



Summary and Analysis of the Threat Process of the Tunkhannock PA Weis Market Shooter

June 8, 2017

Overview of Event

- Shortly before 1AM on June 8 2017, a 24-year-old male assailant shot and killed three of his co-workers on the midnight shift at the Weis Market in Tunkhannock Pennsylvania.
- The assailant was armed with two pistol grip shotguns and approximately 100 rounds of ammunition.
- Assailant allowed one female co-worker to escape.
- The assailant live streamed his suicide after the shootings.

Background of Shooter

- Lived with parents outside Dallas PA.
- Attended Luzerne County Community College (Majored in Broadcasting).
- Very active on social media, YouTube.
- Made a variety of videos for YouTube for several years.
- Worked at Weis Supermarket for 7 years.

Fantasy Life

- Obsessed with Ember McLain- an unpopular cartoon character who wanted to be a rock star.
- Ember “died” in a house fire and became a ghost.
- As a ghost, she would recruit people between the ages of 10-35 to kill people and commit suicide to become part of Ember’s Ghost Squad (EGS).
- Assailant personalized this character and identified with her as the assailant’s “soul mate.” “Connected with her.”
- Aspired to join the Ghost Squad as a female ghost.

Personal Pathologies (Risk Factors)

- Suffered from depression.
- Suicidal thoughts and intentions (10 years).
- Severely affected by death of some of his peers.
- A sense of foreshortened future. “Fascinated with death.”
- Strained relationship with his father.
- Identified as a woman (covert cross-dressing, body-hair shaving, etc.).
- Hated people and life.
- Developed homicidal ideations.
- Identified with the Columbine shooters.



Grievance

- The assailant was also upset at cartoon animators who “failed” him by not assisting in the production and animation of his high school shooting cartoon that he was working on. The assailant considered this video to be his “masterpiece.”

Identification Behavior

- Assailant identified with, and idolized the Columbine shooters. Wanted to be like them.
- Assailant “loved” the Columbine shooter’s death photo which he wanted to emulate.
- Assailant examined the journal of one of the Columbine shooters and believed that not only did the shooter understand what the assailant felt, but also believed that he and the shooter “knew each other.”

Novel Aggression

- Although not an actual novel aggressive act, the assailant filmed a video (“*Extinction*”) which depicted him murdering of two of his “friends,” the frog and the whale. These “friends” were depicted in previous videos as the assailant’s companions with which the assailant had conversations and a relationship.
- The video shows the assailant being upset as he returns home from being fired from his job due to the release of a sex video. The sex video, previously filmed by the assailant, depicted the whale performing anal sex on the assailant while the assailant was in a state of amnesia. The “*Extinction*” video depicts the assailant becoming enraged and then stabbing both the whale and the frog to death.
- In a follow-up video (“*Absolution*”), the assailant displays regret for his act and says that they (the frog and the whale) were his friends and that he “took two innocent lives.”
- In another follow-up video (“*Resurrection*”), the assailant, with Ember’s influence, justifies the murders.

Detailed Plan

- Developed a detailed chronology of activities he needed to perform on the night of the shooting.
- Took his weapons to work, keep them in the car until he is ready.
- Sought to “control and contain this operation” by placing pallets of store product in front of the exit doors to block victim’s escape.
- Placed his car on the outside of a set of double doors to block exit.
- Sent out the media release of videos and emails (already composed), to the websites.
- Texted his mother to say good bye.
- Conducted the attack.
- Live-streamed his suicide.



Leakage

- Assailant reported that all his high school essays ended with the death of the main character. Assailant stated that none of his teachers inquired about this theme.
- Some “leakage” occurred on social media in the form of cryptic statements, but most of this communication may have been parsed as plots of his characters in the context of his videos.
- It is unclear which of the videos, if any depicting his plan and intentions, were released in time for outside intervention. A media release containing his videos was released the night the attack.

Acquisition

- Since he worked at the same location for 7 years, the assailant gained knowledge of the store layout, including entrances, exits, locks, the alarm system, and routine activities.
- Assailant had possession of keys, and codes to the security system.
- Assailant obtained two pistol grip 12 gauge shotguns, ammunition, hearing protection, and carrying pouches for the shotgun and ammo.

Breach

- In a later video the assailant stated that each day that he goes to work he is observing his co-worker's routines, the amount of product shipment received on pallets, and any other factors or changes in the environment which may negatively affect his plans.

NOTE: Threat assessment research and experience has found that in most every case of targeted and intentional violence, the assailant progresses through a set of stages (a pathway) that moves them to the violence.

However, in many cases investigators, family members, co-workers, and acquaintances are unable to recognize this pathway and its associated signs.

Sometimes this is due to the lack of leakage, or other observable signs. In these cases, the assailant is successful in hiding or disguising their intentions via secrecy and/or deception.

In other situations, the failure to recognize the pathway behaviors, warning signs, and risk factors may be due to the inability of observers to recognize the significance of such factors.

Disclaimer- This analysis was conducted by a MPOETC staff member based on open source information and is intended to illustrate principles related to threat assessment. It is not to be considered a comprehensive or clinical analysis.