute to ensure our victory in the end. Because within these three books lies the tools required to win the ongoing Western European cultural war” (Berwick, 2011, p.5).

Step Three on the Path-Researching and Planning

Anders Breivik engaged in researching and planning his attack over a three year period. He used the internet to research “600” manuals on how to make bombs including how other terrorist groups have constructed them including Al-Qaida, and their magazine *Inspire*, as well as the methods used by Timothy McVeigh, and the IRA; overall, he was particularly interested in making bombs from diluted fertilizer. Throughout his life he was interested in weapons and acquired significant knowledge of all types of weapons. Breivik also engaged in suspicious inquiries when he asked a taxi driver when government employee usually leave for the day, which government building was most prominent, and which routes were optimal to travel in Oslo, as well as when he used his GPS to scout paths throughout Utøya Island. As already stated, his plan included three stages of waging war outlined in Part Three of his European Declaration of Independence.

Step Four on the Path-Preparation

In preparing emotionally and physically, Breivik claims that he practiced techniques for emotionally detaching himself so that he could go ahead with the murders. He states that he practiced “Bushido” techniques and listened to music to enhance his “contempt for death” and to eliminate his fears; he also continued to take the steroid Winstol that he claimed helped suppress his fear. In regard to a workout regimen, he claimed to drink four protein shakes and go on 20 minute training runs where he would wear weighted packs and carry water bottles to build up his conditioning. To keep his morale high, he would reward himself with candy and good food like Chinese takeout. In addition, he also claimed that his playing of *World of Warcraft* and *Modern Warfare* online games help him perfect his use of a

“holographic weapon gun sight”, and that he could practice strategies to avoid being trapped by police. However throughout his life he belonged to a gun club and would intermittently practice shooting at a range. In addition, Breivik used a farm as a cover to purchase diluted fertilizer, and so he could experiment with different recipes for perfecting his homemade 2100 pound bomb. Also, he researched and then made the police “uniform” or costume, purchased the body armor and black boots (with spurs according to Seierstad, [2013] or black boots with spikes according to Borchgrevink, [2013]) that he would wear during his spree killings; as per weapons, he purchased a glock, shotgun, rifle and pistol, lead tipped bullets, and a significant amount of ammunition. Also, due to studying sewing in school, he was able to make the police, Freemason’s and Knights Templar uniforms, and purchased the weapons biological suit that he was photographed in and released onto the internet before the violence. In regard to the van that would transport the fertilizer bomb, he rented an Avis van, and removed the logo. Also, he made a sign regarding performing water treatments to display near the van to account for the acid smell emanating from his van, so that passersby would not get suspicious. Lastly he left a car near the government buildings so that after dropping off the van, and lighting the fuse, he could proceed to Utøya Island.

Step Five on the Path-Breach

The day before the bombing, he engaged in one final reconnaissance of the Norwegian Government quarter, regarding probing security, where he would target to attempt to kill the Norwegian Prime Minister. Prior to leaving for Oslo, Breivik upload his European Declaration of Independence and distributes it to 6000 addresses, and various photos of himself in different attire onto the internet; this could be considered a final act behavior. Although he wanted to destroy his computer’s hard drive, he did not because he needed to allow it to distribute his 8000 emails, so he left it running while he departed for Oslo. After loading his bomb onto his van, he drove to Oslo and parked it in proximity to the Government

Building which housed the Norwegian Prime Minister; however since the Prime Minister had decided to work from home that day, no harm was committed to the Prime Minister.

Step Six on the Path-Attack

On July 22, 2011, Anders Breivik exploded a 2100 pound bomb on an automatic timer, that was planted near the Government Building in Oslo killing seven individuals except for the Prime Minister. Subsequently, he took a taxi and then ferry over to Utøya Island, dressed as a policeman, and shot another 69 adults and teens that had assembled for a summer gathering of the Progress Youth political party. It seemed as though Breivik planned that the bombing would divert the police to the government quarter while he headed for Utøya Island, which was at least one hour away. The total dead after his bombing and then more personal shooting spree was about 77. However, Breivik did not have any intention of killing himself or engaging in shootout with police given that he called the police twice to state who he was and that he was surrendering (so that he would not be shot). He then cooperatively surrendered once the assault team arrived on Utøya Island. This was in line with his plan and intention to continue to live so that he could be a revolutionary leader and have a following.

Discussion

Relating to this study, we argue that given a higher prevalence of narcissistic traits or NPD in mass shooters and the higher prevalence of ASD found in mass shooters, then it may be important to investigate the overlap between these two disorder/traits in mass shooters. It is possible that the co-occurrence of both ASD and narcissism is a particularly 'explosive' combination, a combination which makes an individual with ASD more at risk for engaging in extremely violent behavior.

The present study suggests that there may be an association between NPD and violence, similar to other studies. However, the factor of narcissistic decompensation (possibly co-occurring with an Asperger's

coping strategy) was presented as a critical component of NPD that mediated its relationship with violence. In addition, narcissistic decompensation then overlapped with a sense of grievance, and then when the violence-only decision was made, the person was then firmly on the path to intended/terroristic violence. This case study of Anders Breivik indicated that it was not the NPD per se that is critical but the four factors, namely, narcissistic decompensation, its overlaps with step one on the path or grievance, the violence-only decision (step 2 of the path), and then researching, preparing, planning, breaching security leading to the attack of others. These factors are proposed and further research is necessary to examine if they are critical in other shooting events.

Clinical Recommendations and Future Directions

As highlighted in previous studies (e.g., Allely et al., 2014, 2016), there exist significant gaps in our understanding and knowledge of the contributory factors which give rise to the development of a mass shooter. Further research is needed to investigate the pathway to violence and other background factors in individuals, who become mass shooters in order to try and elucidate the early risk factors or patterns of behavior which can help predict individuals who may at increased risk of engaging in extremely violent acts, so that early preventative strategies can be implemented. In this paper, The Pathway to Intended Violence model is highlighted as a useful tool to help identify which risk factors and pathways are more predictive of mass shooting (Allely et al., 2016). Such factors as narcissistic decompensation, grievances, the violence only option/decision and engaging in the remaining steps of the path to intended violence are suggested as critical, but need further examination.

Another direction that might be useful may be to further examine the distinction of the grandiose versus the vulnerable narcissist (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003) and how it relates to mass violence. For instance it can be speculated that grandiose narcissism (such as in this case of Breivik), and vulnerable narcissism, (possibly in the case of Elliot Rodger who painfully avoided interactions with beautiful

women but still felt entitled to a relationship with them), to examine the mechanisms of narcissistic decompensation or narcissistic rage to arrive at mass violence. This would represent a finer analysis and might account for some of the distinctions that only using the broader narcissistic personality disorder misses when accounting for the connection between NPD and mass violence, with different perpetrators. Furthermore, an analysis of the individuals identified as having an ASD and mass violence, as identified in Allely et al. (2016), could also be the subject of a finer analysis, and then commonalities in individual characteristics and if using the Path towards Intended/Terroristic Violence is meaningful to the analysis; in this way, since these persons with an ASD and violence cannot be studied as a group, individual case analyses can be completed and risk factors and risk management approaches could be suggested.

Lastly, another direction for future research is an empirical investigation into whether early NPD symptoms are associated with later extremely violent behaviors such as mass shooting events. To date there have only been a modest number of studies that have investigated whether early NPD symptoms or traits are predictive of later offending behavior. For instance, findings from a study carried out by Johnson and colleagues (2000) suggested that NPD symptoms in early-adolescence were predictive of violent criminal behavior in both mid-adolescence and early-adulthood (Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen, Oldham, Skodol, & Brook, 2000). Additionally, Keene and Epps (2016) investigated narcissistic vulnerability and shame-proneness as potential mediators between childhood physical abuse (CPA) and adult anger and aggression using a sample of 400 undergraduate students. Of the 400 students, 134 had a history of CPA. Participants completed self-report questionnaires which assessed history of CPA, shame-proneness, narcissistic vulnerability, physical aggression, trait anger, and hostility. Findings indicated that compared to non-abused participants, abused participants were more angry and aggressive and also experienced increased levels of shame-proneness and narcissistic vulnerability (Keene & Epps, 2016). Empirical studies looking at the early factors explored in these previous studies in specifically individuals

who engaged in extremely violent behavior like mass shooting could take us a step further to understanding the pathway to violence in these individuals.

Conclusion

There is currently relatively little understanding of the warning signs and risk factors for extreme violence such as mass shooting with persons with ASD. There is a great need for the development of a comprehensive risk assessment that can be used by law enforcement officers to assist them (Milby, 2015). Furthermore, it would also be responsible for any investigative body to formally and comprehensively evaluate the presence of an ASD, other co-occurring disorders, and how it functionally contributes to the mass violence so that professionals and others do not speculate about the connections of ASD and Violence for that perpetrator.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Highlights

- Although Narcissism has already been identified as existing in some shooter's profile, another facet of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), namely narcissistic decompensation is of central importance in understanding the path Breivik undertook in waging his personal and political "war".
- The present study suggests that there may be an association between NPD and violence, similar to other studies. However, the factor of narcissistic decompensation (possibly co-occurring with an Asperger's coping strategy) was presented as a critical component of NPD that mediated its relationship with violence in the case of Anders Breivik.