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# School Shootings Perpetrators' Self-Reported Motives: A Qualitative Analysis of Manifestos and Other Writings

Stephanie A. Miller  
*Georgia Southern University*

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***School Shootings Perpetrators' Self-Reported Motives: A Qualitative Analysis of Manifestos and Other Writings***

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the  
*Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology.*

By

*Stephanie Miller*

Under the mentorship of *Dr. Laura E. Agnich*

**ABSTRACT**

The motivations behind perpetrators' decisions to commit a school shooting are important to study because they are rare events which generate high public concern, are difficult to predict, and have been increasing in recent years. This study examined the self-reported motives of nineteen perpetrators of school shootings throughout the world by examining their manifestos and other writings. If no self-reported motives were found, then statements made in the perpetrators' writings were used to decide what factors may have motivated them to commit their acts. In particular, this study looked at what motivations the perpetrators expressed in their writings and which motivations were the most common. This study found that most often, there is no one definitive reason why a perpetrator of a school shooting decides to commit an attack. The motivations are most commonly a combination of factors, which can include political and/or religious motives, negative peer influences, and or/ experiences of abuse, rejection, bullying, and/or mental illness.

Thesis Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Laura E. Agnich

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Steven Engel

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*Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology*

University Honors Program

**Georgia Southern University**

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## **Introduction**

This thesis/capstone proposal will look at both attempted and completed mass murder and rampage style attacks that have taken place at a variety of schools across the world. This thesis will address two main research questions. The first question is, what motivations do perpetrators of mass violence incidents express in their writings? The second question is, which motivations are the most common?

The motivations of perpetrators of school shootings are an important issue to explore because incidents of mass violence have been increasing and it is difficult to predict when and where one will occur. Harding et al. (2002) discuss the fact that although rampage school shootings are rare, public concern over them is high. Both parents and students alike fear for their safety and believe that an attack could happen at their school. The number of mass shootings has tripled since 2011. In the United States, a mass shooting occurred every 200 days between 1982 and 2011 and every 64 days between 2011 and 2014. Over the past fifty years, thirteen mass shootings have occurred that resulted in double-digit death tolls. Seven of these incidents took place over the past nine years (Follman, 2015).

Not only has there been a significant increase in mass shootings in recent years but this has been occurring at the same time that overall violent crime has been decreasing. According to the School-Associated Violent Deaths Study, (SAVD) between 1992 and 2006, rates of multiple-victim homicides in schools remained stable while rates of school homicides with one victim decreased (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2008). On the other hand, other studies also report declines in single-victim incidents, but found that there was an increase in multiple-victim incidents between 1992 and 1999

(Wike and Fraser, 2009). This data is particularly alarming because it presents the idea that perpetrators of these attacks are aiming to carry out larger and more destructive attacks.

According to Nekvasil (2015), although school homicides are not frequent occurrences, when one does happen, it is most likely to involve a firearm and result in the loss of multiple victims who do not know the perpetrator. Additionally, if there is more than one perpetrator then the number of victims is even more likely to be increased. Multiple casualty homicides are also most likely to involve a firearm, have victims who are strangers, and result in an increased number of victims if there is more than one perpetrator. However, it is more likely that a multiple casualty homicide will occur at a gas station, convenience store, restaurant, and/or bar. Of all multiple casualty homicides, only 0.8% occurred in schools, according to the NIBRS database. It is almost as common for a homicide incident in a school to have one victim as it is to have more than one victim, with incidents involving one victim comprising 46% of cases and incidents involving more than one victim comprising 54% of cases. However, it was significantly more common for a homicide incident occurring in all other locations, to only have one victim, with a total of 78% of cases having one victim. Additionally, the perpetrators of approximately 39% of school homicides were adolescents (Nekvasil et al., 2015).

As these incidents of mass violence have been increasing, the media's attention to these incidents has been increasing. With this increase of media attention has come an increase in the public's attention to these incidents. In order for mass violence incidents to begin decreasing, research needs to be done on why these incidents are occurring in the first place. Once the motivations for these incidents are established then steps can be

taken to decrease these motivations, which will result in a decrease of mass violence incidents, since school shootings are typically planned in advance and perpetrators often mention their intentions to others or display warning signs that they may be thinking about attacking (Wike and Fraser, 2009). This signaling of their attacks is often referred to as leakage, and nowadays more and more perpetrators are taking to social media to announce their attacks.

### **Literature Review**

Throughout the years, researchers have tried to understand why perpetrators of school shootings decided to carry out their attacks. Studies have been done to try to pinpoint warning signs that may indicate someone is about to commit a mass murder or rampage style attack. Possible trigger warnings have been identified, which may be the deciding factor to influence someone to decide to commit a school shooting. The following section includes the results of these studies, which include profiles of people who may be more likely to commit an attack, warning signs that someone is about to commit an attack, and possible reasons why that perpetrator decided to carry out their attack.

In their article *Teasing, Rejection, and Violence: Case Studies of the School Shootings* Leary et al. (2003) discusses the case study results of fifteen school shootings. Based off of their findings, they came up with a profile for a student who may be more prone to committing school violence. This profile describes a male student who has been ostracized, taunted, teased, harassed, and often publicly humiliated by his fellow students for an extended period of time. Additionally, he will most likely demonstrate an intense

interest in guns and explosives, a fascination with death, Satan, and other “dark” themes, and/or psychological problems.

In his journal article, *Rampage School Shooters: A Typology*, Peter Langman (2009) examines the cases of 10 rampage school shooters. Based off of his findings, Langman categorized the perpetrators into three types of rampage shooters: traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic. Langman characterized the traumatized shooters as coming from broken homes, having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse, having at least one parent with substance abuse problems, and having at least one parent who had a criminal history. He characterized psychotic shooters as coming from intact families and displaying signs of suffering from either schizophrenia or schizotypal personality disorder. Lastly, he characterized psychopathic shooters as coming from intact families and displaying signs of narcissism, lack of empathy, a lack of conscience, and sadistic behavior.

According to Henry’s (2009) research, rampage shooters do not carry out their attacks because of one particular reason. Rather it is a combination of factors, which can include educational policies on schooling, readily available firearms, mental illness, violent media, poor peer relationships, and family neglect or abuse. He believes that some perpetrators may be committing these crimes as a way to alleviate the pains of their own victimizations, which can include physical violence, bullying, and rejection, which may lead to psychological trauma. Newman et al. (2004) believes that school shooters decide to commit these attacks as a last resort.

According to a study conducted by Leary et al. (2003), the shooters tended to have experienced rejection, along with a variety of other possible risk factors, including

psychological problems, an interest in guns and explosives, and a fascination with death. According to Wike & Fraser (2009), some perpetrators of school shootings could have experienced “alienation from school, rejection and victimization by peers, access to guns, practicing with guns, and leakage of plans” (p. 167). A few signs that a person might be planning an attack include an obsession with weapons, a fixation on images of violence, and a history of aggressive acts, which can even include killing animals.

### ***Violent Media***

Violent media is a very broad term, which in this case includes everything from social media to music and a variety of other forms of entertainment. Wike and Fraser (2009) mention in their research that perpetrators’ writings found after an attack often contain references to death, violence, superiority, and hate. They have also found evidence that violent messages in popular songs, video games, television shows, and movies may increase aggressive behavior, reduce normative constraints, and promote violence. For example, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, better known as the Columbine High School shooters, appear to have had an interest in violent video games. Henry (2009) suggests that mass media sensationalizes violence and exaggerates it so that youth are often exposed to violent messages and images of death which can result in them seeking protection, often in the form of knives and guns. Leary et al. (2003) discovered during his research that a number of individuals showed an interest in death and other “dark” topics, such as death-rock music and Satanic worship. Additionally, they came to the conclusion that people who are fascinated by death, or who can relate to Gothic, Satanic, and other “dark” lifestyles may be less affected by the thought of mass



destruction and killing, which could in turn affect the way they thought about committing a mass shooting.

### ***Abuse***

In Langman's (2009) research, he categorized perpetrators into three types of shooters. One of these categories were traumatized shooters. All of these types of shooters came from broken homes where they suffered physical and/or sexual abuse. Additionally, each traumatized shooter had at least one parent who struggled with substance abuse problems and at least one parent who had a criminal history.

### ***Anger***

Before conducting their research, Wike and Fraser (2009) mentioned findings from other studies that discussed how school environments can create social dynamics that reinforce exclusion and hostility (Farmer et al., 2007; Hyman and Perone, 1998 ; Thompson and Kyle, 2005). In their study, Leary et al. (2003) discuss how certain events "may provoke intense anger and resentment, if not overt aggression," and how "various forms of rejection cause anger and may lead to aggression." (p. 204) Peter Langman (2009) also discusses anger as an influence among his category of psychotic shooters. According to Langman (2009), psychotic shooters were typically the youngest siblings in their families. In addition to this, their older siblings were higher functioning, none of who were at all psychotic, and several of who were particularly successful. The combinations of these factors resulted in increased rage and anguish among the psychotic shooters. (Langman, 2009)

### ***Rejection***

In their research Leary et al. (2003) state that there are two types of rejection, acute or chronic, and that some of the most common forms of rejection are ostracism, teasing, and/or romantic rejection. “Individuals who are particularly shy or eccentric, who possess undesirable social characteristics, or who do not share other students’ interests may simply be ignored” (p.204). In extreme cases of ostracism, these individual’s peers may not include them in various aspects of social life on purpose. Romantic rejections can take the form of either “unrequited love or the breakup of an existing relationship” (p. 204). It has been suggested that rejection may have played a part in numerous school shootings, including the attack at Columbine High School.

In their study, Leary et al. (2003) noted that one newspaper mentioned perpetrators of school shootings feeling like outsiders who were taunted by their peers. Additionally, “testimony presented to the House of Judiciary Committee after the Columbine shootings suggested that a typical school shooter feels ‘lonely and isolated’” (p. 202) Leary et al. reported finding indications of interpersonal rejection among a majority of the shootings which he studied in addition to many cases which involved “ongoing ostracism that left the perpetrator on the periphery of the school’s social life” (Leary et al., 2003, p. 210). In approximately half of the shootings which they studied, Leary et al. found indications that the perpetrator had experienced some form of rejection, typically a romantic rejection, shortly before committing their attack. In addition to finding evidence that social rejection has been involved in most cases of lethal school violence since 1995, Leary et al. state that their findings are consistent with those that were reported in the U.S. Secret Service’s Safe School Initiative, which found evidence for bullying, ostracism, and social rejection in over two-thirds of their cases.

Although Leary et al. found that rejection may be a contributing factor as to why someone commits an act of school violence, they also concluded that rejection is not enough in itself to cause someone to commit an act of violence. Rather, some form of rejection, in combination with other factors, could cause someone to be more susceptible to commit an act of violence.

In their research, Wike and Fraser (2009) also mentioned that rejection by peers, including the dissolution of romantic relationships, may have an influence on school shootings. “Studies show that peer rejection is a developmental correlate of anxiety, depression, aggression, antisocial behavior, and other poor adolescent outcomes” (Wike and Fraser, 2009, p. 165). Many shooters have difficulty solving social problems, feel rejected or persecuted, and/or choose to isolate themselves or associate with other alienated peers. Wike and Fraser also feel that this perceived rejection, when combined with other risk factors, can create a dangerous situation. Follman (2015) mentions one case in particular where a rampage shooter had specifically indicated that he had been the victim of rejection. Additionally, Newman et al.’s (2004) research demonstrated that eighty percent of perpetrators of school rampage shootings had been socially excluded and were seen as outcasts.

### ***Bullying***

Although in this context bullying is very similar to the theme of rejection, bullying in this case looks more closely at those who were picked on, intimidated, or otherwise harassed. Whereas rejection paid closer attention to those who were ostracized and otherwise ignored. According to the Safe School Initiative, 71% of perpetrators had experienced bullying and harassment themselves. Verlinden et al. (2000) disseminated

findings that also support the idea that bullying can be a factor in perpetrator's decisions to commit a school shooting. They found that all nine school shooters which they had studied had experienced some form of teasing or had felt isolated and marginalized by their peers. Wike and Fraser (2009) mentions that school shootings may be more likely to occur in a school with a "high degree of social stratification, low bonding and attachment between teachers and students, and few opportunities for involvement" (p. 165). In their research, Leary et al. (2003) describes a group of students in Maryland, who reported failing to fit in as the most common factor in students committing school violence. Additionally, bullying appeared to be a common apparent factor in a majority of the cases which Leary studied. The victimization included malicious teasing, taunting, humiliation, and/or bullying for reasons such as the school shooter's weight or appearance. In addition, they state that adolescents who are disliked and/or unpopular may experience bullying, taunting, and/or malicious teasing as well.

Violent victimization, such as bullying and exclusion, for extended periods of time, can cause students to feel hopeless and vulnerable and those who are the victims of violence can become violent themselves. According to Larkin (2007) the vast majority of perpetrators of rampage shootings are the victims of physical and psychological violence, such as harassment and physical intimidation, caused by peer elite groups such as athletes, and their shootings are a form of retaliation in reaction to this violence. Perpetrators of these violent victimizations can be categorized at the level of individuals, groups, institutions, and community-level agencies. Individuals can include students, teachers, school administrators, and other staff. Groups can include peers, cliques, and gangs, all of which play a role in the school hierarchy. Groups can even include teachers

who beat on students and use their power to belittle them. Institutions would include school policies, school climate, and school governing structures, and institutional policies and other practices that discriminate based off of sexism, racism, and ageism.

Community-level agencies can include school boards and the effects of their policies on school districts, school size, school staffing, and socially toxic neighborhoods.

Approximately half to three quarters of shooters had been victimized for an extended period of time, including being bullied, threatened with physical violence, persecuted, assaulted or having their property stolen, before they decided to commit their act of mass violence (Newman et al., 2004). The perpetrators committed these shootings in the hopes of reclaiming their social standing in the eyes of anyone who had hurt or excluded them (Newman et al., 2004).

### ***Mental Health***

“School shooters often have several commonalities in temperament, including poor control of anger, lack of empathy, and a combined sense of persecution, righteous indignation, and superiority” (Wike and Fraser, 2009, p. 164-165). According to a study done by Vossekuil et al. (2002) there were indications apparent in three-fourths of the cases studied that the perpetrators were suicidal before they committed their attacks. According to Wike and Fraser (2009), many perpetrators of school shootings showed signs of depression and/or thoughts of suicide. Additionally, a significant number of shooting events have resulted in the perpetrators committing suicide. Newman et al.’s (2004) study, which looked at cases of multiple victim school homicides, indicated that up to 85% of school shooters demonstrated signs of psychological problems including mental illness, depression, suicidal ideation, and/or family problems. However, it still

needs to be determined how the shooter's mental state interacted with other factors to lead the perpetrator to carry out their act.

Langman (2009) described his category of psychotic shooters as displaying symptoms of schizophrenia or schizotypal personality disorder, including paranoid delusions, delusions of grandeur, and auditory hallucinations. He described his category of psychopathic shooters as showing signs of "a lack of empathy, a sense of superiority and contempt for others, skill in impression management, pleasure in deceiving others, and sadistic delight in inflicting pain on humans and/or animals" (Langman, 2009, p. 83). Being male, having an early onset of symptoms, excessive substance use, and not taking antipsychotic medications are all factors which can put a schizophrenic at higher risk of committing violence. The presence of sadism, or lack thereof, is one way to separate people with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders from those who fall under Langman's (2009) category of psychotic shooters. "Sadism involves seeking out opportunities to have power over others and inflict pain or death for the sake of getting a thrill from doing so" (Langman, 2009, p. 85). "Neither Hare's (1999) list of psychopathic traits, nor the diagnostic criteria for antisocial personality disorder, includes sadism" (Langman, 2009, p. 85). In at least two-thirds of the cases which Leary studied, the perpetrator had indicated "having psychological problems, including depression, hyper aggressiveness, or sadistic tendencies" (Leary et al., 2003). In contrast, Follman states that "Decades of research have shown that the link between mental disorders and violent behavior is small and not useful for predicting violent acts. People with severe mental disorders are in fact far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators" (Follman, 2015). Additionally, in their research, Towers et al. - "found no significant association between

the rate of school and mass shootings and state prevalence of mental illness” (Towers, 2015).

### ***Peer Influence***

Nekvasil (2015) concluded that mass school shootings may have a copycat appeal, especially in the case of adolescents. Wike and Fraser (2009) also supported the theory of the contagion effect, otherwise known as the copycat appeal, by arguing that “media coverage of high profile shooting incidents, such as Columbine and Virginia Tech, may stimulate those at risk of perpetrating a school shooting to imitate the actions of other school shooters” (p. 163). Based on his research, Peter Langman (2009) categorized school shooters into three categories: psychotic shooters, psychopathic shooters, and traumatized shooters. He found several common factors amongst the perpetrators which he had categorized as traumatized. These included illegal use of firearms by father-figures and peer influence to commit the attack. In the case of psychotic shooters, however, only Dylan Klebold showed evidence of peer influence to commit his attack. Langman’s (2009) last category of school shooters, the psychopathic shooters, did not show evidence of peer influence to commit their attacks. In fact, psychopathic shooters were the ones who influenced their peers to join them in the commission of school shootings. Langman (2009) theorizes that some school shooters, including those that fall under his categories of traumatized or psychotic shooters, may not have committed their attacks without the outside pressure of peer influence.

Follman (2015) also discusses evidence supporting the possibility of a copycat effect among mass shooters. He theorizes that perpetrators look to past attacks for inspiration and operational details. Forensic psychologists have described the emulation

of famous predecessors to be the following of a cultural script. It is believed that mass murders, particularly in recent years, have begun to leave behind “legacy tokens” in the hopes of claiming credit for their attack, describing why they committed the attack, and/or to heighten the media attention given to their attack. There is evidence that sites of previous mass shootings, such as Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, and Columbine, are locations where those people who may be under the influence of the copycat effect travel to in order to gain inspiration an attack (Follman, 2015). When school shootings and other mass killings were compared with mass shootings in which three or less people were killed, evidence indicated that contagion may have had a significant influence on the school shootings and other mass killings, while contagion most likely did not have a significant influence on mass shootings in which less than four people were killed (Towers, 2015).

### ***Role of Firearms***

The role of firearms in the commission of mass murder attacks has been an ongoing topic of controversy. As is apparent, a school shooting, or other rampage style shooting, could not be committed without the use of a firearm. Shootings are more likely to result in multiple fatalities than attacks with other kinds of weapons and the higher the victim count in multiple casualty homicides, the more likely it is that a firearm was used in the commission of the attack. On the other hand, according to Nekvasil et al.’s (2015) study, “fatal shootings at schools were not more likely to occur than homicides with other kind of weapons” (p. 242). With this being said, German schools have experienced a relatively high number of fatal attacks that involved edged weapons, rather than firearms (Nekvasil et al., 2015).



In their study, Wike and Fraser (2009) also discuss the role of weapons in the commission of school shootings. They came to the conclusion that perpetrators of school shootings often show signs of being fascinated with guns, bombs, and other explosives. In addition to an apparent fascination with weapons, the perpetrators all had access to guns. In his research, Peter Langman (2009) notes that those shooters who he categorized as psychopathic shooters “came from families with at least two generations of law abiding firearms use” (p. 85) and in addition to this, had a fascination with weapons. In his research, Henry (2009) also mentions a gun culture as being a possible influencing factor on perpetrators of mass shootings. In his study, Leary et al. (2003) stated that a common risk factor that a significant number of shooters shared was an interest in guns and explosives. Additionally, a significant number of incidents that he studied “involved individuals who were familiar with, if not fascinated by, guns and bombs” (p. 210) and he reasoned that those individuals “who not only have access to guns but who are fascinated by firearms and explosives may be more likely to act on their aggressive impulses because they are comfortable dealing with instruments of destruction” (Leary et al., 2003, p. 211).

One of the first things that a threat assessment team focuses on in their investigations is access to weapons. In his study, Henry mentions that Australia had been experiencing significant gun violence at one point in time, but once stricter gun laws and other policies regarding gun ownership were put into effect, they saw dramatic decreases in gun-related deaths (Follman, 2015). However, this article also mentions that possession of a firearm is not a meaningful predictor of targeted violence. In the United

States, the number of deaths caused by a firearm were much lower in states with stricter gun laws (Towers, 2015).

## **Methodology**

### ***Data and Sample***

This research was approached using grounded theory and collected qualitative data. The writings of 19 perpetrators of school shootings were read and analyzed. These perpetrator's stated motivations and inferred motivations, based on their risk factors and possible trigger warnings mentioned in their writings, will be discussed. Reoccurring possible motivating factors that were identified amongst these perpetrator's stated motivations and inferred motivations will also be discussed. The writings of Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Sebastian Bosse, Robert Butler Jr., Seung-Hui Cho, Wellington de Oliveira, Eric Hainstock, Chris Harper-Mercer, Kip Kinkel, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Adam Lanza, Marc Lepine, Myron May, Bryan Oliver, Karl Pierson, Evan Ramsey, Michael Slobodian, Jeffrey Weise, and Luke Woodham were read and analyzed. These perpetrators writings were all found on an online database created by Peter Langman. The perpetrators were randomly selected, in order to provide the least biased sample possible. It was not taken into account if the perpetrator was a student at the school they attacked when selecting which cases to include, nor was it taken into account how many victims were killed during the attack.

The following section includes a brief description of each perpetrators school shooting, describing elements of the shooting including each perpetrators name and age, where the perpetrator committed their attack, including the name of the school and the

geographical location of the attack, when the perpetrator attended the school they attacked, if at all, when they committed their attack, number of victims killed and number of victims overall, type of weapon primarily used in the attack, and whether or not the perpetrator survived the attack.

### *Cases*

Micheal Slobodian was sixteen years old when he attacked Brampton Centennial Secondary School in Brampton, Ontario, Canada in May 1975. During his attack Slobodian killed one student and one teacher, wounded thirteen others, and then killed himself. Police found a rifle and additional ammunition on Slobodian's body after the attack. Slobodian carried out the attack using two rifles. A note was later found in Slobodian's bedroom, naming some of his targets (Belgrave, 2015).

Marc Lepine was twenty-five years old on December 6, 1989 when he attacked Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal in Montreal, Canada. Lepine shot and killed fourteen women and wounded nine others before shooting and killing himself (Chauvin, 2015).

Evan Ramsey was sixteen years old when he attacked Bethel Regional High School in Bethel, Alaska in February 1997. He carried out his attack using one shotgun. Although Ramsey had compiled a hit list prior to his attack, he ultimately shot and wounded one adult and one student, both who later died as a result of their injuries. Years before Evan Ramsey's attack, in October 1986, his father attacked the Anchorage Times Newspaper using a gun and smoke grenades, although he did not injure anyone in his attack. At the time of his attack, Evan Ramsey was under the guardianship of the Lower Kuskokwism School District's superintendent. As of February 2017, Ramsey resides at

the Wildwood Correctional Center in Kenai and will be eligible for parole when he is eighty-two years old (McBride, 2017).

Luke Woodham was sixteen years old when he attacked Pearl High School in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in October 1997. In his attack, Woodham shot and killed two of his fellow classmates, one of which was his ex-girlfriend, and wounded seven others. Woodham confessed to this act and a jury rejected an insanity defense and found Woodham guilty of two counts of murder and seven counts of aggravated assault, which resulted in two consecutive life sentences and seven twenty-year sentences. Hours before his attack at Pearl High School, Woodham beat and stabbed his mother to death. Although he claimed he did not remember killing his mother, a separate jury convicted Woodham for the murder and he was sentenced to life in prison. Attorneys at both trials argued that he was legally insane at the time of his attacks (CNN, 1998; Mitchell, 2016).

Kipland Kinkel, otherwise known as Kip Kinkel, was fifteen years old when he carried out his attack on Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon in May 1998. Kinkel shot and killed both his mother and father at his home just north of Springfield, on May 20, before heading to Thurston High School on May 21, where he shot and killed two students and shot and wounded twenty-five others before being stopped by his fellow classmates. At the time of his shooting Kinkel was a freshman student at Thurston High School. Kinkel was captured and charged as an adult with four counts of aggravated murder and twenty-six counts of aggravated attempted murder. In November 1999 Kinkel was sentenced to 111 years in prison without the possibility of parole (Clark, 1998; PBS.org).

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were both eighteen years old when they attacked Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in April, 1999. At the time of their attack both students were current seniors at Columbine High School. They wounded twenty-three, killed twelve students, one teacher, and then themselves. Harris and Klebold used a variety of bombs, including pipe bombs, other explosives, and automatic pistols to carry out their attack. Investigators found at least seventeen bombs at the scene of the crime (New York Daily News, 2015).

Jeffrey Weise was sixteen years old when he attacked Red Lake High School on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Bemidji, Minnesota in March 2005. Weise first shot his grandparents at their home on the reservation, before wounding fifteen students and killing five students, a teacher, an unarmed security guard and then himself at the high school. Weise's grandparents later died as a result of their injuries. Weise carried out his attack using two handguns and a shotgun. One of the victims, Weise's grandfather, had been an officer for the Red Lake Police Department and Weise took his grandfather's guns, Kevlar vest, and squad car in order to carry out his attack. Weise ultimately took his own life after being confronted by police (Associated Press, 2005; Enger, 2015).

Eric Hainstock was charged as an adult with first-degree intentional homicide at the age of fifteen, after shooting and fatally wounding his principal John Klang, who later died as a result of his injuries at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics. In September 2006, Hainstock entered Weston Schools, where he was a current student, carrying a shotgun and a concealed hand gun. A custodian and Klang immediately intercepted Hainstock, resulting in the altercation between Klang and Hainstock which left Klang mortally wounded (Sander, 2006).

Sebastian Bosse was eighteen years old when he wounded thirty-seven people, and killed himself, in an attack on his former school, the Geschwister Scholl secondary school in Emsdetten, Germany, in 2006. Bosse shot four students and a janitor, and injured the rest of his victims, including a pregnant teacher, by setting off smoke canisters around the school. Bosse had also set up a total of thirteen pipe bombs around the school and in his vehicle, in addition to strapping explosive packs to his body (Juttner, 2006; Armborst, 2006).

Seung-Hui Cho was twenty-three years old when he shot and killed thirty-two people, and then himself, on the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University campus in Blacksburg, Virginia, in April 2007. Cho was born in South Korea but became a permanent U.S. resident in 1992. At the time of his attack Cho was a senior at the school, which is more commonly known as Virginia Tech (CNN Library, 2017).

Pekka-Eric Auvinen was eighteen years old when he shot and killed seven students, the headmistress, and himself at Jokela High School, in Tuusula, Finland. At the time of his attack in 2007, Auvinen was a senior at Jokela High School. Police reported finding indications that Auvinen had also been planning on burning the building, before shooting himself. Before executing his attack, Auvinen uploaded a video to YouTube titled “Jokela High School Massacre” and also uploaded additional content that referenced Seung-Hui Cho, Eric Harris, and Dylan Klebold, all of who have also committed mass murder attacks (Peterkin, 2008).

Robert Butler Jr. was seventeen years old when he committed his attack on Millard South High School in Omaha, Nebraska. Butler fired seven rounds total, shooting and killing his assistant principal, shooting and wounded his principal, firing a shot at a

custodian but missing, resulting in bullet fragments wounding a school nurse, and pointing his gun at a security officer but not firing it. Butler then shot and killed himself, after fleeing from the scene of the attack (Leibowitz, 2011).

Wellington de Oliveira was twenty-three years old when he attacked Tasso da Silveira Municipal School in Rio de Janeiro. Oliveira shot and killed twelve children and injured numerous others, before shooting and killing himself, in April 2011. Oliveira had formerly attended the school from 1999 to 2002 (Andrade, 2011; Daily Mail Reporter, 2011).

Adam Lanza was twenty years old when he shot and killed twenty-six people in an attack on Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown Connecticut on December 14, 2012. Before attacking the school, Lanza shot and killed his mother, Nancy Lanza, at their home, and then killed twenty students and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School, before shooting and killing himself. At the time of the attack the school had a security system in place which locked the school doors each morning and required visitors to be checked in. Lanza carried out his attack using three guns, one of which he used to gain entrance into the school since the doors were locked when he arrived at the school. Lanza had previously attended Sandy Hook Elementary when he was younger (CNN, 2012; Jeltsen, 2016).

Bryan Oliver was sixteen years old when he attacked Taft Union High School in Taft, California, in January 2013. At the time of the attack Oliver was a current student at the school. According to police, Oliver had been plotting to kill two students. Oliver shot and critically wounded one student in the attack and one teacher was marginally wounded by a stray bullet. After shooting one student Oliver was confronted by school staff and

surrendered. Oliver had one gun and additional ammunition on his person during the attack. Although the school had an armed security guard he was not on campus at the time of Oliver's shooting. Oliver was charged as an adult with two counts of premeditated attempted murder and three counts of assault with a firearm, as a result of the attack (Crimesider Staff, 2013; ABC News, 2013).

Karl Pierson was eighteen years old when he attacked Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado, in December 2013. According to Arapahoe County's Sheriff, Pierson intended to injure multiple people, including his debate coach. Pierson had a machete, Molotov cocktails, a shotgun, and additional ammunition on his person during the attack. Pierson shot and critically wounded one student, who later died as a result of her injuries, set a fire using a Molotov cocktail, and then shot and killed himself in the attack. At the time of the attack, the school employed a deputy sheriff as their resource officer, and an unarmed security guard (Gurman, 2013; Watkins and Cabrera, 2013).

Myron May was thirty-one years old when he shot and killed three students in the Strozier Library at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida on November 20, 2014. May was shot and killed on site by police after he refused to surrender. May was a graduate of Florida State University and Texas Tech law school and had been working as a prosecutor for the Dona Ana district attorney's office, practicing law in Texas and New Mexico, until he quit his job in early October. May then left to stay with a family friend in Florida, close to where he had grown up as a child. Before carrying out his attack, May sent packages to numerous people and investigators found numerous documents and videos in the home that May was staying at before the attack, which gave his explanation



for the attack. Investigators found numerous guns and boxes of ammunition on May's body and in his vehicle (Connor, 2014; Democrat staff report, 2015).

Chris Harper-Mercer was twenty-six years old when he carried out his attack at Umpqua Community College in Oregon, in October 2015. Harper-Mercer, who was armed with six guns, a flak jacket, and spare ammunition cartridges, shot and killed nine people and wounded many more before shooting and killing himself. At the time of the attack, Harper-Mercer was a current student at Umpqua Community College. Harper-Mercer joined the army in 2008 but was discharged after a month, before he finished basic training. He then graduated from the Switzer Learning Center in Torrance in 2009, which is a private school for students with learning disabilities, emotional issues, and other special-education issues (Healy, 2015).

### ***Hypothesis***

The researcher hypothesized that the most common reoccurring factors that could have potentially motivated the perpetrators to commit their school shootings would include bullying, mental illness, and/or exposure to violent media. Violent media was used as an umbrella term to include exposure to violent media such as violent video games, TV shows, movies, and music. Although it was expected to repeatedly find evidence of these potential motivating factors amongst numerous perpetrator's writings, grounded theory was used as the basis for this project so that the possibility of other potential motivating factors could be investigated.

### **Results**

Political motives, religious motives, experiences of rejection, experiences of bullying, peer influence, anger, mental health, and experiences of abuse were all found to be possible contributing factors that had an influence on school shooters decision to commit their attacks.

### ***Political Motives***

Four of the perpetrators studied indicated political reasons as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators included: Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Seung-Hui Cho, Marc Lepine, and Wellington de Oliveira. Interestingly, three of these perpetrators, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Marc Lepine, and Wellington de Oliveira committed attacks in countries other than the United States, including Finland, Brazil, and Canada. The fourth perpetrator, Seung-Hui Cho was born outside of the United States, in South Korea, although he later became a permanent United States resident before the time of his attack. Pekka-Eric Auvinen listed political motives as the reason for his attack by stating "...political terrorism (although I choosed the school as target, my motives for the attack are political and much much deeper and therefore I don't want this to be called only as "school shooting." Although de Oliveira did not specifically state political motives as the reason for his attack, he wrote a suicide note stating "I left a house in Sepetiba which no family needs, there are poor institutions, financed by generous people, that take care of abandoned animals, I want this space where I passed my final months donated to one of these institutions, because the animals are being very despised and need much more protection and care than human beings who have the advantage of being able to communicate, to work to feed themselves." This, and other

statements made by de Oliveira, led me to believe that political factors may have influenced him to commit his attack.

Marc Lepine, as was the case with Auvinen, specifically stated that the reason for his attack was political. Lepine wrote in his suicide note “Would you note that if I commit suicide today 89-12-06 it is not for economic reasons but for political reasons.”

Numerous statements made by Seung-Hui Cho in his manifesto lead me to believe that he may have also had political motives influencing him to commit his attack. These writings included statements such as “...all of you who have felt what I have felt in my life, all of you who have suffered the wrath of these Democratic Terrorists... you’re in my heart. In life and death and spirit,” “I am Ax Ishmael. I am the Anti-Terrorist of America,” and “Are you happy now that you have destroyed my life? Now that you have gone on a 9/11 on my life like \*\*\*\* Osama. Now that you have \*\*\*\* your own people like \*\*\*\* Kim Jong-II. Are you happy now?” (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Religious Motives***

Two of the perpetrators studied indicated religious motives as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shootings. These perpetrators were Wellington de Oliveira and Seung Hui Cho. In his suicide note de Oliveria described how he wanted his body to be cared for after his death and stated “I need to be visited at my grave by a faithful follower of God at least once, he must pray in front of my grave and ask God’s forgiveness for what I did praying that upon his return Jesus wakes me from the sleep of death for eternal life.” Additionally, Cho made references to religious figures and other religious terms throughout his manifesto. These references included “Christian Nazis,” “Descendants of Satan,” “Apostles of Sin,” Moses, “American Al-Qaeda,” God, and

Christians, to name a few examples. He also made statements including “Thanks to you, I die, like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the Weak and Defenseless people- my Brothers, Sisters, and Children- that you \*\*\*\*.” As was found to be the case with political motives, both perpetrators who appeared to have been influenced by religious factors had ties to countries other than the United States (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Rejection***

Eleven of the perpetrators studied indicated rejection as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators included: Sebastian Bosse, Seung-Hui Cho, Eric Hainstock, Chris Harper-Mercer, Kip Kinkel, Robert Butler Jr., Marc Lepine, Evan Ramsey, Jeffrey Weise, Luke Woodham, and Dylan Klebold. Sebastian Bosse stated in a recorded video “There are two main reasons for that massacre. First reason, school. Teachers, students, everything... Second, the politics. On one hand I see... it is... the only thing where you are really, really free, nobody has to tell you, nobody has the right to tell you what to do or not to do.” I have interpreted Bosse’s reason of “school” to mean rejection. In the same video Bosse states “Since 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, people picked on me, And I was a loser. I wanted to have friends...And I began planning this, this massacre. I wanted to kill them all, because they ruined my life... You are alone and you want to have friends, and they change completely how you think.” In writings posted on his website, Bosse also referenced rejection when he made statements such as “The only thing that was taught to me intensely at school was that I am a loser.” These, and other similar statements, are the reason I believe that Bosse was indicating the mistreatment he had experienced from his peers, when he was referring to “school” being a reason for his attack. In his manifesto Cho discusses what appears to be experiences of

rejection, which may have influenced him in the commission of his attack. He made statements such as “You have succeeded in extinguishing my life. Vandalizing my heart wasn’t enough for you. Raping my soul wasn’t enough for you. Committing emotional sodomy on me wasn’t enough for you.”

In letters that he wrote while incarcerated, Eric Hainstock described experiences of rejection which he had suffered. In one letter to Vincent P. O’Hern, Hainstock wrote “...But I wasn’t an A student or a star on the high school sport teams. No one ever listened.” In another letter, Hainstock wrote “All the abuse; all the lies, taking me off meds that worked because he didn’t want to spend the money, not allowing me to continue treatment because he didn’t want to pay.” These, and other writings, are sufficient enough evidence for me to believe that these and other experiences of rejection played a role in influencing Hainstock to commit his attack. In a public statement, Kip Kinkel stated “I absolutely loved my parents and had no reason to kill them. I had no reason to dislike, kill or try to kill anyone at Thurston.” Although Kinkel denies having a reason to commit his attack, his writings lead me to believe that rejection may have been one factor which influenced him to carry out his attack. Also in his journal, Kinkel discusses a rejecting event, which may have been what triggered him to commit his attack. Kinkel wrote “End. New day. Today of all days, I ask her to help me. I was shot down. I feel like my heart has been ripped open and ripped apart.”

In his suicide note, Lepine wrote “I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker.” Although Lepine lists political motives as being the reason for his attack, his targeting of one group, feminists, in particular leads me to believe that he may have experienced rejection by one or more members of this particular

group. In a post to his blog, Harper-Mercer referenced the Vester Flanagan shooting, by stating “I have noticed that so many people like him are all alone and unknown, yet when they spill a little blood, the whole world knows who they are. A man who was known by no one, is now known by everyone... Seems the more people you kill, the more you’re in the limelight.” This is sufficient evidence for me to believe that Harper-Mercer may have been feeling alone and unknown, and may have been influenced to commit his attack by the want and/or need for attention and recognition.

Ramsey specifically stated feelings of rejection in a note that he wrote by saying “Hey Every body!! I feel rejected, rejected, not so much alone, but rejected. I feel this way because the day-to-day treatment I get usually it’s positive but the negative is like a cut, it doesn’t go away really fast.” In an online journal entry Weise wrote “Right about now I feel as low as I ever have... My biggest disappointment and downfall came from what was supposed to be the one thing to lift me from the grave I’m continually digging for myself.” In his manifesto, Woodham wrote “I only loved one thing in my whole life and that was Christina Menefee. But she was torn away from me.” Robert Butler Jr. committed his attack shortly after he was suspended from school and escorted out of the building. His three victims included himself, his principal, and his assistant principal. The timing of his shooting in combination with who the victims were, lead me to believe that this rejecting event, being suspended from school, may have been what triggered Butler to commit his attack (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Bullying***

Eight of the perpetrators studied indicated bullying as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators included: Sebastian Bosse,

Seung-Hui Cho, Robert Butler Jr., Evan Ramsey, Karl Pierson, Bryan Oliver, Eric Harris, and Luke Woodham. Bosse indicated that he had been bullied and that his experiences of being bullied may have had an influence on his decision to carry out his attack by making statements such as “I realized that my entire life, I was the dumb one for the others, and people made fun of me. And I swore to take revenge!” Butler posted on Facebook soon before his attack stating “Everybody that used to know me I’m sry but Omaha changed me and \*\*\*\* me up. And the school I attend is even worse ur gonna hear about the evil \*\*\*\* I did but that \*\*\*\* school drove me to this.” Although Butler did not specifically list bullying as a cause for his attack, nor did he specifically cite particular instances of bullying, the wording and timing of this post, in reference to his attack, lead me to believe that Butler had been experiencing bullying both in Omaha and his new school.

Ramsey, Pierson, and Woodham, all specifically discussed experiences of bullying in their writings. In a note he wrote, Ramsey stated “The main reason that I did this is because I’m sick and tired of being treated this way everyday.” In his journal Pierson wrote “When I do commit my atrocities, I want the conversation to be about elementary school teasing. Words hurt, can mold a sociopath, and will lead someone a decade later to kill. In his manifesto Woodham wrote “I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. I did this to show society “push us and we will push back!” I suffered all my life.” and “...all throughout my life I was ridiculed. Always beaten, always hated... I am malicious because I am miserable. The world has beaten me” Although Oliver did not specifically list bullying as a cause for his attack. Based on the fact that he had been plotting to kill two students in particular, and the fact that he had written a short story in which he described a boy who couldn’t make any friends and was

bullied continuously all the way through high school, I believe that these intended targets may have been bullying Oliver in some form and that this had an influence on his decision to commit hit attack (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Peer Influence***

Six of the perpetrators studied indicated a form of peer influence, in one way or another, as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators included: Sebastian Bosse, Seung-Hui Cho, Chris Harper-Mercer, Adam Lanza, Dylan Klebold, and Eric Harris. There is evidence that Bosse may have been influenced to carry out his attack due to his interest in school shooters and adoration of Eric Harris in particular. In his journal, Bosse wrote “ ERIC HARRIS. Probably the most reasonable boy that a shitty high school can offer... pff ... ERIC HARRIS IS GOD! There is no doubt. It is scary how similar Eric was to me. Sometimes it seems as if I were to live his life again, as if everything would repeat itself. I am not a copy of REB, VoDKa, Steinhauser, Gill, Kinkel, Weise or anybody else! I am the advancement of REB! I learned from his mistakes, the bombs. I learned from his entire life.” Although he denies copying other school shooters who came before him, Bosse admits to using them as a guide for planning out his attack.

I feel that Cho may have been motivated to commit his school shooting by the want of public attention. Although Cho did not reference mimicking a previous school shooter, he made mention in his writings that he wanted to set an example for later school shooters to follow. In one blog post Chris Harper-Mercer discussed his thoughts on the Vester Flanagan shooting. In this post Harper-Mercer stated “I have noticed that so many people like him are all alone and unknown, yet when they spill a little blood, the whole



world knows who they are. A man who was known by no one, is now known by everyone... Seems the more people you kill, the more you're in the limelight." Although Harper-Mercer does not directly make any mention about wanting to mimic Flanagan or follow in his footsteps, he does point out the amount of attention that one can get if they commit an attack. This, I believe is sufficient evidence to support the theory that peer influence may have had an impact on Chris Harper-Mercer's decision to commit a school shooting. In many of his writings, Lanza makes reference to a variety of school shootings, including multiple references to the Columbine shooting in particular. This attention given to previous school shooters, in combination with other factors, leads me to believe that Lanza may have been influenced by their shootings to commit his own attack. I believe that peer influence played an important part in Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris's decision to carry out their attack due to the fact that the pair committed the shooting together (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Anger***

Seven of the perpetrators studied indicated anger as being a possible factor that may have motivated them to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators included: Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Kip Kinkel, Evan Ramey, Karl Pierson, Luke Woodham, Michael Slobodian, and Eric Harris. Based off of his writings, I believe that anger may have been a possible factor which influenced Auvinen to commit his attack. In his manifesto, Auvinen states "...knowing as much as I know has made me unhappy, frustrated and angry. I just can't be happy in the society or the reality I live. Due to long process of existential thinking, observing the society I live and some other things happened in my life... I have come to the point where I feel nothing but hate against humanity and human

race.” In a public statement made by Kip Kinkel, he stated “I absolutely loved my parents and had no reason to kill them. I had no reason to dislike, kill or try to kill anyone at Thurston.” Although Kinkel denies having a reason to commit his attack, his writings lead me to believe that anger may have influenced him to carry out his attack.

In his journal, Kinkel stated “I am so full of rage that I feel I could snap at any moment. I think about it every day. Blowing the school up or just taking the easy way out, and walk into a pep assembly with guns. In either case, people that are breathing will stop breathing. That is how I will repay all you... for all you put me through.” This was just one example where Kinkel discussed the anger he felt. In a note left by Ramsey, he wrote “I do hope the shells hit more than 1 person because I am angry at more than 1 person.” In his journal Pierson wrote entries such as “I am filled with hate, I love it.... I feel like a bomb, ready to let the world feel and experience my hatred for all things of pleasure.” and “I feel like a bomb. My head has happy, anger and confusion hormones.” In his manifesto, Woodham wrote “I am not insane! I am angry.” In his suicide note Slobodian listed certain intended targets and wrote “I am not insane but just strictly fed up of life. I am not getting myself anywhere and its my fault” (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Mental Health***

Eight of the perpetrators studied indicated mental health as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators included Auvinen, Eric Hainstock, Kip Kinkel, Adam Lanza, Myron May, Karl Pierson, Jeffrey Weise, and Dylan Klebold. Auvinen mentions mental health in his manifesto, discussing the idea that, what some people may see as a psychological disorder is really a natural reaction. Auvinen stated “Individual, who is going through his/hers natural power process and

trying to live naturally, but is being told that the way he acts or thinks is wrong and stupid, will usually have some reactions which might be considered as “psychological disorders” by the establishment. In reality they are just natural reactions to the disruption of natural power process. They will have some of the following (depending on individual’s personality): feelings of inferiority/superiority, hostility, aggression, frustration, depression, self-hatred/hatred towards other people, suicidal/homicidal thought etc... and it is completely normal.” Although Auvinen mentions that he is not suffering from mental health issues, these, and other writings are enough significant evidence for me to believe, without him specifically stating, that mental health issues may have influenced him to commit his attack.

In letters that he wrote while incarcerated, Eric Hainstock described some of his experiences dealing with mental health problems from which he suffered. In one letter to Vincent P. O’Hern, Hainstock wrote “I had been in IEP classes and the program which is to provide me with a psychologist for me and to review me and my behavior, none, ever was given or assigned.” In another letter, Hainstock wrote “All the abuse; all the lies, taking me off meds that worked because he didn’t want to spend the money, not allowing me to continue treatment because he didn’t want to pay.” These, and other writings, are sufficient enough evidence for me to believe that Hainstock was indeed suffering from mental health problems and that they played a role in influencing him to commit his attack. As previously mentioned, in a public statement by Kip Kinkel, he stated “I absolutely loved my parents and had no reason to kill them. I had no reason to dislike, kill or try to kill anyone at Thurston.” Although Kinkel denies having a reason to commit his attack, he wrote “My head just doesn’t work right... these VOICES inside my head.”

This, and other writings, lead me to believe that he was suffering from one or more mental illnesses and that this may have played a role in his decision to carry out his attack.

Lanza described experiences in his writings which indicated that he may have been suffering from a mental illness. Lanza made posts stating "...those images were the worst "hallucinations" I had experienced until a couple of weeks ago" and "I heard screaming around me, and I had an overwhelming sense that there was someone dead behind me. I kept seeing silhouettes of flickering people everywhere." Based off of these, and additional, writings I feel that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Lanza's possible sufferings could have been a contributing factor in his decision to carry out his attack. At one point in his suicide letter, Marc Lepine mentioned that the Forces refused him because of antisocial problems. Although he does not discuss other mental health issues, I believe that mental health issues could have possibly influenced his decision to commit his attack. In a letter May wrote he stated "Because I am a targeted individual, everything has been taken away from me. I have literally been robbed of life through psychological, financial, and emotional hardship." In that same letter May wrote "I attempted to turn myself in at the Dona Ana County Detention Center on three separate occasions. I was literally escorted to the jail by about ten cars; however, no one went inside the jail with me. Each time I attempted to turn myself in, the cars waited in the parking lot (watching me go inside the jail). But the jail informed me that they had no paperwork for me. Then, each time I left the jail after being turned away, the cars that escorted me into the jail were gone." In his journal Pierson wrote entries such as "I am a psychopath with a superiority complex," "I doubt the medication is working," and "It is

important to note I rarely take my meds” In an online journal entry Weise wrote “I’m starting to regret sticking around, I should’ve taken the razor blade express last time around”. I feel that this was an indication of depression, which may have been a contributing factor is Weise’s decision to carry out his attack (School Shooters, 2017).

### ***Abuse***

Two of the perpetrators studied indicated abuse as being a possible motivating factor to commit their school shooting. These perpetrators are Eric Hainstock and Bryan Oliver. In letters that he wrote while incarcerated, Eric Hainstock specifically described experiences of abuse which he had been suffering from. In one letter to Vincent P. O’Hern, Hainstock wrote “I went to these people and agency’s a dozen or more times, explaining the abuse I was receiving at home and at school. In another letter, Hainstock wrote “All the abuse; all the lies, taking me off meds that worked because he didn’t want to spend the money, not allowing me to continue treatment because he didn’t want to pay.” These writings are sufficient enough evidence for me to believe that Hainstock had indeed been receiving abuse at home and that this abuse may have played a significant role in influencing Hainstock to commit his attack. Bryan Oliver wrote a short story in which he described a boy who was beaten and neglected during his childhood by his father and abused by his older brother. Although not specifically stated, I feel that Oliver may have been portraying himself as this boy, indicating that he had been experiencing abuse at home. If this is correct, then those experiences of abuse at home could have influenced Oliver to commit his school shooting (School Shooters, 2017). Table 1 below provides a summary of the cases examined in this study, and basic demographic and other information about the perpetrators and their attacks.

<b>Offender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Outside of U.S.</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Attended the School</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Number of Victims</b>	<b>Number of People Killed</b>	<b>Primary Weapon</b>	<b>Survived Attack</b>
Michael Slobodian	16	Yes	Brampton Centennial Secondary School	At the time of attack	1975	16	3	Gun	No
Marc Lepine	25	Yes	Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal	Denied admission twice	1989	24	15	Gun	No
Evan Ramsey	16	No	Bethel Regional High School	At the time of attack	1997	2	2	Gun	Yes
Luke Woodham	16	No	Pearl High School	At the time of attack	1997	10	3	Gun	Yes
Kip Kinkel	15	No	Thurston High School	At the time of attack	1998	29	4	Gun	Yes
Eric Harris	18	No	Columbine High School	At the time of attack	1999	38	15	Gun	No
Dylan Klebold	18	No	Columbine High School	At the time of attack	1999	38	15	Gun	No
Jeffrey Weise	16	No	Red Lake High School	At the time of attack	2005	25	10	Gun	No
Eric Hainstock	15	No	Weston High School	At the time of attack	2006	1	1	Gun	Yes
Sebastian Bosse	18	Yes	Geschwister Scholl Secondary School	Before the attack	2006	38	1	Gun	No
Seung-Hui Cho	23	No	Virginia Tech	At the time of attack	2007	33	33	Gun	No
Pekka-Eric Auvinen	18	Yes	Jokela High School	At the time of attack	2007	9	9	Gun	No
Robert Butler Jr.	17	No	Millard South High School	At the time of attack	2011	4	2	Gun	No
Wellington de Oliveira	23	Yes	Tasso da Silveira Municipal School	Before the attack	2011	25	13	Gun	No
Adam Lanza	20	No	Sandy Hook Elementary School	Before the attack	2012	28	28	Gun	No
Bryan Oliver	16	No	Taft Union High School	At the time of attack	2013	2	0	Gun	Yes
Karl Pierson	18	No	Arapahoe High School	At the time of attack	2013	2	2	Gun	No
Myron May	31	No	Florida State University	Before the attack	2014	4	3	Gun	No
Chris Harper-Mercer	26	No	Umpqua Community College	At the time of attack	2015	17 - 19	10	Gun	No

## Discussion

### *Policy Implications*

In regards to the possible motivating factors that were found in this study, which include: political motives, religious motives, experiences of rejection, experiences of bullying, peer influence, anger, mental health, and experiences of abuse, I suggest focusing on policies regarding bullying, rejection, abuse, and mental health. I am choosing not to propose policy implications in regards to political and religious motives due to the fact that I believe that political and religious motives are more of a personal interpretation and I feel that it will be much more difficult to attempt to change a person's religious and political views than it will be to address issues of bullying, rejection, abuse, and mental health. This in no way means that I feel political and religious motives are any less influential or important compared to the other suggested motivations. The biggest change that I feel should be made is school staff awareness. Fox and Harding (2005) describe how many school officials are unaware of students who may be suffering from a variety of emotional, social, and/or behavioral problems.

Since bullying and rejection are closely related to each other, I believe that the following proposed policy implications will address both of these factors. First, I propose that the number of counselors and other related professionals, be increased in schools. Once the number of staff has been increased I then propose that each counselor be assigned to a specific group of students and each student must check in with their counselor at designated times throughout the school year. These designated check-ins would be implemented around possible high-stress times, such as the start of each semester, midterms, and finals week. Additionally, if any staff member notices a

significant change in a student they need to report this to that student's counselor so that they could look into following up on the situation. If a staff member has to break up an altercation, both students should be immediately referred to their counselor so that they can address the situation and understand the circumstances leading up to the event, rather than immediately punishing the students. Teachers should also look into assigning group projects, in order to build peer relationships in the class. However, it may be an important factor to consider how these projects are assigned, as it may be best to assign the students into groups themselves, so that no student is left out, or chosen last, resulting in them feeling left out or otherwise rejected.

In regards to mental health and abuse I feel that each school should be assigned a school psychologist. If the school is too small, the budget is too tight, or some other factor is preventing the school from being able to employ a full time on campus psychologist, then I propose that they at least have a psychologist available at specified times, either for a certain number of hours each day or a certain day each week. Although I am proposing that a psychologist be available to students I do not propose that each student be required to meet with them or undergo a psychological evaluation, unless requested by the student or guardian. Specifically in the case of abuse, if a student's assigned counselor notices any sign of abuse then they should refer that student to the school's psychologist for further examination.

As Rocque (2012) mentions, many school policies that are currently in place, in regards to school shootings, involve focusing on reducing school shootings. Due to the uncertainty of when and where a school shooting will occur, I propose schools creating active shooter protocols, so that if a school shooting does occur both students and staff



will be better prepared on how to handle the situation. I propose that active shooter drills be implemented the same way fire drills and other emergency plans are implemented. Additionally, I propose that all schools have access to a threat assessment team. Virginia, Illinois, and Connecticut have all mandated threat assessment teams in their public colleges and universities and Virginia even requires them in all K-12 public schools now. (Follman, 2015) I recommend that everywhere else should also follow in their footsteps and mandate threat assessment teams in their colleges and universities so that they could look deeper into students that a counselor or psychologist may be concerned about.

### ***Limitations***

This research originally began as a study of mass murder attacks occurring at a variety of public locations around the world. However, this topic turned out to be too extensive for the purposes of this study. In reaction to this, I propose future research focusing on shootings occurring at public locations other than schools, both specifically in the United States, and internationally. Some of these shootings could include the Colorado movie theater shooting, the Fort Lauderdale airport shooting, and the Charleston church shooting, to name a few. Additionally, further studies could look at the similarities and differences between mass shootings occurring at schools versus other public locations in the United States. Additional studies could also look at the similarities and differences between mass shootings occurring at schools versus other public locations internationally. Later studies could then be conducted with a focus on mass shootings occurring at public locations other than schools in the United States and internationally, to compare the similarities and differences between the two populations. Some limitations for the current study included a lack of reliable information from

legitimate news sources on attacks occurring both before the early 2000s and outside of the United States. Additionally, this study had to disregard a few of the more recent shootings that it was originally studying due to a lack of available verifiable information. There is also a lack of a database in regards to keeping track of the details of school and other mass shooting events.

While conducting research on previous studies related to school-based mass murder attacks, it was discovered that there was a noticeable lack of religious and political reasons mentioned. When reading news articles related to more recent shootings, it was noticed that many of these attacks mentioned possible religious or political motives. It is recommended that future studies look into a possible relationship between these motivations and recent mass murder attacks. Comparisons could be conducted to view where mass murder attacks took place in the late 1900s and early 2000s versus where mass murder attacks are taking place today. Are mass shooters moving away from school shootings and targeting other places? If so, is there a reason for this change? Is there a difference in their motivations? Is this the reason why the locations of the attacks have changed?

### **Conclusion**

There is no one definitive reason why a perpetrator of a school shooting commits their attack. Different perpetrators commit their attacks for a variety of reasons. Even if a perpetrator specifically lists a reason for their attack, this may only be the main reason, or the trigger, for what caused them to carry out their shooting. Often, there is not one particular reason why each perpetrator did what they did. It appears that most commonly it is a combination of factors that influenced a perpetrator to commit their attack. A

person might be more apt to commit a school shooting if they are currently, or have previously, experienced abuse, rejection, bullying, and/or mental illness. Additionally, political motives, religious motives, and negative peer influences can also be considered important factors to look at when determining if a person will be more likely to commit a school shooting. Rather than trying to pinpoint an exact reason why someone committed a school shooting, it may be more beneficial to look at what risk factors a person is experienced that may have influenced them to perpetrate their act. Once these common risk factors are diagnosed then it may be helpful to compare which risk factors appeared most frequently depending on the location of the attack.

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