
MARCH 2022



Hot Yoga Tallahassee

A CASE STUDY OF
MISOGYNISTIC EXTREMISM

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE
National Threat Assessment Center

This report was prepared by the staff of the U.S. Secret Service
National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)



NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER
U.S. SECRET SERVICE
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March 2022



Introduction

On November 2, 2018, a 40-year-old gunman opened fire inside Hot Yoga Tallahassee, a yoga studio in Tallahassee, FL, killing two women and injuring four more before committing suicide. The attacker was motivated to carry out violence by his inability to develop or maintain relationships with women, along with his perception of women's societal power over men. For decades prior, he engaged in numerous instances of inappropriate and criminal behavior directed toward women and girls. These behaviors resulted in him losing several jobs, being barred from public locations, and having multiple contacts with law enforcement, some of which resulted in arrest.

The behavioral history of the Hot Yoga Tallahassee attacker illustrates many of the behavioral threat assessment themes identified through years of U.S. Secret Service research examining targeted violence. Further, this attacker's history highlights the specific threat posed by misogynistic extremism. This gender-based ideology, sometimes referred to as "male supremacy," has received increased attention in recent years from researchers, government agencies, and advocacy groups due to its association with high-profile incidents of mass violence. Some of these attacks were perpetrated by individuals who espoused specific types of misogynistic extremism, including "anti-feminists" and "involuntary celibates" (See Origins of the "Incel" Label). The Hot Yoga Tallahassee attacker did not appear to adopt any of these specific ideological labels, but his behavior and beliefs aligned with many who do. Although these labels and their origins vary, they all have proponents who have called for violence against women.

Origins of the "Incel" Label

In the late 1990s, a Canadian woman created an Internet peer support forum for people who wanted a sexual relationship but were unable to find a partner. It was intended to be a safe place to seek support for those who felt sexually deprived due to social awkwardness, marginalization, or mental illness. She popularized the term "involuntary celibacy" as a nonjudgmental way for lonely people to identify as a group. Over time, the term would be shortened to "incel." This forum, along with similar communities, was intended to be positive and focused on providing support for overcoming one's "incel" status.

As the community grew, the ideas expressed in the forums changed and by the early 2000s, some of the more dominant voices were young heterosexual men with vindictive and aggressive views toward women. Though the original developer took down her website, the community continued to spread across other forums.

Today, the term "incel" is often used to describe men who feel unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships with women, to which they feel entitled. The term is used to describe one online subculture that exists within the "manosphere" – a network of blogs and forums frequented by groups including incels, men's rights activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and pickup artists (PUAs). Although these groups are known to promote male-dominant views, some members express extreme ideologies involving anti-woman hate, sexual objectification of women, and calls for violence targeting women.



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For example, on May 23, 2014, a 22-year-old male killed six people and injured fourteen others in a shooting and stabbing spree near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Among the victims were three women who were shot outside of a sorority house. The attacker viewed these young women as symbols of the type of woman he was unable to attract. Earlier that day, he posted a video on social media where he expressed his frustration of not being able to find a girlfriend. He also recorded details of his hatred for women, his contempt for interracial couples, and his plans for retribution. Although the UCSB killing spree is an example of a mass attack perpetrated by a self-identified incel, mass attacks have also been perpetrated by attackers motivated by other types of misogynistic extremism. For example, on July 19, 2020, a 72-year-old self-described “anti-feminist” lawyer attacked the family of a federal judge, killing the judge’s son and wounding her husband. The attacker was a fervent men’s rights advocate, motivated by a belief that “manhood is in serious jeopardy in America” and calling for a “revolution.”¹ Unlike the UCSB attacker, this attacker did not identify as an incel. He had previously been married and was not known to visit incel-related websites.

It is further important to note that misogynistic violence is not restricted to high-profile incidents of mass violence. Misogyny frequently appears in more prevalent acts of violence, including stalking and domestic abuse. No matter the context, responding to the threat posed by these beliefs requires collaboration across multiple community systems, including law enforcement, courts, mental health providers, and domestic violence and hate crime advocacy groups.

The Hot Yoga Tallahassee case study demonstrates the opportunities that exist to prevent targeted violence while drawing particular focus to the risk posed by misogynistic extremism. Highlighted throughout the case study are behavioral threat assessment themes (see table on page 5) that were evident in the background of the Hot Yoga Tallahassee attacker. These behavioral themes are frequently seen in the backgrounds of other attackers and, as such, should be the focus of community-level violence prevention efforts to identify and intervene with those who pose a risk of engaging in targeted violence.



Behavioral Threat Assessment Themes in the Attacker’s Background

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Motive✓ Concerning and threatening communications✓ Concerning online content✓ Stressors (chronic & acute)✓ Mental health history✓ Elicited concern in others✓ Bizarre or inappropriate behavior✓ Interpersonal difficulties✓ Blaming others✓ Intense/escalating anger✓ Interest in violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Homicidal ideations✓ Beliefs and fixations✓ Harassment✓ History of being bullied✓ Financial instability✓ Failed life aspirations✓ Lack of consequences✓ Target-related behaviors✓ Attack planning✓ Final acts |
|---|--|

The themes and behaviors identified in this case study are not provided as predictors of violence, but rather as factors that should be evaluated in context when conducting a behavioral threat assessment. Further, some of the identified behaviors involve activities that are protected by the Constitution and should be viewed with those protections in mind.



Early Life and Young Adulthood

For the purposes of this case study, the attacker will be referred to using his initials.

Born in 1978, SB and his two brothers were raised in Vestal, NY, where SB served as an acolyte in the United Methodist Church. SB delivered newspapers to his neighbors, mowed their lawns, and was active in Boy Scouts. SB avoided listening to pop or metal music, which referred to partying, the “rock and roll” lifestyle, and all the “action” others got because he found the lyrics unrelatable.² He felt pressured by society about sex and being in a relationship. From early adolescence and into his teen years, SB had limited friendships and no romantic relationships.

When SB was in eighth grade, around 1993, he experienced what he later described as the worst day of his life. He claimed to have done something that caused all the students in his school to turn against him. Though he did not share the details of the incident, he reported that even students he had not previously known treated him as an outcast for an entire day. The experience ended with him hiding under his sheets at home for hours in the dark and served as the inspiration for a song he wrote later in life, titled “Crying in the Dark.” That same school year, a group of female students bullied SB during home economics class. He later described this bullying as the origin of his misogyny.

History of Being Bullied

...described this bullying as the origin of his misogyny.

As a teen, SB wrote four novels and a screenplay, including a 70,000-word, 81-page novella titled *Rejected Youth*, which he wrote the summer before his senior year. *Rejected Youth* was a revenge fantasy about a middle school boy turned serial killer who hated his female classmates who had shunned and humiliated him. In his story, the main character criticizes the girls’ appearances, mocks their boyfriends, and becomes enraged by the girls’ lack of respect for him. In the end, the main character murders the girls one by one, while still admiring their bodies, and then commits suicide as law enforcement arrives. The characters in the story represented SB’s actual classmates from school, though the names were slightly changed. SB said he did not share the story with anyone until 17 years later.

Homicidal Ideations

...a revenge fantasy about a middle school boy turned serial killer who hated his female classmates...

At the end of his senior year, SB was highlighted in the local newspaper as one of three newspaper Carriers of the Month. He also received an athletic award in football, achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, and was elected vice president of his senior class. While running against a female opponent in the student body election, SB’s campaign slogan was “Vote [SB], because we don’t need no woman.”³



According to a childhood friend, SB acted inappropriately with girls at school. At one point, he grabbed a female classmate’s backside after she declined his invitation to a school dance. Despite having been disciplined for this behavior, SB continued to touch girls without their consent while drunk at social gatherings. Following the 2018 yoga studio attack, one female

Inappropriate Behavior

...continued to touch girls without their consent...

Beliefs

...said to openly admire Hitler and the Aryan Nations...

from SB’s graduating class came forward and told police she had been inappropriately touched and stalked by him. In addition to his inappropriate behavior toward women, SB was said to openly admire Hitler and the Aryan Nations while in high school. He also prided himself on being asocial and looked down on peers who were involved in social activities. He bragged that he would achieve a more successful life than them because he focused more on academics.

In 1997, SB graduated high school and moved to the West Coast to pursue his dream of becoming a screenwriter. When he failed to succeed in establishing a career, he moved back to Vestal, NY to live with his parents and enroll in college. SB continued to write scripts, stories, and songs that were described as “dark, violent, and misogynistic.”⁴

Failed Life Aspirations

...failed to succeed in establishing a career...

As a college student, SB worked at an insurance call center but was fired for harassing a coworker. The coworker had told SB that she was also employed at the gym where he was a member. SB then sought her out at the gym. Though the details about his behavior during this encounter are

Harassment/Stressor

...fired for harassing a coworker.

unknown, local law enforcement contacted SB following the gym visit. Police informed him that the coworker was not pressing charges and directed SB to leave her alone. This event served as inspiration for two of SB’s songs. One song, which he shared with his childhood friend who was also a musician, was about an employee killing all his coworkers in retaliation for being fired. He titled the other song “Stalker.”

When SB described his inspiration for “Stalker,” he attempted to absolve himself of any wrongdoing when seeking out his coworker at the gym. SB argued that “aggression is a male trait, and it is criminalized. Evasiveness is a female trait, and it is NOT criminalized, but I think it could be.”⁵ He further complained of how he was told by police that he could not press charges against the coworker, writing “that really was the true onset of my psychosis. It sent me off the edge.”⁶ He continued, “I looked up the most extreme examples

Interest in Violence

“I looked up the most extreme examples of stalking, that ended in mass shootings and such...”

- SB



of stalking, that ended in mass shootings and such, and I wouldn't advocate stalking, as it can be construed as complimentary for the 'victim.'"⁷ SB described three additional past incidents that involved him engaging in stalking behaviors, each of which contributed as inspiration for his song, "Stalker."

While still enrolled as a college student, SB harassed another woman, this time a classmate at his university. According to SB, he and the classmate had previously gone on a date, but when he approached her to chat after class one day, the classmate hid in the women's restroom. SB stood outside of the restroom waiting for her until she came out, at which point she exclaimed, "He's still out there!"⁸ She reported the encounter to school officials, and the Dean's office

Harassment

...stood outside of the restroom waiting for her...

SB's Behavior Toward Women Elicited Concern in Others

- Gyms, bars, and campus officials banned him.
- Employers fired him.
- Classmates avoided him and reported him to school and campus officials.
- Roommates kept their friends away from him and called police.
- A sibling suspected he was a serial sniper and considered reporting him as a suspect.
- His parents removed him from a child's party and locked their door as they slept.
- The military found him guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and fraternizing with an enlisted person.
- School district employees recommended he not be hired.
- Students complained to parents and school counselors when he was a teacher.
- His friend's wife called law enforcement about his disturbing writings.

subsequently instructed SB to leave the classmate alone. He responded that he would, if the classmate left him alone. This was one of the additional incidents that SB attributed as inspiration for his song, "Stalker." Other incidents reportedly occurred during this timeframe that involved SB getting kicked out of or banned from bars for groping women.

In or around 2000, SB moved to the Washington, DC area for an undergraduate internship. According to SB, when his new roommates asked him if he had a girlfriend, SB replied, "sure, she's locked in my basement as we speak."⁹ He later reported this interaction as the inspiration for writing a song titled "Locked in My Basement." The song described an assailant drugging and chaining a woman in his basement, then torturing and sexually assaulting her, after she rejected him. SB later claimed these roommates robbed him while he was on break. He also claimed that the roommates reported him to the police after becoming afraid for their lives. Neither the alleged robbery nor the police report could be confirmed, and SB did not specify why his roommates became fearful.



In 2002, SB graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and government. Soon after graduation, he moved to Alexandria, VA. In October of that year, a series of sniper attacks took place over a period of several weeks across the Washington, DC area, resulting in ten killed and three seriously wounded. At the time, SB's family was aware of his disturbing writings, and SB's brother and sister-in-law feared that SB might be the one perpetrating the killings. They were so concerned that they considered contacting police to report SB as a possible suspect.

This was not the first time that SB's family had been so alarmed by his behavior that they took action. For example, after becoming aware of SB's concerning writings, SB's parents reportedly slept with their bedroom door locked. At one point, SB's parents found that he had been keeping a firearm in the home without their knowledge and asked his brother to remove it. In another instance, SB's parents escorted him from his niece's birthday party after other parents complained about SB inappropriately touching the backsides of girls as he helped them from a waterslide. On another occasion, SB's brother became angry and demanded SB leave the house after learning that SB entered his wife's bedroom and stood over her at a time when he believed she was asleep.

Teaching, the Military, and Graduate School

In 2003, SB moved to Maryland. The following year, he was charged with driving under the influence. He was also evicted by his roommate from their apartment, where afterwards, county police investigated SB for destruction of property.

Stressor
...evicted by his roommate from their apartment...

From 2005 to 2007, after he passed a criminal records check, SB taught English and social studies in a Maryland county school district. In May 2006, at age 28, he was investigated by the county police department for inappropriate contact with a female high school student. SB had made the student uncomfortable when he touched her arm, inappropriately stared at her, and asked if she would ever pose in *Playboy*. He also suggested she wear low-cut shirts. The school district made disciplinary recommendations; however, school officials never publicly confirmed if the recommendations were carried out or if SB was ever disciplined for his behavior. The police record for the investigation indicated the case was suspended, and SB continued to teach in the district for another year before he resigned.

Lack of Consequences
...inappropriate contact with a high school student...[yet] continued to teach...



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On January 30, 2008, SB joined the U.S. Army and was commissioned as an officer six months later. He served for a period in Germany, during which he was assigned to supply and logistics. SB later said in a self-recorded video that he had a positive experience with a woman while in Germany. He described her as his girlfriend and said she was “the best I was able to do.”¹⁰ He also said that she was the only female he did not resent. Of note, his mother later told police that no one in the family ever met this woman or even knew her name.

Blamed Others

...went on to complain that he was backstabbed by his military superiors...

Sometime during SB’s military service, four female airmen in the U.S. Air Force complained about his inappropriate interactions with them while in Amsterdam. In a video posted to social media years later, SB dismissed the accusation, simply stating, “I got too rowdy for their sensibilities.”¹¹ He reflected that this incident contributed to the rebirth of his misogyny. SB went on to complain that he was backstabbed by his military superiors at the time because he felt that they should have believed his story instead of the four female airmen’s account.

A U.S. Army evaluation dated January 21, 2010 noted SB displayed “difficulty assimilating to the Army and demonstrating Army values.”¹² It also noted that SB violated a direct order and demonstrated poor judgment and decision-making. The evaluation described him as someone who would lie and lacked integrity. SB was not recommended for a promotion. At some point, an investigation was initiated against SB due to his “inappropriate contact with female soldiers.”¹³ It is not clear if this investigation was related to the earlier complaints against SB by the four female airmen in Amsterdam. Regardless, as a result of the investigation, the Army found SB guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and fraternizing with an enlisted person. On June 9, 2010, SB was honorably discharged for “unacceptable conduct.”¹⁴

Stressor

...honorably discharged for “unacceptable conduct.”

Following his discharge, SB moved back home to Vestal, NY and lived with his parents for a short time. Then in 2011, he enrolled in graduate school at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, FL, where his behavior continued to elicit concern. One woman who knew him at the time noted that she and other classmates would go out of their way to avoid him because of his inappropriate behaviors. Those who met SB during open mic nights at a comedy club reported that he was strange and told offensive, racist, and antisemitic jokes. Other comedians said they did not like SB or his comedy. Though one of the employees at the club also worked at Hot Yoga Tallahassee, she did not remember SB from the comedy club or anywhere else.

Elicited Concern

...classmates would go out of their way to avoid him...



SB's roommates in Tallahassee later described him as odd and obnoxious. They said SB would sit in the living room drinking beer in his briefs and refused to put on pants, even when the roommates' friends came over. SB would also make inappropriate comments when their girlfriends visited. One roommate described how SB behaved towards women, stating "he was very weird and made everyone uncomfortable...it worried me at the time. There was concern for sure. But there wasn't enough evidence, and I would have been wasting the police's time if I had made any kind of report. I had nothing."¹⁵ The roommate described how he thought SB was mentally ill and perhaps suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder from his time in the military. Eventually, SB's roommates decided they would not leave any of their guests alone with SB, regardless of whether the guests were women or men. "We compared him to Ted Bundy back then," the roommate later said, "it was the way he lurked and followed girls."¹⁶

**Bizarre Behavior/
Elicited Concern**

"There was concern for sure. But there wasn't enough evidence..."

"We compared him to Ted Bundy...It was the way he lurked and followed girls."

- Former roommate

Interest in Violence

...references to notorious serial killers and serial rapists with whom he identified.

SB admired Ted Bundy, the serial killer who confessed to killing 30 women in 7 states, including Florida, from 1974 to 1978. According to SB, he tried to locate the sorority house where Bundy targeted some of his victims. He documented this, writing "I drove down sorority row, so I can check that box. Christians have their Via Delorosa in Jerusalem- I walked that, not bad- and I have mine."¹⁷ Scattered throughout SB's descriptions of his own songs were references to notorious serial killers and serial rapists with whom he identified. In

addition to Bundy, these references included Paul Kenneth Bernardo and Christopher Bernard Wilder, also known as the Beauty Queen Killer. These serial killers and rapists were responsible for the murder or sexual assault of dozens of women in the 1980s and early 1990s, in locations including Florida. SB described his song "Wilder," writing:

"Incidentally enough, [Wilder] and Bundy both rubbed elbows in Tallahassee, spiritually, anyway- Bundy with his sorority house mayhem, and Wilder with his abduction from the Governor's Square parking lot. I suppose I've rubbed elbows with both of them as well, living there for as long as I did, and retracing their steps, visiting their old haunts, etc. What a fraternity. I think he and Ted must be great friends in hell, and have in-depth and fascinating conversations. They have so much in common. I've gotta get in on that, when I arrive."¹⁸



On December 7, 2012, SB was arrested on two counts of misdemeanor battery after he grabbed two women's backsides in an FSU dining hall. One of the victims had been previously assaulted in a similar way by SB over the prior month. SB claimed to police that he may have bumped into several girls by accident. The criminal charges were dropped one month after his arrest, in part due to lack of evidence. In response to his behavior, SB was banned by FSU from the dining hall.

Inappropriate Behavior

...grabbed two women's backsides in an FSU dining hall.

In 2013, SB recorded numerous videos in which he aired his frustrations with women. Many of these videos were later uploaded to a popular website. SB referred to himself as Carnifex in these videos, a name referring to the public executioner in ancient Rome. He indicated that he was producing a video series that would serve as his last will and testament, and that he would be gone after the tenth video was completed. SB used this medium repeatedly to express his frustration with his lack

Threatening Communications

...predicted that women who abuse their power would be the cause of the "next columbine."

of companionship and marriage, often employing derogatory language to blame women for his romantic failures. He described how he went on 14 first dates over a two-month period. Each time he hit "brick walls,"¹⁹ and did not know how much longer he could take it. He offered an ominous warning to women, saying, "you bring this on yourselves," and predicted that women who abuse their power would be the cause of the "next columbine."²⁰

In April 2013, SB met a woman through a social media website designed to help people connect with other members who share similar interests in person. Her profile image featured a photo of her in a yoga pose, and she mentioned yoga at least four times in her profile. She also told SB that she went to a hot yoga class in Tallahassee. Initially, their exchanges were pleasant. However, their relationship quickly went downhill after she declined all his invitations to meet, including a date at a shooting range. He sent her unwanted sexual text messages and suggested that the woman become a stripper. In response, the woman called him "crazy" and "weird and insulting" before she ceased communication.²¹ SB ranted about the woman in his journal, writing that she "presents as carefree-happy-go-lucky; and tries to engage.... Endlessly... she snuffs me, whenever I try to engage her, she answers as quick as she can, then turns away. I saw her gruesome look tonight... I'll never think of her in the same way, I seem to bring out the ugliness in people... I'd like to put it to her."²² Police later confirmed that the woman did indeed attend classes at Hot Yoga Tallahassee in 2013 and 2014; however, they also confirmed that she passed away before the 2018 mass shooting.

While still a graduate student, SB had another negative interaction with a woman on campus, which he referenced when describing his song "Stalker." In SB's version of events, a woman invited him to stop by the campus gym where she worked. When he visited the gym and asked her out on a date, he said the woman refused his offer angrily. The gym manager later called SB to their office to discuss his behavior, but no other consequences were noted.



On May 3, 2013, SB graduated from FSU with two master's degrees, one in public administration and the other in urban and regional planning. In the following years, SB attempted to maintain contact with a friend from graduate school. The two had spent time watching sports together but were not particularly close. Though the friend later moved to Colorado, SB called him constantly, sometimes throughout the night. Occasionally, the friend would call SB to check up on him, but their conversations were never personal and instead focused on sports. SB called this friend a total of 831 times over an unknown timeframe, and eventually the friend blocked SB's calls due to their intrusive nature. SB's last attempt to contact the friend was just two days before the shooting at Hot Yoga Tallahassee.

Interpersonal Difficulties
...the friend blocked SB's calls due to their intrusive nature.

Inappropriate Behavior
A campus employee reported that SB was following a female volleyball coach...

Despite having finished his studies, SB returned to the FSU campus in June 2014. A campus employee reported that SB was following a female volleyball coach at the campus gym, after which, police issued him a trespass warning. A few weeks later, SB was spotted on campus again and was arrested for trespassing. As a result of the charges, he completed a misdemeanor diversion program and a work program. He was also banned from the FSU campus. At the time, SB was unemployed and received \$1,560 in annual Veterans Affairs (VA) disability benefits for tinnitus.

Even though it was SB's own inappropriate behavior towards women that got him kicked out of or banned from various locations, his anger grew with each occurrence. When he described his inspiration for his song "I Hate the Whole World," SB wrote "I add ammo and barrels of fuel to the warehouse, every time such persecution happens. How long, before it ignites, before the entire warehouse explodes, and wipes out everything in a lengthy radius? It may only take a spark, a match, a small, lighted match."²³

Intense/Escalating Anger
"I add ammo and barrels of fuel to the warehouse, every time such persecution happens."
- SB

The following month, SB shared two of his stories with a childhood friend. The first story was *Rejected Youth*, the novella he wrote before his senior year in high school. The second, *18 and Life*, was also written during high school. *18 and Life* was the basis for his song "End of the World," which describes the end of a relationship.²⁴ As SB had no true experience with romantic relationships, he based the writings on the end of a brotherly friendship. The friend who received SB's stories found them too disturbing to read, but SB continued to send material of this nature up until the shooting at the yoga studio.

Concerning Communications
The friend who received SB's stories found them too disturbing to read...



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In 2014, SB uploaded 17 of his videos to a popular video hosting website. The content of his videos was misogynistic, homophobic, and racist in nature. He spoke at length about his hatred of women and experiences of being rejected by them. He described his inability to connect with others, including the men with whom he served while in the Army. He also spoke about retribution, citing the mass shooting near the campus of UCSB in May 2014, which

Interpersonal Difficulties

He described his inability to connect with others...He also spoke about retribution...

was carried out by a perpetrator motivated by misogyny and anger at his inability to have romantic or sexual relationships with women. When SB spoke of retribution, he stated, "I have a duty, an obligation, a moral obligation to proceed and act as such. I thought that may help explain things a bit."²⁵ Other content in his videos blamed television for establishing male sexual expectations along with his hatred of interracial couples and police.

Beginning April 25, 2015, SB was employed as a substitute teacher for a Florida county school district despite concerns aired by school district employees who interacted with him during the application process. SB was described as rude, nervous, and having a "scary and angry look on his face."²⁶ It was also noted that the password he used for his online application login was "Carnifex." The district employees were so afraid of him that they locked the door after he left. Considering SB had failed the Florida Teacher Certification Examination and his erratic behavior, the school district's employees recommended that SB not be hired for the teaching position. Despite these concerns, his application to teach was approved. In January 2016, SB conducted online searches for pornography that involved yoga and cheerleaders; some of these searches were done on school district devices. In March 2016, less than a year after he was hired, SB was fired for violating the district's Internet use policy.

Concerning Online Activity

The content of his videos was misogynistic, homophobic, and racist in nature.

Elicited Concern

...was employed as a substitute teacher...despite concerns aired by school district employees...



Move to Deltona, FL

While unemployed in May 2016, SB conducted his first known Internet search for “Tallahassee hot yoga.”²⁷ This search led him to the Hot Yoga Tallahassee website, which he then accessed.

Target-Related Behavior

...first known Internet search for “Tallahassee hot yoga.”

Soon after, on June 1, 2016, SB approached a woman sunbathing at the swimming pool of his apartment complex in Tallahassee. After the woman refused his offer to apply sunscreen on her body, SB slapped, grabbed, and shook her backside. Law enforcement was notified, and SB was arrested and charged with battery. However, the charges were ultimately dropped after SB completed court-mandated counseling with a sex-addiction therapist. He later described the counseling as a “racket.”²⁸ This was not the first time he was court-ordered to attend mental health services. According to SB, he was ordered to attend treatment four separate times due to his behavior with women and his mania, the first of which dated back to high school.

Mental Health

...completed court-mandated counseling with a sex-addiction therapist.

Meanwhile, just a week after his arrest, SB’s apartment complex served him a lease termination due to his conduct at the pool. The termination instructed him to vacate his apartment within seven days or face legal action. That same day, SB conducted his first of many online searches for a cheerleading camp held at a resort in Panama City, FL. The complex filed an eviction complaint and lien with the county court after SB failed to vacate his apartment on time. The complaint was dismissed a few weeks later after SB moved out of the apartment.

Stressor

...lease termination due to his conduct...

In September 2016, SB rented a room in a single-family home in Deltona, FL that he found online. He resided there with his new roommate, who owned the home, until the shooting at the yoga studio. The roommate later described SB as a recluse and a loner, and said he never learned much about SB because they rarely spent time together. The roommate described SB’s clothing as much too small for him and said SB ate his food straight out of cans, a habit SB claimed was developed during his two years in the military. Concerned for his wellbeing, the roommate purchased SB food and clothing. After the shooting at Hot Yoga Tallahassee, SB’s mother told the roommate that SB “spoke well of him and must have liked him or else [SB] would have killed him.”²⁹



A few months after moving to Deltona, SB spent time with a woman he met through the same social media website that he used in 2013. The woman was a psychologist and later commented that she noticed SB's "disturbing character traits" and was offended by his racist comments.³⁰ On a few occasions, SB "flashed a pistol around."³¹ The woman said she did not have any issue with the firearm itself, but she found the way he brandished it inappropriate. During a New Year's Eve party, SB reportedly made aggressive attempts to get the woman to go home with him. Other group members SB met through the same website referred to him as a Nazi because he would unexpectedly speak about weapons and his support for Hitler's genocide. He also bragged about killing people while in the military, though there is no evidence to support this claim.

Inappropriate Behavior
...would stare at female students and give them nicknames...

Beginning in early 2017, SB applied for 55 jobs with the State of Florida but was not selected for any of the positions. He eventually found employment as a substitute teacher in a Florida county school district, and later obtained a full-time teaching position at a middle school for the start of the 2017-2018 school year. During this timeframe, SB continued to exhibit inappropriate interest in women and girls. In July, he conducted another online search for the cheerleading camp in

Panama City. In addition, after he began his full-time middle school teaching position, three sisters who attended the school told a parent and a school guidance counselor that SB made them feel uncomfortable. The girls reported that SB would stare at female students and give them nicknames, but he did not act the same way toward male students. At the end of August 2017, just two weeks after starting the position, SB was fired from the middle school for "classroom performance issues," yet he could continue working as a substitute teacher in the same district.³²

As a substitute teacher, SB worked in 21 different schools within the district, including elementary, middle, and high schools. In October 2017, a parent called the school where he was teaching to discuss her concerns about SB's prior arrests for battery, as well as his concerning social media content, which she referred to as "red flags" in his background.³³ Whether the school district addressed these concerns is unclear. Later, after the attack at the yoga studio, former middle school students of SB's recalled their concerns. These students described him as being "lazy, detached, and downright strange," that he gave off a "psychopath vibe, like someone crazy," that he "put you on edge," and that he "was really creepy."³⁴

Beliefs
...he would unexpectedly speak about weapons and his support for Hitler's genocide.

Elicited Concern
"...lazy, detached, and downright strange."
...he gave off a "psychopath vibe..."
...he "put you on edge..."
- SB's former students



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In February 2018, while still employed as a substitute teacher, SB occasionally rented time in an individual's at-home recording studio to record songs. Over the years, he had written more than 100 songs, and recorded over two dozen of them. The owner of the studio described SB as "a bit odd...little slow...uncomfortable," noting "there were many flags."³⁵ Though SB had hired others to assist with accompanying music, some of his songs consisted of him simply tapping the beat as he recorded the vocals, which were significantly off-key. His songs often involved themes of misogyny, racism, blaming others, anger, and violence. SB listed the title and a description for each song that he posted on a website he purchased sometime after August 2017. For example:

*"Submit- A fun little ditty, in a horrendous and malevolent context, of course...If any female is reading, you have NO idea the nausea, the increased heart-rate, the fear that some poor adolescent must contend with and overcome, to approach a female and proposition her, because he is told that he must and she won't approach him, and if anything is going to occur, the onus is on him. This he endures, to approach YOU, whoever the individual is, and you should be honored. Do NOT pull a Chernobyl; do not run off all flustered; do NOT laugh at him or shoot him down, because when you do, you plant a seed of violence, whether or not you acknowledge it or not. I promise you."*³⁶

*"Feeling the Impulse- My fury and indignity have been such a part of me for so long, I can hardly remember when I was free of them. Probably 7th grade. I go to sleep with them every night. A long time ago, I had sexual fantasies at night. Anymore, when I lie in bed at night, I picture in big red letters against the wall 'Kill', or 'There is, an Answer.' I have fantasies, much different than the ones I had as a kid- these became the basis of the ultimate and final version of the song."*³⁷

*"I Will Not Touch You (My Bullets Will)- This seems to have gained new relevance, with all the nonsense and shenanigans occurring nowadays, that are destroying so many men's lives. I recall hearing a narrative from caller into a radio show once, who'd been royally screwed by the system, saying, 'if I didn't have kids, I would do something terrible.' Well, I don't have kids, but, hmm..."*³⁸

Blame Others

"...you plant a seed of violence, whether or not you acknowledge it or not. I promise you."

- SB

Intense Anger/ Homicidal Ideations

"...I picture in big red letters against the wall 'Kill!..'"

- SB



Inappropriate Behavior

...asked a female student if she was ticklish and touched her stomach...fired by the school for “unprofessional conduct.”...

On May 23, 2018, SB conducted another online search for information on the Panama City cheerleading camp. Two days later, while he was substitute teaching at a middle school, SB asked a female student if she was ticklish and touched her stomach. The student became frightened and hid behind a classmate. The school removed SB from class following the incident. As he attempted to leave the campus, SB was contacted by a law enforcement officer, though the nature of this interaction was not described in public sources. A week later, on June 1, 2018, SB was fired by the school for “unprofessional conduct.”³⁹

Over the next few months, SB searched for employment but was unsuccessful. His average bank account balance during this time was less than \$300, and he received monthly deposits from his parents. His account balance dipped to \$26.25 by the time of the attack, according to his financial records. His mother later indicated that she thought he was depressed due to his unemployment and lack of benefits. Despite his lack of income and being supported by his parents, SB continued to record his music throughout the summer of 2018. He posted all of this music on his website and two other public music-sharing websites at different times.

Financial Instability

His average bank account balance...was less than \$300...

Failed Life Aspirations

- Failed to establish romantic or sexual relationships with women
- Failed to establish platonic friendships
- Failed to support himself financially
- Multiple failed careers – screenwriter, teacher, military service member, musician



Planning the Attack

In early summer 2018, while still unemployed, SB began planning for his attack. In June, he conducted more online searches for the Panama City cheerleading camp. In July, he searched for yoga-related pornography, performed additional searches for the cheerleading camp, and searched for the camp's schedule. Around this time, SB met with a psychiatrist at the VA medical center. Although the details of his treatment were not available in open sources, SB was later found to have prescription anxiety medication in his system during the attack at the yoga studio.

Mental Health

...found to have prescription anxiety medication in his system...

On July 23, SB purchased the Glock pistol that he would later use in the attack from a pawn shop in Orange City, FL. About a week later, on July 30, SB practiced firing for 30 minutes at an indoor shooting range in Tallahassee, about 280 miles from his home in Deltona. After leaving the range, he traveled an additional 100 miles to Panama City Beach where the cheerleading camp was located.

On August 3, a few days after the trip to Panama City, SB conducted an online search for cheerleading camps closer to his home. He also searched for a map of the area around Hot Yoga Tallahassee. After the shooting, police found SB to be in possession of a detailed engineering diagram of a plaza near the yoga studio, though it is unclear when or how he obtained it.

Elicited Concern

...friend's wife reported SB to a federal law enforcement agency...

In early August, SB sent a childhood friend a link to his website. Concerned by the violent and misogynistic content of the website and its songs, the friend's wife reported SB to a federal law enforcement agency on August 5, 2018. The agency deemed the tip non-actionable.⁴⁰ According to an official from the agency, "even violently themed lyrics are protected speech... unless they target a particular person, place or event. In this situation, there wasn't a specific threat."⁴¹

On August 15, 17, 18, and 20, SB conducted online searches for the class schedule at Hot Yoga Tallahassee. On August 17, he also called Hot Yoga Tallahassee twice by phone, but his back-to-back calls went unanswered because nobody was working at the time. On August 20, SB made two more calls that were answered by a Hot Yoga Tallahassee employee, who did not recall anything memorable about the brief conversations with SB.



During the month of October, SB made final preparations for his attack, which included:

- October 2: Accessed the online class schedule for Hot Yoga Tallahassee.
- October 8: Accessed the online class schedule for Hot Yoga Tallahassee and checked the local weather forecast.
- October 14: Made a reservation at a hotel located four minutes away from Hot Yoga Tallahassee for October 31 through November 1.
- October 18 and 19: Made calls to cancel his psychiatric appointment at the VA.
- October 25: Worked on the last song he uploaded to his website, called "Fuck 'Em All."
- October 27: Purchased ammunition consistent with what he used in the attack.
- October 29: Used the recording studio for the last time and called his childhood friend with whom he had shared his website, writings, and song lyrics. Nothing was noted as being unusual about SB's behavior by either contact.
- October 30: Pawned a handgun he had purchased in 2009.
- October 31: Checked into the hotel, purchased hearing protection and a yoga mat, texted his roommate to let him know he would pay rent when he returned on November 1, extended his hotel reservation by two additional days to November 3, and called a friend from graduate school to chat about sports.

Planning Behaviors

- Online research of two potential targets
- Traveled to potential target
- Contacted target by phone
- Weapons acquisition
- Weapons practice
- Acquired maps/diagrams
- Made hotel reservations, extended stay
- Purchased supplies (e.g., ear protection and yoga mat)
- Final acts:
 - *Cancelled psychiatric appointment*
 - *Wrote message*
 - *Called friends*
 - *Texted roommate about rent*
 - *Finished final song and uploaded content to the web*

On November 2, 2018, the day of the shooting, SB uploaded his song, "Fuck 'Em All," to a public music-sharing website. The song described SB's frustration over his failures in life, including failed employment, relationships with women, and overall life goals. He also uploaded 27 of his songs to another audio website. Prior to leaving his hotel room, SB left a note that referred to the then-U.S. president in racist language and railed against America's racially integrated society, writing in part:

"If I can't find one decent female to live with, I will find many indecent females to die with. If they are intent on denying me life, I will have no choice, but to deny them life... Their arrogance, indifference and treachery will finally be exposed, and punished. If I can't make a living, I will make a killing... I will be successful with females: if I can't be successful at being positive, I will be successful at being negative. This is in their court, however. This is not what I wanted. No kid sits in their room at night dreaming of this. It has come to this though, and I simply have no choice at this point. It is a moral imperative."⁴²



The Attack at Hot Yoga Tallahassee

Around 4:35 p.m., SB left his hotel with a Glock pistol and a yoga mat. At 5:05 p.m., he made his last call to the owner of the recording studio. At 5:17 p.m., he arrived at Hot Yoga Tallahassee and signed up for the 5:30 p.m. class using his first and middle names. He then went outside and paced for about 20 minutes. He also entered and exited the studio several times. At one point, while inside the studio, he asked when the more crowded classes were held. The studio's employee later stated that SB looked disappointed there were so few people registered for the 5:30 p.m. class. SB entered the studio for the last time at 5:29 p.m. By 5:35 p.m., the class was already underway. The yoga instructor directed SB to remove his shoes and socks, and to leave his belongings in a cubby outside the room. SB exited the room to unwrap his yoga mat and begin stretching. He then reentered, stopped in the doorway, and said, "But I have a question."⁴³ He then put on his hearing protection and drew the Glock pistol. The instructor asked what he was doing as SB opened fire at random.

SB shot six people during the attack before his pistol malfunctioned, at which time a class member struck him with a vacuum cleaner and a broom. This allowed time for others to escape. Once he resolved the weapon malfunction, SB said something unintelligible and fatally shot himself. Tragically, two of the victims who were shot later died at the hospital.



Conclusion

This case study demonstrates the importance of using a behavioral threat assessment approach that involves various community stakeholders who may be in a position to intervene with an individual who is escalating to violence. A superficial look at SB's personal history reveals an individual who pursued higher education, served in the military, and held highly regarded professional positions of trust. However, a more complete and multidisciplinary assessment reveals objectively concerning behavior that continued for decades (see table on page 23). At times, SB's behavior elicited concern from parents, siblings, friends, roommates, coworkers, workplace managers, school officials, students, law enforcement, the online community, neighbors, and other community members.

This case study also highlights the specific threat posed by misogynistic extremism. Hatred of women, and the gender-based violence that is associated with it, requires increased attention from everyone with a role in public safety. Regardless of whether an individual self-affixes a label to their extremist beliefs, such as "incel" or "anti-feminist," the individual's behavior should remain the primary focus. In this case, SB's misogynistic views and associated behavior resulted in him being fired from multiple jobs, being banned from public locations, and being arrested.

When conducting a behavioral threat assessment involving an individual who has elicited concern and subscribes to an extreme belief system, the investigation should not be limited to the ideology itself. NTAC research has shown that attackers' motives are often multifaceted. Beyond ideology, other personal elements also contribute to behaviors of concern, including desperation or despair, a need for belonging or connection with others, and a desire for attention or notoriety. Investigators should attempt to identify the origin and development of the ideology, which may help in assessing what the individual would hope to achieve through violence.

Also note that the decision to carry out a violent act may occur well before a specific target is selected. As demonstrated in this case study by SB researching yoga studios and cheerleading camps, an individual plotting an attack may explore multiple targets during the planning process before making their final selection. When seeking to prevent violent acts from coming to fruition, investigators must consider any potential targets that may achieve the plotter's intended goals and desired outcomes.

Finally, NTAC research has shown that there is no one profile of an individual who plans or executes an act of targeted violence. Attackers vary in age, race, sex, education level, employment history, and other characteristics. What most attackers share, however, are observable concerning behaviors displayed prior to engaging in violence. Although every act of targeted violence may not be prevented, the risk of future tragedies can be reduced if the appropriate systems are in place to identify the warning signs, gather information to assess the risk of violence, and apply the appropriate community resources.



SB's Background

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eagle Scout• High school senior class vice president• High school athletic award for football | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bachelor's degree and two master's degrees• U.S. Army officer• Public school teacher |
|---|--|

SB's Concerning Behaviors

- Self-described misogynist, aggrieved by his inability to obtain a relationship or sex with women
- Openly admired Hitler and Aryan Nations; other members of online social networks referred to him as a Nazi
- School district personnel recommended he not be hired for a teaching position due to concerning behavior during the application process
- Multiple school firings related to inappropriate behavior with female students
- Three arrests connected to incidents of groping women in public and trespassing on FSU campus after warning when seen following female coach
- Served a lease termination by apartment complex after assaulting a woman at the swimming pool
- Additional law enforcement contacts for destruction of property, following women on campus, and inappropriate contact with students while teaching
- Friend's wife reported violent and misogynistic writings to law enforcement
- Court-ordered mental health treatment on at least four occasions due to behavior with women and mania
- Banned from local bars for behavior toward women
- Parents slept with their door locked, removed him from his niece's birthday party for touching young girls, and had his brother remove a firearm that he kept
- Brother suspected him of being a serial sniper in DC
- Roommates compared him to Ted Bundy



Endnotes

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