

Sandy Hook Case Study: Reflective Essay

Often, acquired knowledge in one subject inspires research into another. In my freshman year at Kansas State University, I wrote a research paper on the Sandy Hook school shooting for Professor Friedmann's class, English 210. The class focused on the Holocaust, but it approached the subject matter differently from any other course I have ever taken. Instead of only studying what happened, we also spent a long time studying why it happened—and that method of research has influenced the way I approach all knowledge acquisition since.

Traditional historical narratives that focus on the immediate causes of the Holocaust are easy to understand but unsatisfactory. Germany was in shambles after the first World War. Its people needed someone to blame for their defeat, their disillusionment, and their debts, and the rising Nazi Party was more than willing to point a finger at the Jewish population. But this explanation fails to address the most important question, the one that unmasks the true cause of the Holocaust: Why did the Jewish community become the scapegoat?

After studying centuries-old conspiracy theories, I realized that the dehumanization of the Jewish people began long before the twentieth century. Although the Romans crucified Jesus, Jews have long shouldered the blame for deicide. For hundreds of years, Christians have accused them of collaborating with Satan, murdering children, drinking blood, and secretly ruling the world. Although the genocide of the Jewish population during the Holocaust was mostly secular in nature, it would not have been possible without an inter-generational buildup of fear, conspiracy theories, and antisemitism.

Having learned about how centuries-old conspiracy theories culminated in an event as horrific as the Holocaust, I felt inspired to investigate modern conspiracy theories with the same diligence as my professor. If past conspiracy theories could be so dangerous, so insidious as to

cause murder and genocide, what of contemporary ones that spread so quickly on the internet? I chose to research conspiracy theories centered around the Sandy Hook shooting for a few reasons. First, Sandy Hook was one of the first major school shootings in this country. Children dying in 2012 was treated differently from children dying in 2018 or 2022, because the Sandy Hook massacre occurred before the American public became numb to the news of school shootings. Second, I knew that Sandy Hook essentially began the trend of conspiratorial rhetoric following mass shootings. Although names and places change with every new incident, talking points remain constant. Thus, I felt compelled to understand Sandy Hook conspiracy theories before researching those of any subsequent shooting. Finally, I chose this topic because it relates to me personally. My generation grew up barricading doors and hiding in closets during school shooting drills, receiving lessons from teachers on using school supplies for self-defense, and even spreading rumors online about particular people who may come to school with a gun.

When I began my research, I employed some strategies to ensure the credibility of my sources. One of them was cross-referencing information. If I read a claim in one source, I preferred to find other sources substantiating that claim. That way, I could verify that the information was not the opinion of one person, but the conclusion of several reputable sources. Another of my strategies involved statistics. Whenever I wanted to cite a statistic, I traced it to its original source. This is important because writers sometimes have ulterior motives. They want to portray information in a specific way to support a pre-drawn conclusion, so they give data in a misleading or incomplete fashion. They may provide correct statistics, but improper explanations of their meaning or context; therefore, statistics must be traced, double-checked, and represented truthfully.

For my study, I decided to use quotations from individuals directly involved in what I was discussing. I found it paramount to quote parents of Sandy Hook victims, as they have a history of being misrepresented and demonized by media outlets and commentators. I also wanted to quote *Infowars* host Alex Jones, one of the most popular defenders and propagators of the conspiratorial rhetoric. Since Jones has tried to back-track on harmful things he has said, I decided to provide direct quotations from his website and podcast to hold him accountable.

When researching, I used the Kansas State library archives and the EBSCOhost search engine. An excellent source from EBSCOhost was Pauley and Dokoupul's "Fact Versus Fiction Over the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting." The 2018 CBS News transcript includes an interview with parents of Sandy Hook victims. My favorite source from the library archives was Katie Mettler's 2019 article on Alex Jones' mental state. She identifies Jones' explanation for his harmful rhetoric as a self-diagnosed "psychosis." Both sources were vital in providing direct quotations and insight into the emotions of both the propagators and victims of the conspiracy theories.

One difficulty while doing my research was identifying the arguments of the conspiracy theorists without citing them directly. When writing a research paper, I believe it is necessary to cite scholarly articles, but since conspiracy theories are not born in academic papers, but in social media posts on Reddit, Twitter, and 4chan, I had to find a way to include them while maintaining the integrity of my research. My solution was to cite scholarly articles explaining or debunking the theories. Thus, I only cited trustworthy, reputable sources.

My intention in writing a research paper on the Sandy Hook massacre was to demonstrate the danger of conspiratorial rhetoric during the age of the internet. I was inspired by the research Professor Friedmann did regarding conspiracy theories attacking Jewish people, and how those

conspiracy theories culminated in hate, violence, and genocide. During my first year at Kansas State University, I have discovered that the “why” is often more important than the “what,” and I intend to approach all research this thoroughly in my future academic endeavors. Most importantly, I have learned to recognize the importance of truth, as well as my role in spreading it.

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ENGL 210

2 May 2022

The Sandy Hook Conspiracy Theories: A Case Study

I. Introduction

On the morning of December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza massacred six adults and twenty children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, before taking his own life with a bullet to the head (Ray). In the tragedy's aftermath, the gunshots of his AR-15 reverberated through the American public, striking fear into the hearts of many. Survivors, victims' families, and sympathizers demanded answers, closure, reform. How could a school be so easily penetrable? How had this troubled young man come to possess such a lethal weapon so easily? What could be done to prevent future mass shootings? But despite the clamoring for increased gun control, despite the rows of tiny coffins and the vows of President Obama to prevent similar tragedies, no significant federal reform ensued from the Newtown shootings (Ray). In fact, no significant federal reform followed any mass shooting afterward, whether in a church or a school or a club (Wilson). What should have marked a turning point for American gun control laws instead hailed the arrival of its new favorite conspiracy theory—that such shootings were “false flags”—if not outright fakes—orchestrated by the Democratic Party to deprive Americans of their Second Amendment rights (Wilson). Conspiracy theories about Sandy Hook and other mass shootings are worthy of interest and investigation due to their shocking ability to prevent meaningful reform.

Provided by news and media coverage, the facts of the Sandy Hook shooting are as follows: On December 14, 2012, 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot his mother, Nancy Lanza, to death with a .22-calibre rifle in their home in Newtown, Connecticut (Ray). Afterward, he loaded into his mother's car an AR-15, two pistols, a shotgun, and several high-capacity magazines of ammunition, then drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School (Ray). Upon arrival, he shot through a window. His first two victims were school principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach at approximately 9:30 am (Ray). He then proceeded to the classroom of Lauren Rousseau, where he killed her and 14 children; next, he arrived at the classroom of Victoria Soto, who had hidden her students in a closet (Ray). Lanza murdered her and six of her first graders, as well as school staff members Anne Marie Murphy and Rachel D'Avino (Ray). In only five minutes, Lanza shot to death 26 people and finally himself, bringing the body count to a total of 28. When law enforcement arrived, Lanza was dead. His motives were indiscernible; his victims, un-vengeable (Ray). What could be made of such senseless violence?

For gun control advocates, there was nowhere to go but forward. A wave of proposals followed the Sandy Hook massacre (Ray). The Assault Weapons Ban of 2013 would prohibit sales of guns like the one Lanza used in his attack, the Manchin-Toomey proposal would increase background checks for purchases online or at shows, another bill would restrict the sale of high-capacity ammunition magazines—however, despite their initial popularity, each of these plans died in the Senate (Ray). Why? In the days and weeks following the tragedy, public sentiment had shifted from concern to suspicion. Alongside those of buried children and mass shootings, another fear was brewing among Americans: what if something was being kept from

them? Quickly the public came to doubt the truth of the story and the reliability of the media (Crawford).

Why fear for the safety of the children when you can fear for the safety of the guns? Online fringe groups worried that the shooting had occurred at too convenient a time to be legitimate, and that it was staged by the Democratic Party to push an agenda on gun control (Koebler). So-called Sandy Hook “Truthers” took their paranoia to the internet, explaining their doubts about the validity of the massacre. They argued that the media’s story did not add up, that there were contradictions among witnesses, that responses and interviews came off as rehearsed, almost fake (Koebler). Blogs written by skeptics such as Professor James Tracy of Florida Atlantic University immediately gained traction, and before long the story had been picked up by alt-right conspiracy theorist and *Infowars* host Alex Jones (Koebler). Between his website and his broadcasts, Jones was able to project conspiracy theories about the shooting to his large audience, sewing doubt into the minds of many Americans (Koebler). Additionally, trust in the United States of America’s media hit a record low in 2012, with Republicans and Independents showing the most doubt that they were being provided with fair and accurate news coverage (Morales). In a Gallup survey conducted in September of 2012, as many as 60% of American adults claimed to have “little or no trust in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly” (Morales). Declining trust in mass media and increasing usage of social media formed a perfect storm for the proliferation of conspiracies.

Although it is somewhat difficult to believe that so many Americans in the twenty-first century could be ensnared in a web of lies, stagnant gun control reform and the incessant rhetorical reemergence of ‘false flags’ and ‘crisis actors’ demonstrate how tightly the Sandy Hook conspiracy theories have gripped the nation. To discover how and why these false

narratives persist, it is necessary to pose certain questions. First, how exactly has social media impacted the proliferation of conspiracy theories, including Sandy Hook? Second, who were the alleged conspirators, and how were they treated? Then, who mainly believed in the conspiracy and why? What ‘evidence’ did these believers use to back up their claims, and how can it be disproved? Also, what is the legacy of Sandy Hook conspiracy theories—what traces of them remain in the conspiracy theories of today? And finally, what role did Alex Jones play specifically, and what consequences has he seen for his dangerous rhetoric? These questions prompted me to explore the Sandy Hook conspiracy theories to determine how conspiratorial rhetoric has dammed the legislative channels of reform.

II. Research Methods

When researching this conspiracy theory, I decided it was especially important to verify any evidence put forward to either support or deny a claim. This is because conspiracy theories thrive on misinformation; for example, the delusional ramblings of Reddit posts are like gold in the hands of the Truthers. They proclaim their findings to be undeniable, proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, so clear that any reasonable eyes would arrive upon the same conclusion once presented with the accumulated research. As the theories proliferate online, they inevitably fall into the hands of scholars, public figures, and news outlets, adding credibility and awareness to what was originally the machinations of one person’s wild paranoia. The only counter to the conspiratorial ensnarement is to confirm the validity of every installment in one’s research.

Often, it is helpful to employ certain search engines designated to seek out only scholarly and trustworthy sources. Many useful search engines are accessible through the Kansas State University Library Databases. EBSCOhost is one such search engine—for example, Paul and

Dokoupil's CBS News interview with fathers of the Sandy Hook victims, "Fact Versus Fiction Over the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting," came from EBSCOhost. Unfortunately, not every source could be found on the search engine, so I needed to use Google to see what trustworthy articles I could discover there.

When navigating Google, I carefully evaluated every webpage for its factual content. Some red flags indicating that a site was untrustworthy included poor formatting, spelling errors, lack of an author's name, lack of a publisher's name, or the failure to cite sources. Sometimes, even if an author's name was not given, the article was still useful if it came from a trustworthy publisher and cited reliable data and research; likewise, an article without a publisher could still be useful if it came from a trustworthy author who cited reliable data and research. After evaluating a source, I decided it would be worthwhile to evaluate the one making a claim: the author. A quick search of an author's name allowed me to learn the author's education, previous works, specialization, political biases, past employment, and other revealing information.

For example, a brief investigation into Amanda Crawford, writer of the 2014 article "How Conspiracy Theories in the US Became More Personal, Cruel, and Mainstream After Sandy Hook," revealed that she earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland and a Master of Mass Communication degree from Arizona State University, indicating that she has received a high level of education ("Amanda J. Crawford"). Previously she has worked as a reporter for *Bloomberg News*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *People Magazine*, so she has had a lot of experience in the journalism industry ("Amanda J. Crawford"). In 2018, she became a faculty member of the University of Connecticut, where she won an award in support of one of her projects ("Amanda J. Crawford"). Her main research areas included journalism ethics, media law, and misinformation, which all related to the topic of her article

about the spread of conspiracy theories (“Amanda J. Crawford”). From this information, I concluded that Crawford was a trustworthy source. I applied the same process to the evaluation of all sources, especially because I was researching such a controversial topic.

III. Discussion

How do conspiracy theories come to be, and what are their repercussions? After researching the theories surrounding the Sandy Hook school shooting, I uncovered a few methods and motives. The reason for studying conspiracy theories goes beyond mere curiosity, since they are not formed in a vacuum—what is evident for one conspiracy theory may very well be relevant for another; therefore, in examining one, a hundred others are equally scrutinized. This section of the paper attempts to answer the questions posed in the introduction, and in doing so hopes to shed some light on a wide range of conspiratorial ideas, tactics, and consequences. Separate sections have been allotted for each question’s answer.

i. Social Media and the Spread of Conspiracy Theories

As an election year, 2012 already marked a pivotal moment in the American political climate. Adding to this tension, this was also the first year that found more than half of the country's adults active on social media (Crawford). As confidence in mass media plummeted, online commentators began to usurp official organizations as some Americans’ trusted news providers (Morales). These “trustworthy” online influencers included Alex Jones, Mike Cernovich, and Jack Posobiec, far-right figures whose platforms created a pipeline for the obscure ideas of fringe communities to make their way to mainstream eyes on Twitter (Barnes). According to a 2017 study by researchers from the University of Alabama, Cyprus University of Technology, University College London, and Telefonica Research, conspiracies often gain

attention in this way: anonymous users on Reddit or 4chan patch together their conspiratorial “evidence,” influencers and political figures raise awareness of the theories by tweeting about them, and eventually the hoaxes attract mainstream media coverage (Barnes).

Thus, for the first time in American history, belief in conspiracies was becoming easier and more common. Support from educated professionals like Professor James Tracy and political figures like Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene added credit to these theories, making it even more difficult for the public to determine what to believe (Crawford; Koebler). Instead of marking a turning point in U.S. gun control regulation, the Sandy Hook massacre created a turning point in America’s approach to conspiracy theories: as the first major “social media age” conspiracy, it spread rapidly, had mainstream support, and was ruthless in its accusations (Crawford).

ii. Identity of the Alleged ‘Conspirators’ and their Treatment

One major distinction between Sandy Hook and previous conspiracy theories lies in the identity of the alleged perpetrators: survivors, witnesses, mourning families, and first responders (Crawford). In the past, the agents behind conspiracies have been said to be shadowy organizations and government officials, who used their power to orchestrate “false flag” operations—“false flag” referring to the theory that powerful organizations routinely arrange massacres in order to blame them on another group (Wilson). But in the case of Sandy Hook and subsequent mass shootings, conspiracies hinged on the ordeal being outright faked. If children died at Sandy Hook, ultra-conservative gun lovers would have to accept that Lanza legally obtained an assault rifle and used it to kill twenty defenseless elementary schoolers in five minutes (Wilson). Since neither the lethality of the weapon nor the legality of its purchase could be disputed, the only alternative was to deny the massacre completely. In refuting the existence

of the victims, “Truthers” diverted public attention away from gun reform and onto the Democratic political agenda of nullifying Second Amendment rights (Wilson). On paper, pointing fingers at the Democratic “Deep State” as the conspiratorial agent seemed relatively harmless; however, this accusation led to the relentless, harrowing harassment faced by traumatized survivors and grieving families.

Ever since skeptics began to sow doubt in the minds of the American public regarding the veracity of school shootings, the burden of proof was unfairly thrust upon survivors and victims’ families. Two fathers of Sandy Hook victims, Neil Heslin and David Wheeler, spoke out about how their very existence (and that of their children) was being discounted and abused (Pauley and Dokoupil). On CBS News, Wheeler stated, “For me personally, it has, in my more vulnerable moments, felt like a complete denial of my life” (qtd. in Pauley and Dokoupil). Heslin went as far as to describe the harassment that he and his family had received, saying, “I’ve had many death threats. You know, people say, you should be the ones with a bullet hole in your head” (qtd. in Pauley and Dokoupil). Another victim’s father, Robbie Parker, was widely accused of being a crisis actor on the evidence of smiling nervously during a press conference, and yet another, Lenny Pozner, was mocked and discredited on Facebook after trying to engage with conspiracists to answer their questions (Zarroli). At every turn, mourning parents have been harassed, threatened, followed; they have been made the laughing stocks of the internet, the symbols of the Democratic Deep State, the evil villains of a conspiratorial narrative.

iii. The Conspiracy Theory’s Target Audience

Since the Sandy Hook conspiracy theories are based on the purported sinister motives of Deep State Democrats (the “segments of the intelligence community and unelected officials” according to investigative journalist Jason Wilson), it is no surprise that most conspiracists

belong to the far-right of the political spectrum. With the aid of social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, the pool of believers has expanded to include even some of the mainstream right (Barnes). By polluting the narrative of the tragedy, the conspiracists steered discourse away from potential gun control and toward obscure political motives (Barnes). In this manner, they have prevented any substantial federal gun reform from coming to pass.

Consequently, the conspiracy theory's target audience are members of the right and far-right who are against gun control (Barnes).

iv. Explaining Conspiratorial “Evidence” and Debunking It

Chaos reigns in the aftermath of a shooting; the spread of misinformation is inevitable. Unfortunately, confused details and traumatized recountings have been weaponized by Truthers as proof that witnesses and survivors are actually crisis actors (Radford). Crisis actors do exist: they are professionals who role play criminals and victims to add realism to the training of first responders (Koebler). The term originated from a Colorado acting studio called Visionbox, which has since been accused of supplying its performers to a myriad of allegedly staged shootings—Visionbox has denied all of the allegations (Koebler). To support the crisis actor conspiracy theory, Truthers used the testimony of Sandy Hook School Nurse Sally Cox (Stuart). In an interview following the shooting, Cox referred to the shooter's mother as a caring kindergarten teacher, despite Nancy Lanza never having taught at the school (Stuart). This inconsistency led many to believe that Cox had misremembered her “script”—however, no names were used in the interview, so she likely heard erroneous information regarding the shooter's identity (Stuart). Another piece of evidence that was used to support the crisis actor theory was the appearance of Sandy Hook victims in videos and photographs taken after the shooting. Specifically, Truthers pointed to a photo of six-year-old victim Emilie Parker sitting

with President Obama after the shooting; however, the girl in the photo is actually Emilie's sister (Radford). As tempting as it may be to believe that the twenty murdered children of Sandy Hook Elementary School are alive and well, such an idea is at best dismissive of their fates and at worst destructive of future progress (Radford).

Other theories revolve around Lanza's choice of weaponry. When news stations initially reported on the incident, many of them misidentified the guns used in the attack (Stuart). Both NBC News and the *New York Times* incorrectly reported that Lanza used handguns in the shooting (Stuart). Eventually, the truth came out. According to Chief Medical Examiner Wayne Carver, all the victims had been shot by a rifle, not a handgun (Stuart). The Connecticut State Police also confirmed on January 18 where each of Lanza's guns were found (Stuart). Although handguns were found on the scene, and he used a handgun to shoot himself, the victims were killed with an AR-15 (Stuart). The gun found in Lanza's car, incorrectly reported to be the AR-15, was eventually correctly identified as a shotgun (Stuart).

Finally, one of the strangest theories to come out about the incident is that no one—neither survivors, nor family members, nor witnesses—shed a single tear for the victims. This unusual idea has been used to support the crisis actor theory: to Truthers, the lack of tears indicates that the so-called “mourners” really had nothing to mourn (Stuart). Basically, if nobody cried, then nobody died. Of all the theories, this is the most easily disproven. Photos, interviews, and press conferences all clearly show crying witnesses and family members (Stuart). Parents of murdered children and siblings of murdered teachers cried, and there is even footage of President Obama crying (Stuart).

v. **Connections to Other Conspiracy Theories – Legacy of Sandy Hook**

The trend that began in 2012 continues today. Ever since Sandy Hook and its immediate onslaught of conspiracies theories, similar charges of “false flags” and “crisis actors” have been brought against every subsequent shooting. Whether in Connecticut or Nevada or Texas, whether in a school or a bar or a church, each instance of gun violence in this country sees avid conspiracists compile lists of contradictions, match faces of witnesses and victims with those of previous tragedies, and lash out at anyone who dares call for gun reform. One heartbreaking example is the 2018 shooting at Parkland, Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School: as David Hogg, Emma Gonzalez, and other grieving students demanded reform, these young, brave survivors were mocked, ignored, and hailed across the internet as crisis actors (Barnes).

vi. **Alex Jones – Role, Rhetoric, Repercussions**

Although both conspiracists and conspirators appear at first glance to be the nameless, faceless specters who haunt the darkest corners of the internet, further investigation reveals that this is anything but true. Behind each victim is a real story and a real family, and behind each Tweet or blog or Reddit post is a real individual; thus, just as Sandy Hook parents and Parkland survivors became the faces of the so-called Democratic Deep State, so too did Alex Jones become the face of the Truthers. With the help of his social media platforms, his website, and his podcasts, Jones quickly rose to be one of the most prominent leaders of the brigade opposing the Democrats and the crisis actors. How did he use his popularity to spread the conspiracy theory, and what has happened to him since?

The story of Alex Jones picks up in 1999, at the founding of his website *Infowars*. This alt-right forum was used both to promote fake news and to share conspiratorial videos, while simultaneously acting as an avenue for Jones to sell merchandise (Williamson). When his

conspiracy theories revolving around Sandy Hook attracted attention in the 2010s, the website's popularity spiked (Williamson). He made many outlandish claims without a shred of evidence. "The general public doesn't know the school was actually closed the year before," he declared on his radio program in December 2014. "They don't know they've sealed it all, demolished the building. They don't know that they had the kids going in circles in and out of the building as a photo-op. Blue screen, green screens, they got caught using" (qtd. in Johnson).

As *Infowars* continued to thrive, Jones must have seen the opportunity to make a name for himself. Steadily, he made friends with fellow radical Republicans. By 2015, even Donald Trump was counted among his many acquaintances: the prominent businessman was interviewed by Jones and fellow Republican Rojer J. Stone Jr. on the *Infowars* website (Williamson). Jones' efforts paid off in 2016, when he was privileged with a V.I.P. invite to Trump's presidential nomination speech at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland (Williamson). While Trump spoke, Jones was observed crying profusely (Williamson). He had been welcomed with open arms into the future president's corner; however, what he did not realize was that his newfound mainstream recognition would promptly come back to bite him.

Due to his association with the newly elected President Trump, Jones became more exposed to the mainstream media, resulting in a new wave of scrutiny directed at his misinformation and lies (Johnson). The attention caused him to back off from some of his previous statements, even claiming that all he had done was look at the Sandy Hook incident from every angle (Johnson). Legal trouble caused him to backtrack even further; in a 2019 interview with lawyers representing Sandy Hook families, Jones admitted to believing in the shooting, although he continually blamed his inability to see the truth before on "psychosis" (Mettler). He stated, "And I, myself, have almost had like a form of psychosis back in the past where I basically thought

everything was staged, even though I'm now learning a lot of times things aren't staged" (qtd. in Mettler). His fluctuating positions on the reality of the massacre as well as his refusal to take responsibility for the pain he has caused demonstrated a startling lack of remorse.

For the past few years, lawsuits and legal fees have stalked Alex Jones. At least nine Sandy Hook families have sued him on charges such as defamation; also, he has been punished severely for his refusal to produce requested documents and evidence for the court (Bella). In 2021, Texas Judge Maya Guerra Gamble issued default judgments against him for failing to comply with court orders: "An escalating series of judicial admonishments, monetary penalties, and non-dispositive sanctions have all been ineffective at deterring the abuse," she wrote (qtd. in Bella). In addition to facing a mountain of legal and financial troubles, Jones also has had to face several business and social ones. He was banned from several major social media platforms—including YouTube, Facebook, and Spotify—for violating their policies regarding hate speech (Bella). Despite his financial and social ruin, however, Jones would continue to discover ways to incite trouble.

January 6, 2021, marks one of the most shocking dates in contemporary American history. A massive gathering of Trump supporters united at the Capitol to stop the "globalists" from "stealing" their beloved president's power (Williamson). Organizing the riot behind the scenes were several radical Republicans, including Jones. In addition to using his broadcasts as a call to action on behalf of Trump, Jones also helped fund the attack—he was able to secure at least \$650,000 from Julie Fancelli, a wealthy *Infowars* fan (Williamson). With his social and financial capital, he wreaked havoc on the country. Jones' frightful trajectory from piecing together conspiracy-themed videos in 1999 to storming the Capitol in 2021 demonstrates the danger of a

conspiracy-oriented mind (Williamson). When one sees danger and deceit everywhere, violence follows naturally—first in words, and then in action.

IV. Conclusion

It is easy to research Sandy Hook related conspiracy theories; it is easy to trace their origins and debunk them; it is all too easy to look at a person like Alex Jones, track his history, and conclude that he is an unreliable source and a troubled mind. Recently it has been surprisingly simple to fine and discredit Jones, and even to silence him on all social media platforms. Why, then, have the 2020s still not seen any meaningful gun reform? Perhaps conspiracy rhetoric is not based entirely on research or evidence, but on an ill-defined uncertainty that troubles people, prompting circular arguments and unproductive dialogue while also disrupting the inclination for cooperation and informed decision-making. In researching the Sandy Hook massacre, I intended to banish uncertainty with certainty, to usurp narratives with facts, to identify Truthers as hoaxers, and to exchange theories for realities. Only after the truth is clear and widely known will any action be taken to prevent future mass shootings.

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