

Why some women support a confessed mass murderer

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by Maxine Bentzel



FILE - In this Feb. 19, 2018 file photo, Nikolas Cruz, accused of murdering 17 people in the Florida high school shooting, appears in court for a status hearing in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Cruz reportedly had a history of shooting small animals. While some animal welfare advocates question the usefulness of animal abuser registries, laws creating them have been passed in a growing number of municipalities in recent years with proponents citing studies linking animal cruelty to crimes ranging from domestic violence to mass shootings. (Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP, Pool, File)

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (CBS12) —

He's accused of killing 17 people and ruining countless lives, yet Nikolas Cruz has support from all over the world.

CBS12 News found people have formed a secret Facebook group to discuss their support for Cruz online. We spoke with members of the group over Facetime and by phone to find out how they could support him.

They all said they don't have to support what he did to support him.

They believe Cruz is someone who needed help, but never got it.

"I feel like if someone took his cries for help a little more serious, this could've been prevented," Bre said.

The group refers to Cruz as "the first victim" and has a myriad of member both men and women, including 46-year-old mother Emi Coffey.

"If somebody had been there for Nikolas, maybe this wouldn't have happened," she said.

Psychologist Rachel Needle said there's a number of theories about why people support alleged killers like Cruz.

"Some start out as people who are fascinated by what's been done and want to learn more about it and understand the person," she said.

Needle said some are empathetic and often times have something in their life that connects them to a killer.

Many women in the Facebook group told us they have children with autism or suffered from mental health issues themselves.

"I can just see my son in the same position so it kind of hit home," Eva said.

Shortly after Cruz was sent to prison, he began receiving stacks of fan mail and love letters.

Some of them included provocative photos like one of a woman from Chicago in a bikini eating a popsicle and one from a teenager who goes so far as to describe her body and bra size to Cruz.

"There are women that are sexually aroused by people that have committed violent crimes or the idea of people committing violent crimes," Needle said.

Needle said there's a long history of women romantically interested or aroused by criminals.

The technical term for it is hybristophilia.

"Some of them start as trying to form a friendship and being compassionate and evolve into more as they start to feel closer the person and often times it's a false sense of intimacy, but sometimes it is a little bit more than that," Needle said.

The women CBS12 News spoke with all said they were not romantically interested or attracted to Cruz.

CBS12 News asked them if they realized how it sounded to others that they support him.

"I realize most people are appalled by it," Mariya said. "It sounds terrible like wow you support this person who killed a bunch of teenagers because he was mad."