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The Emergence of “The School Shooter” as a Category of Analysis: What the 1990s Can Teach Us About Youth Violence

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THE EMERGENCE OF “THE SCHOOL SHOOTER” AS A CATEGORY OF
ANALYSIS

THE EMERGENCE OF “THE SCHOOL SHOOTER” AS A CATEGORY OF
ANALYSIS: WHAT THE 1990s CAN TEACH US ABOUT YOUTH
VIOLENCE

By

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Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
for the designation of Research and Creative Honors

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a case study of the emergence and framing of “the school shooter” as one part of the larger problem of American youth violence during the 1990s. This decade forever changed the way school safety is viewed. Although the annual number of school shootings largely remained the same from the 1970s to the early 1990s, a spike in fatalities in 1993 occurred during a fraught historical moment. A wave of youth violence, beginning in the late 1980s, helped to set the stage for new security measures, such as zero tolerance policies in schools, and the development of new social categories. These included the concept of the “super-predator” in 1995, and then creation of the category of “school shooter” soon thereafter. On April 20th, 1999, two teenage boys would commit the deadliest school shooting of the 1990s, Columbine. In 2000, the FBI would publish a school shooter profile, utilizing Columbine as framework. The thesis analyzes ten case studies of major school shootings from 1996-1999, where this new category of violence coalesced. Although the phenomenon predated Columbine, this shooting became the lasting image of a school shooter, and the lens to analyze the shootings that came before it. By analyzing the etiology of school shooters through the lens of criminological theories, the thesis seeks to explain the nature of this type of crime and how to critically think about school safety in a world where school shootings are becoming our reality.

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This thesis wouldn't have been possible without the help of my Honors College committee. Their commitment to my project held this project together. I am forever grateful for their invaluable expertise and support for my personal academic journey.

During the start of my thesis proposal, I grappled with the challenge of creating a structure for my initial research question. I didn't think that my topic was feasible as it looked too broad, and I was struggling to narrow the topic into a question that I could research effectively. It was in this process, that Dr. David Tanenhaus's main discipline, history, helped me establish a steady timeline for the project and make it more manageable. I would like to closely thank my faculty advisor, Dr. Tanenhaus, as he played a pivotal role in the framing of the thesis proposal and the structure of the final thesis. I am grateful for all the time that he has invested into my project and his unique input in the original framework and making of the final thesis.

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My thesis wouldn't have been possible without doctoral student Christopher Forepaugh and Dr. Terance Mieth. It was during one of my introductory criminal justice courses where I first met Christopher and Dr. Mieth. In this class, I encountered a documentary of a school shooter case. This section of the class interested me as soon as I watched the documentary, prompting me to ask questions on the phenomenon of the

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school shooter. This ignited my passion to explore this issue and turn it into a personal research project. Christopher was a graduate student in this class, and I was impressed by his unique thought process and insightful contributions to the class material. Furthermore, Dr. Miethe’s profound expertise in criminological theories and crime statistics served as the backbone of this project. Finally, I would like to thank my family for supporting me along the production of this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

School shootings have become a normal but tragic part of life in the twenty-first century United States. This thesis studies the rise of the school shooting phenomenon during the 1990s and how it has become a routine part of society. Before our contemporary definition was created, a “school shooter” was a student who belonged to an after-school rifle club. Today, a “school shooter” is shorthand for an adolescent who commits mass murder at a school. Between 1996 and 1999, there were ten prominent school shootings in the K-12, public school system. As this thesis will show, the rise of zero tolerance policies during the late 1980s, followed by the creation of the super-predator theory in 1995, set the stage for the media response to the problem of the “school shooter” during the final years of the twentieth century.

This thesis is informed by historical and criminological methods and sources. It also engages interdisciplinary approaches between adolescent development and juvenile justice in order to understand the warning signs behind school shooters. Scholars such as Peter Langman and Ralph Larkin have taken a psychological approach to try to understand the warning signs of school shooters. On the other hand, Laurence Steinberg has taken an adolescent development approach by analyzing how the brain functions during adolescence and how it is applicable to juvenile offenders. In 2000, a year after the Columbine massacre, the FBI released *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*, an in-depth report on warning signs and prevention methods for the school shooting phenomenon. Certain scholars and the FBI have attempted to explain the development of school shooters as a category of violence, however, the attributes and characteristics identified have not been applied to criminological theories.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In the research amongst the school shooter profile, scholars have highlighted key traits as warning signs of school shooters such as weapons, video games, alternative culture, and Nazi fascination. However, scholars ignore criminological theories as being contributive to the development of warning signs. This thesis draws on Social Process Theories, which provide explanations for individual criminal behavior and how social interactions and processes contribute to deviancy. The risk factors that are included in this category of criminological theories include peer pressure, familial disputes, academic performance, stigmatization/stereotyping, and learning good and bad crime values, all of which will be applied to the ten case studies.

The Columbine Debate

There has been debate on whether or not the Columbine shooting began a new era of policing public schools. My findings support the argument made by Kristin Henning that the criminalization of public schools began before Columbine, the “deadliest school shooting in U.S. history” (Henning 132). In Henning’s book, she argues that after Columbine, funding for school safety increased in various states (Henning 132), but that the criminalization of school actually started earlier and was driven by fears of Black youth.

Adolescent Development

A scholar that adds insight to the world of adolescence is Laurence Steinberg, who is a university professor of psychology. In *Age of Opportunity*, Steinberg discusses leading juvenile statistics and the reasoning behind adolescent risk-taking and impulsivity. He also brings in suggestions as to how parenting and high schools should be

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remodeled. Steinberg’s book provides a deeper dive into the roots of adolescence and provides theories such as “brain plasticity” which explain how experiences affects adolescents and the vulnerabilities that they face. Furthermore, Steinberg states that adolescence is a period “of brain growth that is far more sensitive,” remarking that individuals remember more memories from their adolescence (Steinberg 1). Experiences in school are also heightened because of the plentitude of hormones, in combination with emotions, making mundane events in school monumental to students.

Steinberg’s work is applicable to the main study because in order to understand the reasoning behind the phenomenon of school shooters, it is necessary to understand the risk factors that they encompass. For example, in almost all of the case studies, students were bullied, with the student seeking revenge towards the bully in a school shooting. Steinberg’s work is necessary to understand adolescence development, for example in order to see how adolescents internalize events such as bullying. Steinberg also claims that the development of the adolescent brain is characterized by reorganization. This means that in this period, after the brain reaches adult size at age ten, friendships are harder to form, and children start to form cliques (Steinberg 39). Many of the school shooters depicted in the case studies are loners, outsiders, with many students not knowing who they are at the school.

Steinberg also describes adolescence as a period of highs and lows, emphasizing that many teenagers become more emotional, are sensitive towards opinions from others, and are determined to experience intense events, or “sensation seeking” (Steinberg 39). Furthermore, since during puberty the brain is remodeled, the drive for experiencing intense moments is heightened because of the concentration of dopamine receptors in

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teenagers. All of the individuals in the case studies analyzed were experiencing intense moments, that being a first relationship or an interaction with drugs.

Identified Risk Factors

Another scholar I am depending on scientific research is Peter Langman, a professor of psychology, who specializes in the analysis of school shooters. In his book, *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*, he takes on a psychological perspective on school shooters and categorizes some of the most high-profile school shooters into 1) psychotic, 2) sociopathic, 3) other personality traits. Langman’s research gave me a better understanding of the mental history of the school shooters that I am focusing on for the case studies. Furthermore, his book has taken into account stories from classmates of the school shooter as well as relatives, in order to make the story as accurate as possible. This is important as the thesis proves that there were certain misconceptions with school shooting incidents, with the bigger the case in the media, the bigger the discrepancies.

Although Langman focuses on neuropsychiatric disorders, the main study is centering on overlooked risk factors such as alternative music and trench coats. This thesis uses Langman’s analysis on certain shooters’ disorders to provide context for their engagement into the risk factors. For example, Langman names Eric Harris as a psychopath, stating that the central feature for that disorder is “an inflated self-image” (Langman 33). Therefore, the context behind Eric’s delusions of grandeur is based on his physical defect of having a sunken chest. Therefore, Langman connects Eric’s rage against people with his disability because of his fascination with the Nazis, who believed in an Aryan race, yet Eric had a sunken chest disorder.

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Social Process Theories

I will be depending on several criminological theories to apply to the ten case studies. One of them is Gottfredson and Hirschi’s General Theory of Crime. This theory states that there are two control systems that regulate human behavior. These are social controls and self-control. Social control focuses on the external such as attachments to parents whereas self-control is based on the internal. Based on Gottfredson and Hirschi’s research, they concluded that factors associated with deviancy are indicative of having low self-control. Furthermore, impulsivity and risk-taking behavior is associated with low self-control amongst children. In the main study, a lack of self-control is measured through poor grades, substance abuse, and having an authoritarian family background. These factors are one of many mentioned in the current research by Gottfredson and Hirschi (Gottfredson, Hirschi 1990).

Another theory I will be applying to the case studies is Edwin Lemert’s Theory of Secondary Deviance under labeling theories. This theory talks about how social control efforts such as sentencing does more harm than good. Social control efforts label individuals as “no good,” reduce the number of opportunities for a reintegration into society and leads the person to develop a deviant self-image of themselves. Over time, this person will internalize their label, and act based on that label. This is called “deviance amplification,” which leads the student to associate themselves with other deviants and resent those who embody social norms (Rosenberg, 2010).

The last theory I will be applying is Travis Hirschi’s Social Bond Theory. The reasoning behind this theory is that individuals who have strong bonds to social groups such as through school and family are less likely to get involved in deviancy.

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Furthermore, Hirschi argues that humans are inherently evil and that the bonds that control the way that the individual acts. The main bonds that individuals have are attachments to family and friends, involvement in activities, and beliefs on obeying the rules of society. When these bonds are broken, an individual has more time to think about deviancy and eventually engage in deviant acts (Hirschi 1969).

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My first research question is how and when did the category of the school shooter become “naturalized”? For example, how and when did “school shooter” become part of the American lexicon? Finding an answer to these questions will help us learn the significance of the school shooter phenomenon and its continuance.

A second question is to what extent, if at all, might media representation shape public perceptions of the profile of the school shooter during the 1990s? By answering this question, I hope to shed light on how the media creates misconceptions and stereotypes of school shooters. Many people are interviewed in school shooting news coverages and occasionally the information about the school shooter is inaccurate. This in turn causes the public to believe stereotypes and inaccurate information in order to create a skewed profile of the school shooter.

My final question is if the Columbine school shooting create a new era of for the policing of public schools, or did it only accelerate trends already in place?

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METHODOLOGY

I have conducted a historical analysis of primary sources from the 1990s, which included newspapers, personal narratives, and the FBI’s initial 2000 school shooter profile to illuminate how contemporaries tried to understand what caused school shootings. I have also examined scholarly studies published during the 1990s in order to see what issues were prevalent and their relevance, if at all, in the development of the modern-day school shooter profile.

Ultimately, the thesis focused on ten high-profile school shooting cases from 1996 to 1999. I analyzed these cases of school shooters through the lens of criminological theories, which provided an in-depth explanation to the school shooting phenomenon. I also looked closely at how people at the time tried to make sense of the new phenomenon of the school shooter, by analyzing zero-tolerance policies and the emergence of the super-predator rhetoric as a response to deviancy in the mid-1990s. This project helps us learn how the public attempted to solve the epidemic in the 1990s and how concepts like zero tolerance and the super-predator were developed.

Historical work can show us sequencing, helps us explain the context of the topic, and helps us explain the decisions made at the time. I have collected data based on official statistics and qualitative assessment of published sources of the time period. I focused specifically on the FBI’s first published study of this supposedly new phenomenon.

Application of Criminological Theories

In this thesis, I have researched and applied Social Process Theories, which include control theories (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi’s Social Bond theory), labeling

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theories (e.g., Lemert’s Secondary Deviancy theory), and the General Theory of Crime.

These theories provided an explanation as to the etiology (causes of crime) and epidemiology (the distribution of crime) when being applied to various cases. To elaborate, etiology are the biological, psychological, situational, and sociological factors that contribute to criminal behavior. Epidemiology refers to the social, spatial, and temporal distribution of crime, focusing on the disparities between crime rates in certain environments. Labeling theory proposes that human behavior is influenced by how other people in society perceive them to be. Therefore, negative effects on one’s self esteem can create a self-internalization of the label. Social bond theory says that people who have close bonds with social groups such as family, school, peers, and religious organizations are less likely to engage in criminal behavior. Although these theories state that any individual has the ability to become a criminal, these concepts can be applied to high-profile school shooter cases for prevention methods.

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PART 1: BEFORE THE SCHOOL SHOOTER

Historical Overview

School shootings were once associated with after-school rifle clubs. Students that participated in the shooter clubs got a chance to compete against other schools and learn how to fire a wide arrangement of weapons. For example, Justice Antonin Scalia, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice recalls that he was part of his military school’s rifle team. In a 2008 *Washington Post* newspaper article, John Bolton quoted Justice Scalia, who stated: “I used to travel on the subway from Queens to Manhattan with a rifle. Can you imagine doing that today?” This anecdote highlights how the image of an adolescent with a rifle has drastically changed. Until the early 1990s, the National Rifle Association, for example, sponsored rifle clubs at public high schools. The association provided funding for participating schools to purchase weapons for their teams because teaching children to fire a gun at a young age was considered educational.

During the 1990s, however, riflery clubs ceased to be a part of public high schools. In response to the anti-gun sentiment, city gun clubs were created with the intention of integrating children into gun culture. In a 1991 newspaper article by *The New York Times*, Michael Zirmo, a gun shop owner and creator of the Downtown Rifle and Pistol Club, stated that the purpose of their club was to prove that “there’s nothing evil about shooting.” Zirmo explained that the end of gun clubs in schools would produce “a generation that grew up never shooting a gun.”

The image of “the school shooter” has drastically changed during the 1990s as a result of a spike in fatalities in 1993, followed by the media’s coverage of high profile

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school shootings in the ensuing years. Today, the phrase “the school shooter” is shorthand for someone, often an adolescent, who commits mass murder at a school.

Zero Tolerance Policy

Zero tolerance is a broad policy stance that was originally enacted by schools in the 1980s to decrease crime and violence amongst students. Russ Skiba and Reece Peterson define zero tolerance as “policies that punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor,” referring that all criminal acts at school should have severe punishment (Skiba, Peterson 373). One clear example of “zero tolerance” policies was the so-called “War on Drugs” in the United States during the 1980s and the subsequent public fear that the schools had become sites for gang and drug culture. In particular, during the Reagan and Bush Administrations, school districts across the country “promulgated zero tolerance policies that called for expulsion for possession of drugs or participation in gang-related activity” (Skiba, Peterson 373). Suspensions were the most common tolerance practices in the 1990s, partly because it removed violent, crime-prone students from school premises for a temporary time period and would allow them to ‘cool off’ upon their re-arrival to school.

Other initiatives associated with “zero tolerance” policies included implementing the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (DARE) in schools over the country by utilizing funding from federal, state, local government sources, and private donors. In a CRS Report for Congress, Jennifer Neisner explained that the DARE program is “designed to help students learn skills for resisting peer pressure to experiment and use tobacco, drugs, and alcohol.” The program was created in 1983 by the LAPD and the Los Angeles Unified District. By 1986, Neisner states that “the program had reached all 345

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elementary and 58 junior high schools in [Los Angeles].” This demonstrated the impact that DARE had in that era and the agreement of parents, police departments, and school districts to implement the program. The DARE Slogan, ‘just say no,’ was also broadcast as public service advertisements (PSAs). The most famous PSA included the image of a cracked egg being fried on a pan, along with commentary stating, “this is your brain on drugs,” in an attempt to shock students into refraining from using drugs.

Additionally, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) came out with their own PSAs by featuring popular celebrities of the time period to show teens the effects that drugs can have on their physical appearance. Neisner notes in the evaluation of the DARE program for Congress that studies in 1993 “found lower cigarette, alcohol, and drug use among DARE students, and better attitudes towards drug use,” which emphasized the benefits of the program. Along with the anti-drug program, Congress decided to make the ‘war on drugs’ a collective responsibility. For example, in the One Hundred Fourth Congress’s second session, in 1996, Judge John Shadegg stated that “society must take an unequivocal stand against illegal drugs,” emphasizing the importance of society’s involvement in issues that impact the future generation.

In the 1990s, the rationale was that having more police presence on campus would deter students from participating in acts of violence. The ‘no fighting’ policy was implemented in the early 1990s due to the increase of violent disputes between students. In a study done in Henry Foss Senior High School in Tacoma, Washington, ‘No fighting’ policies were implemented aggressively due to the increasing number of violent student incidents. Students had a conscious reminder of the policy through visuals in the school newspaper, new student orientations, and assemblies (Burke, Herbert).

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As it turned out, however, these initiatives implemented in response to varying issues in schools created a parallel to the prison system. In *The Real School Safety Problem* by Aaron Kupchik, he discusses that the various safety measures have “fortified” schools since “we now have added drug-sniffing police dogs searching students’ possessions” and “suspend, expel, or arrest students for minor misbehavior” (Kupchik 3). Kupchik also discusses the implementation of surveillance cameras in schools, an example of allocating the school budget for security functions. This heightened need of monitoring students prompted the installation of surveillance cameras in discreet but visible areas of the ceilings in schools. In turn, this allowed school administrators to monitor students without a physical presence.

Since the Reagan administration launched their ‘War on Drugs,’ a new problem emerged, which was school shootings. These zero tolerance policies, which were originally focused on gang and drug activity, now addressed initiatives to create ‘gun-free’ schools. In 1990, Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which stated that “It shall be unlawful for any individual knowingly to possess a firearm at a place that the individual knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, is a school zone.” In a 5-4 decision, *U.S. v Lopez*, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that that the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 was unconstitutional. Years after this act was declared unconstitutional, the problem of increasing school shootings and violence was still relevant. This prompted US President Bill Clinton to sign into law the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. The gun-free school legislation provided that:

Within one year, every State receiving Federal aid for elementary and secondary education must have a law requiring school districts to expel from school for at

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least one year any student who brings a gun to school, subject to certain exceptions. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act funds comprehensive violence prevention programs, including those that enhance school security (“Memorandum on Implementation of Safe schools Legislation”).

The revised anti-gun act also specified what constituted a ‘weapon’ in the language of the bill. For example, in an article in the *Phi Delta Kappan*, Chris Piphio discussed how the interpretation of ‘weapon’ can be different based on federal or state law. Inside the definition of federal law, a ‘weapon’ is categorized as “guns, bombs, grenades, rockets, and missiles,” (Piphio). On the other hand, state law “may use a broader definition of weapon that does include knives” (Piphio). This new gun legislature proposed effective, temporal initiatives that were semi-effective in confiscating weapons and expelling students.

The Superpredator

The political scientist John Dilulio, Jr. created and disseminated his “superpredator theory” in 1995. Based on the increase in crime rates and fear of juvenile delinquency, criminologists and policymakers started to develop explanations for the rise of this phenomenon. Dilulio, who was a professor at Princeton University, predicted that there would be a substantial increase in the rate of violent juvenile crime because of the rise of “superpredators,” who were more vicious than earlier generations of criminal youth. He claimed in a 1995 story for *The Weekly Standard*, that boys ages 14-17 are more likely to commit crime in the coming five years. More importantly, they would commit the crimes without remorse. Dilulio predicted that by 2010 about 270,000 juvenile superpredators would be out “roaming the streets of America,” stating that these teenagers are born crime prone. It is important to highlight that the superpredator concept saturated the

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airwaves and helped to frame the subsequent coverage of the emerging concern about “school shooters.”

It is important to point out that Dilulio’s theory was controversial. For example, law professor Franklin Zimring, author of *American Youth Violence*, criticized Dilulio’s projections by saying that, “the phrase ‘juvenile superpredator’ is meaningless because it has never been defined” because there was no specific crime attached to the term. More importantly, the superpredator theory grouped all crimes committed by juveniles and completely disregarded analyzing individual cases. In an Op-Ed in the *Los Angeles Times*, Zimring criticized the claim that 270,000 juveniles would become superpredators since Dilulio arrived at this number based on faulty assumption. For example, Dilulio used studies from Philadelphia that “show[ed] 6% of all boys are responsible for about half of all the police contacts with minors,” claiming that more children under age 6 will become superpredators instead of children above age 13. Zimring undercut Dilulio’s theory by stating that it would be inaccurate to assume that younger children are more crime prone since “93% of all juvenile arrests for violence occur after age 13,” exhibiting a pattern of crime through age. Zimring believed that it wasn’t children who were changing into superpredators, but it was a combination of environmental factors which prompted children to act out in violence. This included the effects of the post-80s “War on Drugs” and surge of violence in the early 1990s which prompted the enactment of zero-tolerance policies and government legislation. Ultimately, Dilulio’s theory was rejected by many scholars of crime due to a lack of evidence and the dramatic decrease in juvenile offending that had begun in 1993.

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In relation to school shootings, the Columbine victim narrative has been linked to the superpredator myth. For example, in a study done by Glenn Muschert at Miami University, he examined how the media coverage on the 1999 Columbine school shooting exhibited themes or aspects of the superpredator myth. The Columbine shooting has received more media attention than other school shootings in history, which I will discuss in detail in the framing section of the thesis. Multiple people became victims of this event, and according to Muschert, “the connections revealed between the superpredator myth and the Columbine victim narratives do suggest that the media drew on this preexisting crime myth,” indicating that the myth was used to shape news coverages. Muschert also incorporated evidence from other studies in order to argue how the superpredator myth was utilized in how the media created news stories surrounding Columbine. The content within these news coverages, which included footage of well-recognized figures of Littleton, “drew on this [superpredator] social myth when crafting stories,” based on the emotional language used. The sensational aspect of school shooting media coverages “increase[d] fear of crime” and “increase[d] support for ‘get tough’ crime policies,” making the media focus more on crime rather than starting a conversation on prevention and public policy. These ‘get tough’ policies were catered towards youth and were present by 1997, integrating themselves in zero-tolerance policies in schools. This was also a policy approach that was heavily referred to in youth government legislation.

The creation of the superpredator term also caused the categorization and labeling of young criminals in the 1990s. For example, in the 1997 *Chicago Tribune*, Bob Greene states that the labeling of the superpredator term by society causes “a code that reinforces

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rather than restrains their violent, hair-trigger mentality,” making arrest or imprisonment less feared as to compared to the labeling provided by society. The superpredator theory also categorizes young black males as being more crime prone. In an article by critic Bruce Shapiro for *The Nation*, he claimed that John Dilulio’s theory is remarkably similar to ‘The Bell Curve,’ which contained “racial discriminatory theories.” The theory also separated youth criminals as primarily being involved in violent gangs and living in “moral poverty” or low-income communities.

A surge of policies were created throughout the 1990s, with the superpredator theory in mind. For example, Shapiro states that the myth drove Wisconsin to spend “38 million on two high-security juvenile prisons,” and in New York, State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver wanted children to be tried as adults in court. According to Gary Marx from *The Chicago Tribune*, criminologists argued that the cause of this surge of crime was due to “the spread of guns, gangs, and the drug trade,” acknowledging that a violent environment contributes to juvenile crime.

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PART 2: COMPREHENDING THE SCHOOL SHOOTER

In 2000, a year after the Columbine massacre, the FBI released *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*, a model procedure that was designed to be used by school faculty, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. Based on the imminent concerns of families affected by school shootings, this threat assessment served as a profile for the school shooter as its own category of violence. In their creation of a profile, the FBI took into consideration a student’s personality, their family dynamics, their relationship with school, and how they behaved socially. The FBI also classified “threats” into categories, ranging from low-level to high-level threats, corresponding their own criteria.

Although the FBI profile of the school shooter recognized the phenomenon as its own category of violence, their risk factors could be considered harmful if followed extensively. For example, the FBI states that ‘leakage’ is a trait where “a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that may signal an impending violent act,” (O’ Toole 16). Based on the literature that is on adolescent development by Laurence Steinberg, adolescence is a time period filled many changes, and a student could express themselves in a negative way because of these hormonal changes. Therefore, risk factors could be misrepresented when focusing on them without context.

For this thesis, I have adopted some of the criteria that the FBI has identified as warning signs for the school shooter. For example, the report names “unusual interest in sensational violence,” “negative role models,” and “fascination with Violence-Filled Entertainment,” as some of the most prominent signs (O’ Toole 20). Based on the role of

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media in Bandura’s theory and the focus of media in the study’s research questions, these factors will be applied and taken into consideration analyzing the role of media in the case studies. The main study also investigates whether the risk factors of the 1999 Columbine school shooting, which set the stage for school shooter misconceptions and stereotypes, were developed before. Based on the timing of the FBI profile and the response needed by the media, the FBI formulated their risk factors with Columbine as a main model. This was due to how prevalent Columbine was in the media and how it outshined shootings that occurred before, making that shooting the lasting image of a school shooter to the American public.

School Shooting Statistics 1970-2020

The data used for this graph has been derived from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

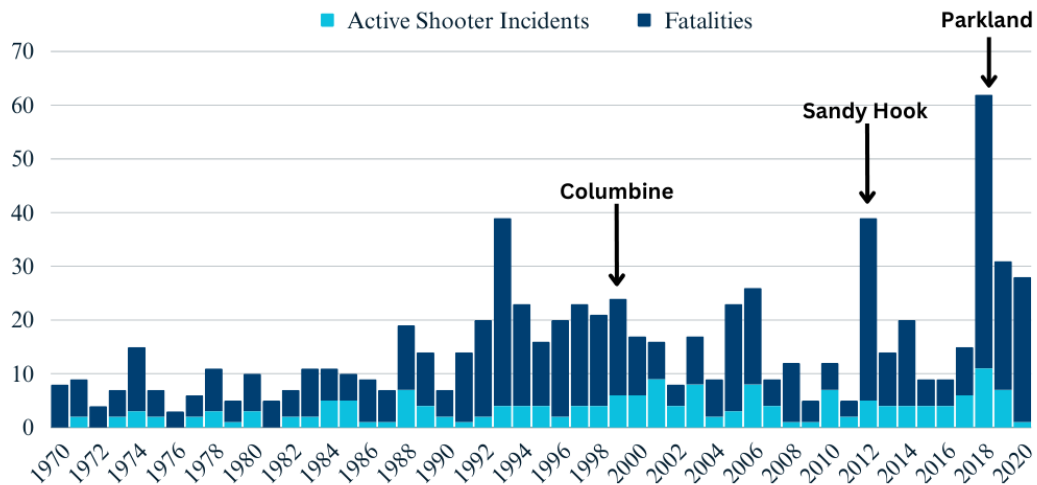


Fig. 1. Graph that showcases the progression of school shooter incidents and fatalities from 1970 to 2020 (Center for Homeland Defense and Security).

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Part two of this thesis also focuses on public reactions and the general comprehension of the school shooter as the 1990s progresses. There were various school shootings that left last impressions on the American public during the middle of the 1990s, however, the ones that were at the start of the 90s did not garnish as much attention as these other ones. This is based on how sensational the coverage of the school shooting was portrayed in the media, how many fatalities there were, and if there was widespread circulation of the shooting. Other external factors that compromised early school shootings were the lack of prominent fatalities and wounded people. A graph has been created in order to understand ‘the school shooter’ phenomenon develop early in the 90s. There is a spike in 1993, which is the result of a multitude of low fatality school shootings. In the 2000s, prominent school shootings are six years apart, with high fatalities.

Case studies can provide answers for the context behind the statistics of school shooting incidents, by comparing the number of shootings per year during the 90s and evaluating how it correlates to public perceptions of school violence at the time. Ten case studies between the years 1996-1999 have been selected for analysis because of their satisfaction in the criteria selected for the current study. The main criteria for selecting school shootings are relevance of video games, trench coats, white supremacy, alternative music, guns/weapons, and satanism. Some of these factors are notably present in all of them, while others are not present, but have one factor. Selection was also determined if the school shooting had at least one wounded victim and was committed by a male juvenile, ages 12-18, at a United States K-12 public school. These selected cases have been analyzed through the lens of criminological theories, such as Gottfredson and

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Hirschi’s social bond theory, and Lemert’s labeling theory. The chart below visualizes the ten school shootings chosen for case study analysis. The goal of the ten case studies is to analyze how the factors in the case studies facilitated a school shooting and if ‘the school shooter’ was a category before Columbine.

Table 1
Case Study of Ten Major School Shootings From 1996-1999

Date	Shooter Name	Age	Location	Fatalities
February 2 nd , 1996	Barry Loukaitis	14	Frontier Junior High (Moses Lake, Washington)	3
February 19 th , 1997	Evan Ramsey	16	Bethel Regional High School (Bethel, Alaska)	2
October 1 st , 1997	Luke Woodham	16	Pearl High School (Pearl, Mississippi)	3
December 1 st , 1997	Michael Carneal	14	Heath High School (Paducah, Kentucky)	3
December 15 th , 1997	Joseph “Colt” Todd	14	Stamps High School (Stamps, Arkansas)	0
March 24 th , 1998	Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden	13	Westside Middle School (Jonesboro, Arkansas)	5
April 24 th , 1998	Andrew Wurst	14	James Parker Middle School (Edinboro, Pennsylvania)	1
May 21 st , 1998	Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	15	Thurston High School (Springfield, Oregon)	4
April 20 th , 1999	Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold	18, 17	Columbine High School (Littleton, Colorado)	15

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*May 20th, 1999	Anthony Thomas “T.J.” Solomon	15	Heritage High School (Conyers, Georgia)	0
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*First admission of a student claiming they want to be “a school shooter.”

Author’s Note

Before reading the ten case studies, it is imperative to recognize the significance of the criteria that I am identifying. The reader should focus on the factors present in the case studies and think about the role of these factors in the shootings. The reader should think about whether these factors directly contributed to the final outcome or if it was a combination of the factors. Furthermore, as the case studies approach 1999, the reader should ask themselves if the cases before Columbine resembled the Columbine shooting and if the student considered themselves as a “school shooter.” I have included a criteria section below to showcase the role of mass media in youth violence and to provide deeper context for the reader as they navigate towards the case studies.

CRITERIA

The Role of Video Games in Youth Violence

Critics of video games have argued that they cause adolescents to commit violent acts. In the 1990s, the genre of first-person shooter (FPS) games emerged, making the player feel as if they were holding a weapon. Popular FPS games from the 1990s were *Doom*, *Quake*, and *Redneck Rampage*. Avid gamers claim that the thrill amongst first person shooter games is not necessarily about the shooting aspect but due to the competitive nature of getting one’s blood pumping. The majority of these video games have extremely violent themes and gory imagery. This ranges from blood being spattered on the screen to hearing the sounds of a gun reloading. *Doom* has been credited as the

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pioneer of the FPS genre by many, giving credit to the advanced visuals, screenplay, and multi-player features for 1993 (Nick 930 00:00-00:37). In *Doom*, players take on the role of a space marine “who is forced to face off against an invasion of demonic creatures straight from hell,” leaving players to utilize weapons such as “shotguns, rocket launchers, and chainsaws” (Nick930 00:37-00:53).

The controversy with *Doom* was caused due to the 1999 Columbine shooting. Since there was evidence that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold heavily played *Doom*, many placed the blame of the shooting on the creator of the video game. This led to the creators of *Doom*, John Carmack and John Romero, to be sued in 2001 because parents of Columbine victims claimed that “video games cause catastrophic anti-social behavior that must be prevented through strict regulation” (D’Entremont 192). Carmack earned heavy criticism from parents due to his controversial past. At the age of fourteen he broke into a school and stole Apple II computers (Plunkett). In general, parents held a negative understanding of the weight that video games had in the shooters’ lives.



Fig. 2. One of the numerous WADs Harris created that imitated the layout of Columbine High School (Columbine Video Archives).

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Young children are more impressionable and at risk for committing the violence that they witness on screen. In a 1999 gaming study by child psychologist Jeanne Funk, she concluded that younger children are more vulnerable to being affected by violence. Funk elaborates by stating that, “playing violent electronic games has been associated with such negative conditions as short-term increases in aggression.. [and] psychological dependence [to video games]” (Funk, 1999). This suggests that a variety of factors work in combination to produce aggression. These may explain why video games make up a small percentage of the impulse to violence, despite the fact that within these fantasy worlds, weapons are extremely prevalent.

Interest in Weapons

Weapons such as guns, bombs, and knives are also part of the common interests of school shooters. Young males appear to have an obsession with acquiring a number of weapons, who they receive from their father or find other means to get it. The majority of school shootings have conducted failed bomb attempts before the shooters resorted to guns. Books such as William Powell’s *The Anarchist Cookbook* provides detailed instructions on how to craft a pipe bomb at the comfort of home. In the 1994 Thurston High School shooting, which I will describe in detail in the framing section, Kip Kinkel was so fascinated with the book that “he gave a speech in class about how to make a bomb and bragged about wanting to be the next Unabomber,” (Langman 87). Kinkel also believed that by acquiring an arsenal, no one would pick on him. Therefore, he grew protective of his weapons, such as his guns and knives. In one instance, his friends played a joke by hiding his knives and Kip “flew into a rage, grabbed a kitchen knife, and

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screamed, “Give me my knife back!” These weapons were his identity, and without them he was nothing.

The majority of adolescents acquire a weapon from someone in their own family (Langman 182). Most families have a history of practicing shooting or have weapons readily at their disposal. For example, Eric Harris came a family that utilized firearms daily. Harris’s grandfather, who served in World War II “was a hunter... and his parents were leaders of a local pistol association,” (Langman 132). Therefore, guns were seen as a household item and teaching children how to properly use firearms was deemed as educational.

In another case which I will elaborate on in the framing section, Andrew Golden essentially grew up with weapons. His parents were part of the Jonesboro Practical Pistol Shooters Association and because of this, “Drew handled guns from a young age” (Langman 22). A pivotal moment in Golden’s life occurred during his sixth birthday, where he was gifted a rifle. Andrew grew extensively obsessed with weapons throughout his childhood that teachers reported that “it was his toy of choice” and that “he even did a skit about guns for his English class.”¹ These weapons which were once used to educate and teach about a rich war history, were now being used to commit mass murder.

The Role of Alternative Music

The alternative music scene was notoriously blamed as the cause for multiple school shootings in the 1990s, with law enforcement utilizing song lyrics as a scapegoat for mass murder. In 1991, the grunge movement became mainstream once the album,

¹ Cybelle Fox, Wendy D. Roth, and Katherine Newman. “A Deadly Partnership: Lethal Violence in an Arkansas Middle School.” In National Research Council, ed., *Deadly Lessons: Understanding Lethal School Violence*, pp. 101-131. (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2003), p.117.

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Nevermind, by Nirvana came out, making it more accessible to teenagers through outlets such as MTV and record stores. The grunge sound was characterized by as a new version of rock, with newer generations leaning towards the movement due to how down-to-earth the musicians were, as compared to past generations of glam rock. The new era focused on hit bands such as The Offspring, Alice In Chains, Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam, to name a few, who based their lyrics on issues surrounding the youth. This cultural environment led to the revival of the 1990s gothic subculture due to outside influences of German bands such as Rammstein and Kein Mitleid für die Mehrheit, which translates to “no pity for the majority” (Koerner). The goth subculture was also characterized by an industrial sound, which included “cold clangings of factory floors” and lyrics which questioned “life's meaning with images of violent resistance to the status quo and intense self-loathing” (Koerner). Goths of this era wore “black clothes.. paint[ed] their fingernails black” and were “fascinated with death,” largely being seen as strange and out of place in most towns. Parents were growing concerned due to the “hardhearted nihilism” that their children were undergoing while identifying as goth (Koerner).

The gothic revivalism of the 1990s included bands such as Nine Inch Nails, The Cure, and Marilyn Manson. Teenagers were mainly drawn to Marilyn Manson due to his provocative lyrics and outlandish appearance, which was characterized by heavy makeup and tattoos. Several lawsuits circulated after the Columbine shooting, where Manson was largely criticized for instigating Klebold and Harris to commit mass murder. This was based on the posters that both of the boys had in their rooms and Manson lyric references. During a 1999 interview regarding on the allegations, Manson stated, “The media has

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unfairly scapegoated the music industry. . . and has speculated-with no basis in truth-that artists like myself are in some way to blame,” (Jipping).

Contrary to Manson’s claims, however, scholars have argued that alternative music desensitizes adolescents to violence and ignites an aggressive state of mind. According to Craig Anderson, psychology professor at Iowa State University, the connection between media violence and aggressive behavior has been established for over six decades, “regardless of culture,” beginning with the birth of video games in the 90s (“Iowa State University”). Furthermore, Anderson suggests that “media violence is similar to other known risk factors for aggression,” emphasizing that violent video games can be the same as other aggressors, based on the graphic content (“Iowa State University”). However, the initial research that was coming out in the 1990s led to the censorship of alternative music by record companies. This warning came in the form of a black- and-white block on the right corner of albums, bearing the words, “Parental Advisory Explicit Content.”

Manson’s music has been repeatedly correlated with various school shootings, which have led to various lawsuits. According to student accounts, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold listened to Marilyn Manson, but they appeared to be more attracted to the German industrial sound. Although they did not listen to Manson extensively, the song themes and lyrics played a big component of their lives. However, school shooters such as Kip Kinkel, Andrew Wurst, and Luke Woodham were avid fans of Manson, and listened to his songs consistently (Jipping).

It is imperative to note the impact that Manson’s lyrics had on a young impressionable audience. For example, a scientific study in 1999 found that "fans of rock

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music containing potentially negative themes (i.e., suicide, homicide, and satanic themes) were more likely to report that they knew all of the words to their favorite songs,” providing an explanation as to why adolescents relate deeply to the lyrics embedded in the songs. In the song, “Lunchbox,” Manson describes pulling the trigger on a bully with the lyrics detailing, “the next bully who fu**s with me is ‘gonna get my metal”... Pow pow pow,” (Jipping).

It is evident that Manson’s lyrics are charged with a hatred for humanity based on his personal life, in which he stated in an interview that in public school he “didn't end up having a lot of friends and music was the only thing [he] had to enjoy,” (Kipping). The feeling of isolation and self-loathe made Manson grow angry at the people who picked on him in his youth, leading to his violent lyrics. Adolescents feel the same way, with many of them relying on Manson’s music to get them through their school day. Alongside with listening to bands in the gothic subculture, the style choice of a trench coat was generally associated by the end of the 1990s as part of the image of a school shooter.

The Symbolic Significance of Trench Coats

As a style choice, the wearing of trench coats has been derived from the gothic subculture. The reason why trench coats have become popular in the subculture is because “they conceal differences,” but most importantly, “people who are attracted to clans and cults seek to lose their individuality and discover power and pride in a group,” (Rosenblatt). The reason why many school shooters wear trench coats is to show how different they are from the rest of society, by being a part of the gothic subculture. Adolescents in that subculture can recognize others in the movement by seeing the distinct characteristics of the gothic look.

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Films released in the 1990s such as *The Matrix*, *Heathers*, and *The Basketball Diaries* also focused on the trench coat look. These were both “fantasy and action films and television shows, frequently targeted and marketed to teenagers and young adults,” in which teenagers wanted to become the embodiment of the main characters of these films (Caldwell). For example, in the 1999 hit film, *The Matrix*, “actor Keanu Reeves and his fellow computer hackers pack an arsenal of weapons beneath their dark trench coats,” being eerily similar to the reality of the Columbine shooting (Howell). In another example, the 1989 film *Heathers*, stars “Christian Slater - in black trench coat” and he “attempts to blow up his school,” (Pevere). *The Basketball Diaries* with a young Leonardo DiCaprio also features a scene in which the young teenager goes through the fantasy of shooting his teacher and classmates.

The trench coat has been associated with school shootings due to the various precautions that school districts have taken to prohibit the wearing of trench coats. For example, after the Columbine shooting, a Washington school “proposed that students be barred from wearing coats indoors at school,” in fear that they would be concealing weapons underneath the coats. Although this precaution was taken due to Columbine, many teachers and administration have ignored other concerning signs, such as Nazi idolization.

Nazis and Skinheads

Fascination with the Nazis, or with the Aryan race is a common trait amongst school shooters. Followers of the Nazis in the US are called ‘skinheads,’ distinctly characterized as white males who wear leather, shave their heads, and wear combat boots with red laces. For example, both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were fascinated with the Nazis,

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with both of them learning German phrases, practicing the Nazi salute while in school, and making anti-Semitic remarks. Due to this, the FBI put out a warning that educators should recognize the warning signs of potential violence with one of them being, “inappropriate role models such as Hitler [or] Satan,” (Lichtblau).

Adolescents who become part of the skinhead movement believe that they are invincible because of the principles of Nazism, which is being part of a “pure race,” who has advantage and superiority amongst minorities. The fixation that Klebold and Harris had with the Nazis is evident with the references made in the school shooting. For example, the Columbine school shooting was done on April 20th which is Hitler’s birthday. Another hidden detail in the shooting was Eric’s t-shirt, which said, “Natural Selection,” emphasizing that only a certain number of students will survive. Apart from the common traits discussed, these are only a percentage of components that make up the profile of a school shooter.

Author’s Note

The ten case studies will commence below. Afterwards, there will be a results section in the form of charts along with additional commentary.

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Barry Dale Loukaitis
Frontier Junior High School
Moses Lake, Washington

Background

On February 2nd, 1996, fourteen-year-old, eighth grader at Frontier Junior High School, Barry Dale Loukaitis, opened fire at his classmates and teacher. Loukaitis killed two students and one teacher. It was the first school shooting in the small town of Moses Lake, Washington. Barry lived in Moses Lake with his parents, JoAnn Phillips, and Terry Loukaitis. He was an honors student at Frontier Junior High and participated in various school activities such as student counsel (“Where Rampages Begin”). His parents separated sometime in 1995 because of his father’s infidelity, which resulted in Barry’s father permanently leaving the home. Barry’s mother, JoAnn, repeatedly discussed suicide with fourteen-year-old Barry, stating that they should commit suicide together on February 14th, Valentine’s Day, 1996 (MTV News Staff, 1997).

This school garnered media attention in neighboring cities, such as in Spokane, Washington, based on the severity of the incident. On February 6th, 1996, *The Spokesman-Review* published an article about the Frontier Junior High School shooting, stating that students returned to the school three days after the incident. The aftermath of the Frontier Junior High shooting was that many students faced increasing pressure by the media to discuss the circumstances of the shooting (Johnson, 1996).

Incident Circumstances

It was a normal day at his junior high, especially for Barry, who was an honors student, who routinely went to his classes and was actively involved in class participation. However, after repeatedly being called a “faggot” by student Manuel Vela

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Jr., Barry seemed to have been pushed to his limit. Vela started to bully Loukaitis at the start of the ninth grade, escalating with the remarks made. At the start of his algebra class, which included Manuel Vela Jr, student Arnold Fitz Jr., and teacher Leona Caires, Barry, who was dressed in black, had three concealed firearms: two pistols and a high-power rifle. He also carried 78 rounds of ammunition. After he killed Vela, another student, and the algebra teacher, he kept several students hostage until a gym coach was able to successfully pin him to the ground (Mapes, 1997).

Result

In June of 1996, the Spokane Court of Appeals tried Barry Loukaitis as an adult for the school shooting. Loukaitis claimed that he was having delusional thoughts before the shooting and worked with his defense attorney to form an insanity plea. However, the prosecuting team claimed that the murder of Manuel Vela Jr. was planned based on the history of bullying and threats (MTV News Staff, 1997).

Applicable Criteria

The Role of Alternative Music

Prosecutors believed that Barry Loukaitis decided to engage in the school shooting because of a song from Pearl Jam’s album, *Ten*, titled “Jeremy.” The song speaks about an American youth who commits suicide because of many factors in his life, such as constant bullying, lack of attention from his parents, and accessibility to guns. In 1992, Pearl Jam released the music video for “Jeremy,” which visually captures a teenage boy in a state of violence, as he faces bullying in school, kills his classmates, and commits suicide afterwards (MTV News Staff, 1997). In September 1997, a news article by *MTV* wrote about how Barry’s mother, JoAnn, claimed to jurors that Barry had

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the lyrics of “Jeremy” memorized, and that watching the video made him uncomfortable (MTV News Staff, 1997).

The Symbolic Significance of Trench Coats

Barry wore a trench coat on the day of shooting, his clothing inspired by Wild West style gunslingers. He concealed a .357 caliber pistol, a .25 caliber semiautomatic pistol, a .30-30 caliber hunting rifle, and 78 rounds of ammunition (Morris, 2020).

Interest in Weapons

Barry was introduced to weapons early on by his father. Weapons such as handguns and rifles were accessible to Barry because of how many were present in the home. Loukaitis was also interested in using the weapons to commit mass murder because of the 1994 film, *Natural Born Killers*, where the two lead characters commit a killing spree (“Where Rampages Begin”).

Evan Ramsey
Bethel Regional High School
Bethel, Alaska

Background

On February 19th, 1997, sixteen-year-old student, Evan Ramsey, opened fire at several students, ultimately killing two people, fifteen-year-old student Josh Palacios and principal Ron Edwards. Ramsey’s childhood was traumatic. When he was seven, Evan’s father went to prison. After this event, his mother gradually became an alcoholic, eventually leaving Evan and his two other siblings abandoned, ultimately all going to different foster homes. According to court testimony, Evan claims that he suffered sexual assault throughout his time in the foster homes. Evan attempted suicide at the age of ten by trying to drown himself. When he was in high school, he started to experiment with recreational drugs such as marijuana (Morin 03:30-04:30).

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Evan mirrored John, his older brother, as he went through adolescence. For example, his brother engaged in deviancy at the age of twelve, which included crimes such as theft and assault. Evan had several deviant acts leading up to the school shooting. First, he did something that caused Josh Palacios, the student who he would later kill during the school shooting, to beat him up. In 1996, while living in his foster home, Evan “kicked a hole in a wall and threatened his foster mother’s daughter” (Langman 90). At school, Evan wined up having multiple disciplinary actions against him. A couple weeks before the shooting, Evan’s father, Don, was released on parole. Later on, his girlfriend would break up with him, and his CD player would be confiscated at school (Langman 90).

Incident Circumstances

In the segment from *60 Minutes*, titled “Rage,” Evan Ramsey states that his main objective for doing the school shooting was to kill himself (Morin 03:10-03:20). Ramsey was reported to be an outsider by other students at Bethel Regional High School, not seeming to fit in the various groups and cliques. Ramsey also reported that he was called a “piece of a shit,” a “bastard,” and a “retard” by various students (Morin 05:35-05:45). He had “help” and “encouragement” from two other students, both who were fourteen, that showed him how to load and fire his shotgun. Furthermore, they promised that “fame and fortune” would follow after he committed the shooting. Evan Ramsey gave notice to several students at the high school that “something big was going to happen.” (Morin 07:20-07:50). On the day of the shooting, Ramsey used a .12-gauge shotgun, which he stole from his foster mother. After shooting Palacios and Edwards, Ramsey attempted to

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commit suicide, by bringing the gun under his chin. However, he surrendered when the police came.

Result

Evan was tried as an adult at the Court of Appeals of the State of Alaska.

Applicable Criteria

The Role of Video Games in Youth Violence

Evan also had a fascination with video games, especially first-person shooter games such as *Doom*. Ramsey would repeatedly play this game multiple times a day and the shotgun he used in the shooting resembles that weapon in *Doom*.

Interest in Weapons

Evan’s father, Don, also brought a gun into a public place and was actually involved in a standoff with police. Indirectly, his father’s incident could have influenced Evan to commit the mass shooting. Furthermore, Evan’s interest in violence escalated once he played *Doom*, possibly influencing him to choose the .12-gauge shotgun as his weapon of choice (“Where Rampages Begin”).

Luke Woodham
Pearl High School
Pearl, Mississippi

Background

On October 1st, 1997, sixteen-year-old, tenth grader at Pearl High School, Luke Woodham stabbed his mother, Mary, and then committed a school shooting. In total, Woodham killed three people, his mother and two students. One of the students was Luke’s ex-girlfriend, Christina Menefee, the other was her friend, Lydia Kaye Dew. One of his motivations for the school shooting was to seek revenge on Christina. Woodham did not take the break-up lightly, as he became very jealous of his ex-girlfriend, seeing as

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she had moved on by dating other students. He planned beforehand where he would see Christina on campus and waited until it was the right moment to shoot her. In the process, he shot her friend. Woodham foreshadowed this event by stating in a journal, “If I can’t pry your eyes open.. through pacifism... then I will do it with a bullet” (Perlstein 29).

Luke’s relationship with his mother was volatile. Sometime in 1997, Luke’s mother, Mary, divorced his father. Luke believed that his mother did not love him after this event (Bragg). Furthermore, in his testimony with police, Woodham claimed that his mother said that he “was the reason [his] father left,” and that Luke wouldn’t “amount to anything,” further instigating him by remarking that he was “fat, stupid and lazy” (Bragg).

Incident Circumstances

On the morning of October 1st, Luke put a pillow over his mother’s face as she slept and stabbed her repeatedly with a butcher knife (Bragg). He then drove to Pearl High School, entered the premises, and shot his ex-girlfriend and her friend by firing repeatedly. Luke used a .30-30 hunting rifle for the entire shooting (“Teen-agers Charged”). He was finally stopped by a teacher who went outside to his car to get a pistol (“Luke Woodham”).

Result

Woodham was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

Applicable Criteria

Satanism

In the court testimony, Woodham claimed that he was an outcast and that he was influenced by “a demonic spell cast by another student,” (“National News Briefs”).

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Police would later find out that Woodham was part of a group called “the Kroth” which was comprised of several young people who labeled themselves as outsiders and practiced satanic worship. They planned to do a takeover of Pearl High School and after they were going to flee to Cuba. The group’s leader, nineteen-year-old Grant Boyette, had an extreme influence on Luke Woodham, who viewed him as a mentor. He befriended Boyette in Jan 1997 after Boyette casted a spell from a satanic book. Woodham also said that he assigned him demons in order for him to carry through the shooting. In testimony, Luke claimed that on the morning of October 1st, he saw demons who “said [he] was nothing and [he] would never be anything if [he] didn’t get to that school and kill those people” (“Teen-Ager Accused”). In his trial, a defense medical expert testified that he had severe psychological problems because of the combination of being in “the Kroth” and his trauma associated with his mother’s divorce. (“Teen-Ager Accused”)

Trench Coats

On the day of the shooting, Luke showed up to Pearl High School wearing an orange jumpsuit and a trenchcoat on top of it. However, he did not conceal the hunting rifle (“Luke Woodham”).

Michael Carneal
Heath High School
Paducah, Kentucky

Background

On December 1st, 1997, fourteen-year-old student Michael Carneal, opened fire in Heath High School. Michael suffered from undiagnosed schizophrenia which made him paranoid, as well with intense bullying from the transition into high school (Salahieh). He also claimed that “demons” haunted him through the voices that he would hear (Paxton).

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Incident Circumstances

Michael got to school with his sister at around 7:45 a.m., and as soon as he entered school premises, he shot at a youth prayer group that was inside the school after hearing them say “Amen” (Salahieh). He did not know these students personally. Once he was finished shooting, Michael put the pistol on the ground and surrendered to the principal of the school.

Result

Michael was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. He is currently serving his sentence and has taken responsibility for his actions (Salahieh).

Applicable Criteria

Weapons

Michael brought a shotgun and a rifle which were stolen from his father, concealing them in a blanket. Students who questioned the blanket were told that it was an art project. In his backpack, Michael also carried a .22 caliber pistol which was loaded.

Joseph “Colt” Todd
Stamps High School
Stamps, Arkansas

Author’s Note

I decided to include this school shooting, with zero fatalities, because it is the predecessor to the Craighead County, Arkansas shooting. After viewing newspaper articles for Arkansas in 1997, it seemed that the state was heavily affected by this event. The shooting to follow in 1998 would confirm the fears of the media and public, creating more headlines that compared the two shootings and the public acknowledging that the ‘the school shooter’ is its own category of violence. Since this event had no fatalities, it

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did not receive as much media coverage throughout the United States, resulting in limited information about the shooting incident. However, it was deeply covered locally.

Background

On December 15th, 1997, fourteen-year-old, eighth grader at Stamps High School, Joseph “Colt” Todd shot two students in the early morning of the school day. According to Todd, he wasn’t targeting the students, he was just tired of being picked on by several students (Haymes).

Incident Circumstances

On the morning of December 15th, Joseph “Colt” Todd showed up to the high school early, waiting near the school parking lot. He hid in some woods that were nearby and watched as the two students congregated in the parking lot. The two students were in the school parking lot before classes would start. They were both shot in the hip.

He was in a state of mind where “it didn’t matter who walked on campus,” (CNN). According to Colt’s testimony from the police, “he had been living in pain for some time” and “he was going to cause pain on someone else” (CNN).

According to students at the high school, students would take his money and teachers never did anything (Pederson).

Result

He was charged with two counts of first-degree battery (CNN).

Applicable Criteria

Interest in Weapons

Colt used a .22 caliber rifle.

Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden
Westside Middle School
Jonesboro (Craighead County), Arkansas

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Background

On March 24th, 1998, thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson and eleven-year-old Andrew Golden, conducted a planned school shooting in Westside Middle School. This resulted in five fatalities, and ten wounded. After the shooting, the school’s administration and security changed drastically. A local Arkansas newspaper reported that students returned from spring break the day before the shooting. This shooting got a lot of attention from the media in Arkansas but throughout the U.S. as the Stamps High School shooting was the predecessor to the Westside Middle School Shooting, proving the point that a shooting needed to be taken seriously.

According to Mitchell Johnson’s lawyer, he was sexually abused when he was younger. Mitchell also apparently lied about being in a gang to his peers, because he felt inferior to the rest of them. While in school, Mitchell also made comments about killing his ex-girlfriend, because of a recent breakup. Part of the reason of the breakup was because his ex-girlfriend believed that Mitchell was “trouble,” and acted strange. One of these occurrences of “acting strange” was putting together a list of students that he planned to kill. On the other hand, several accounts of Andrew Golden claimed that he was a calm student, but he could be violent at that times. Golden’s grandfather, Chuck Golden, claimed that Andrew “liked to wear a skinning knife strapped to his leg when he rode his bike,” (“Jonesboro Dazed”). Most students did not recall that the boys were friends and would not consider them as close.

Incident Circumstances

Before the shooting, Mitchell and Andrew acquired a van by stealing it from Mitchell’s family. It was a ’91 Dodge van, which was parked a half mile from the school.

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Furthermore, the boys planned in advance to steal guns from Andrew’s grandfather’s home (“From Wild Talk”). Once they acquired the van and the guns, the boys parked the van close to the school, and entered the school as if it was a normal school day.

On approximately 12:35 p.m., a fire alarm was heard by students and faculty in Westside Middle School. The alarm was triggered by Andrew Golden, who pulled down the lever and ran away quickly to deter suspicion. After he pulled the lever, he joined Mitchell Johnson in a field that was adjacent to the school. Johnson and Golden hid in woods that were in the field and waited for students to start heading outside, as a procedure of the school fire alarm policy. Once students were outside, the two boys started shooting. The boys used a .44-calibre rifle and a 30.06 rifle to commit the shooting. 911 calls immediately came in as the shooting began. The boys were finally caught by law enforcement after being chased in the woods (“From Wild Talk”)

Result

Golden and Johnson were charged with five counts of murder and 10 counts of first-degree battery (Monmaney, et al). Since the boys did not meet the minimum age of culpability in the State of Arkansas, which was fourteen, they could not be charged as adults. Therefore, they were both placed in the Department of Youth Services Facility in Alexander (Saline County), with their releases being scheduled by their twenty-first birthdays (“Encyclopedia of Arkansas”)

Applicable Criteria

Interest in Weapons

The boys used a .44-calibre rifle, .38 revolver, and a 30.06 hunting rifle to commit the shooting. Andrew Golden’s grandfather was a wildlife conservation officer who had a

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dozen guns in his possession. They were readily accessible along with ammunition boxes in the Golden home. Apart from the accessibility of weapons, Golden grew up with weapons early on in his life, being coached by his grandfather on how to hunt and shoot animals (“From Wild Talk”). The city of Jonesboro is a conservative place where parents raise their children with a heavy gun culture, making it a way of life. The boys also took “a 10-inch special purpose knife” and “a crossbow” on their way to the school (“From Wild Talk”).

Trench Coats

The boys dressed in a camouflaged outfit on the day of the shooting. They also brought a pair of Doc Marten boots to wear to the school (“From Wild Talk”).

Andrew Wurst
James Parker Middle School
Edinboro, Pennsylvania

Background

On April 24th, 1998, fourteen-year-old Andrew Wurst shot a teacher and wounded three other people at the eighth-grade dance for James Parker Middle School. Although this shooting did not occur in a school, the elements for the facilitation of a school shooting are present, regardless of the location. The dance was held at Nick’s Place, a restaurant that was nearby to the middle school. Andrew killed a science teacher with a semiautomatic pistol.

As a child, Andrew had fears about monsters in his closet and in his bed. This extended all the way to adolescence, resulting in his mother checking every night that there was no one under his bed or in his closet. In order to help him settle down, his mother would lay on his bed covers with him, trying to calm him down (Langman 4).

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Andrew had a psychiatric evaluation after he committed the shooting and the psychiatric stated that Andrew was living in an alternative world, ignoring reality. For example, Andrew claimed that “people are programmed to act and say what the government, mad scientists, or a psycho want them to say” (Langman 5). He started to have these thoughts between age eight and ten. He also claimed that he would hear voices and experienced hallucinations. (Langman 5). When he committed the shooting, Andrew remarked that he “died four years ago” and that he had “already been dead,” claiming that his actions didn’t “matter anymore” (Langman 4).

According to several students, Andrew had talked about killing people repeatedly. Wurst also joked about committing suicide. Classmates reported that Wurst had a “sick sense of humor” and would laugh at the threats that he would make in class. Andrew was also unhappy at home and he had an obsession with being in relationships with girls. Friends reported that the only time they’ve seen him happy is when he would talk to girls at school. Wurst was also reported to be in bad moods on the day of the shooting as he recently argued with his parents about his grades (Hays).

Incident Circumstances

On April 24th, approximately around 9:40 p.m., Andrew hid near the patio of the restaurant that was hosting the James Parker Middle School eighth grade dance. He was armed with a .25-caliber handgun which was registered under his father’s name. There were approximately 240 students at the dance, along with several faculty members. The teacher was standing in the patio of the restaurant when Andrew shot him, firing additional shots inside of the restaurant afterwards (“Student Charged”). Once the

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shooting broke out, Wurst was apprehended by the restaurant’s owner who was armed with a shotgun (“Pennsylvania Students”)

Result

Wurst was charged as an adult for the death of a schoolteacher, as well as aggravated assault and reckless endangerment. He was sentenced to serve a thirty-to-sixty-year sentence, with no possibility of parole until age forty-five. (“Teenage Shooter’s Mom”)

Applicable Criteria

The Role of Alternative Music

A student claimed that Wurst was “a loner” that never smiled, and he dressed in “untucked T-shirts and untied shoes,” symbolic of the grunge movement form of expression through clothing (Hays). Furthermore, Wurst’s friend, reported that he nicknamed Wurst to be “Satan” because he was fond of Marilyn Manson’s music (Becker).

Kipland “Kip” Kinkel
Thurston High School
Springfield, Oregon

Background

On May 20th and 21st, 1998, fifteen-year-old Kipland “Kip” Kinkel killed his parents, William “Bill” and Faith Kinkel, at home and drove to Thurston High School to commit a school shooting (Kinkel 82). Kinkel’s case differs from the previous case studies because it encompasses a variety of applicable criteria that in combination produced a drastic result and prevalent media coverage because of the severity of the incident. This was the first major school shooting before Columbine that resulted in a

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high number of fatalities and high media coverage by the state of Oregon and across the United States.

There were a multitude of factors in Kip’s life that affected him severely. One of them was his relationship with his mother and father. When talking to psychologist Dr. Jeffrey Hicks in 1997, he claimed that his father viewed him as “a bad kid with bad habits,” while his mother was more comforting towards him. He claimed that his father viewed him poorly and that he expected the worst out of him. An event that affected Kip was when his sister, Kristin, left for college in 1995, leaving him alone in Oregon with his parents. Once this happened, Kip started to hang out with juveniles from his middle school that would regularly shoplift at the local “Target” and commit deviant acts such as throwing rocks off a highway overpass. This incident led to Kip getting arrested and resulting in Bill and Faith taking Kip to a psychologist to address his behavioral problems. However, Kip started to acquire weapons such as knives and firearms by his father. Furthermore, Kip told his psychologist that he found relief in explosives such as bombs, prompting him to get more involved in bomb making.

Incident Circumstances

On May 20th, 1998, after getting arrested by police for being charged with possession of a firearm in a public building, Kip went home with his father and shot him. Later that afternoon, he shot his mother. The next morning Kip drove to Thurston High School and began shooting at students when he walked down the hallway towards the cafeteria. He used a .22 caliber semiautomatic rifle and pistol. He also used his father’s 9mm Glock. When Kip began to reload his firearm, he got tackled by five students.

Result

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Two students were killed at the shooting. Twenty-five people were left injured.

Kip Kinkel was sentenced to 111 years in prison without the possibility of parole on November 10th, 1999. He is currently serving his sentence.

Applicable Criteria

Alternative Music

Kip was heavily into bands like Marilyn Manson and Nirvana.

Trench Coats

On the day of the shooting Kip dressed in a trench coat.

Interest in Weapons

At school, Kip mailed some ‘how to build bomb’ books to his house, such as The Anarchist Cookbook. Kip also gave a speech in class on how to make a bomb. Over the years he would acquire equipment for bomb making but also knives, firearms, and grenades.

Video Games

Kip was an avid player of video games, such as first-person shooter (FPS) games.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold
Columbine High School
Littleton, Colorado

Background

On April 20th, 1999, eighteen-year-old Eric Harris and seventeen-year-old Dylan Klebold committed the deadliest school shooting in United States history during the 1990s. Harris was an eighteen-year-old student at Columbine High School who resided with his parents in Littleton. His family relocated often because of his father’s air force job. Klebold was a seventeen-year-old student who also attended Columbine. Klebold

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was raised in Colorado and lived with his parents as well. The boys became friends once in high school together since they were involved in school plays and video production.

There is no accurate account of bullying incidents, but it is known that they were unpopular. For example, former friend of Harris, Brooks Brown, claimed that in the eighth grade, the boys were constantly picked on and objects would be thrown at them. A teacher watched this happen. At one point they were also labeled as “faggots” (Greene).

Before the shooting, Harris and Klebold had frequent police encounters. For example, in January 1998, the boys were charged with mischief, breaking and entering, trespassing, and theft. The boys also made several school project videos that were gruesome and violent. In one titled “Hitmen for Hire,” Harris and Klebold yelled into the camera, later on showing footage of them in trench coats, using their firearms to shoot into the woods (Langman 186). These projects were seen by faculty as not alarming.

Before befriending Dylan, Eric was friends with a student named Brooks Brown, who Eric had a falling out with and decided to make threats towards him because of that (“Shepard”).

Incident Circumstances

During the lunch break on the day of the shooting, Eric Harris arrived at the school and saw Brooks Brown in the parking lot, in which he told him to leave immediately. Dylan Klebold arrived at the same time in a separate car with two gym bags. They both had a 20-pound propane bomb. At 11:19 a.m. the first shots were fired because the two bombs did not detonate. The shooting first happened in the cafeteria and then migrated to the library. At approximately 12:08 p.m., the boys committed suicide in the library.

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Result

In total, thirteen people were killed, twelve students and one teacher. Twenty-five people were left injured. The boys committed suicide.

Applicable Criteria

Video Games

The boys played many first-person shooter (FPS) video games, their favorite being *Doom*. The shooters, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris repeatedly mentioned *Doom* in their journal diaries and were devoted players of the game. Harris created multiple WADs, or data files of *Doom*, which were levels that were created based on their high school. *Doom* also played a critical role of fantasy in both Klebold’s and Harris’s lives. For example, in psychologist Peter Langman’s book, *Why Kids Kill*, he states, “Eric Harris was losing touch with reality through his chronic fantasizing about *Doom*,” emphasizing that Harris was seeing the world as a video game instead of reality (Langman 151). Furthermore, journal entries from Harris referenced levels from *Doom*, in which he partnered with Klebold to create floorplans that imitated their high school, especially the school cafeteria. In one of his entries, Eric states, “*Doom* is so burned into my head my thoughts usually have something to do with the game.... What I can’t do in real life, I try to do in *Doom*.”² Along with *Doom*, the video game *Quake*, was equally as violent, teaching young people to “clear the room” by moving quickly from target to target and aiming for the head,” desensitizing young audiences to violence (Van Horn). This was reminiscent of student accounts of the Columbine shooting, where many noted

² This is a handwritten journal by Eric Harris after the attack. Jefferson County, *Columbine Documents*, p. 26, 393.

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that Harris and Klebold were moving rapidly, trying to shoot as many students as possible.

Trench Coats

The boys often wore trench coats to school as well as Doc Marten combat boots. On the day of the shooting, the boys wore trench coats to conceal firearms.

Weapons

Klebold acquired guns through the help of other students at the school since his parents did not believe in guns. Harris had easy access to weapons as his father had his own collection of firearms.

Alternative Music

The boys were fans of KMFDM, a German metal industrial band, with Dylan wearing band t-shirts often for this band. They were also fans of bands like Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson.

White Supremacy

The shooting occurred on April 20th, which was Adolf Hitler’s birthday. Eric Harris had a fascination with the Nazis and would often do Nazi salutes in public. He also quoted German phrases in his journal. He also praised the Aryan race, yet he had sunken chest disability.

Anthony Thomas “T.J.” Solomon
Heritage High School
Conyers, Georgia

Background

On May 20th, 1999, fifteen-year-old T.J. Solomon open fired in a crowd of students at his high school. Before the shooting, T.J. had recently broken up with his girlfriend and was taking Ritalin. Family and friends also reported that his grades had

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been gradually slipping and that Solomon was becoming increasingly depressed. Sources also reported that T.J. was constantly picked on by a popular jock who was two years older than T.J. Based on the bullying and the rejection from his girlfriend, Solomon grew hateful towards the school, threatening to bomb a classroom. T.J. had also mentioned the Columbine school shooting when describing his threats.

Incident Circumstances

T.J. fired inside the school, holding the firearm low. The shooting ended quickly, and T.J. did not reload his gun. At one point he pulled out a .357 magnum revolver and put the barrel in his mouth. The assistant principal told him to put the gun down and T.J. did reluctantly.

Result

There were no fatalities in the shooting, however six students were injured (Cloud). In 2000, T.J. was sentenced to forty years in prison, however he would be eligible for parole in eighteen years. He is currently released.

Applicable Criteria

Weapons

T.J. had access to guns through his stepfather’s gun cabinet. He used a low caliber rifle to commit the shooting (Cloud). T.J. was also fascinated with bombs since he printed out bomb recipes.

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RESULTS

Table 2
School Shooter Offender Typology

Shooter Name	Male	White Race	≤ 15	Part of Duo	Low Income
Barry Loukaitis	X	X	X		
Evan Ramsey	X				X
Luke Woodham	X	X	X		
Michael Carneal	X	X	X		
Joseph “Colt” Todd	X	X	X		?
Mitchell Johnson	X	X	X	X	
Andrew Golden	X	X	X	X	
Andrew Wurst	X	X	X		
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X	X			
Dylan Klebold	X	X		X	
Eric Harris	X	X		X	
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon	X	X	X		
TOTAL:	12	11	8	4	1

Table 3
School Shooter Offender Typology (cont.)

Shooter Name	Low Income	Lives with Parent(s)	Foster Child	Psychological Problems	Disabilities
Barry Loukaitis		X		X	
Evan Ramsey	X		X	X	
Luke Woodham		X			
Michael Carneal		X			
Joseph “Colt” Todd	?	?			
Mitchell Johnson		X			
Andrew Golden		X			
Andrew Wurst		X		X	
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel		X		X	X
Dylan Klebold		X			
Eric Harris		X			X
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon		X			
TOTAL:	1	10	1	4	2

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? This symbol means that there is little information on the factor

These tables represent the typology of the school shooter as a category of violence. The typology consists of demographic characteristics of the offender as well as environmental and situational factors. As we can see, all school shooters analyzed within 1996-1999 are all male, predominately White, and less than or equal to age fifteen.

Table 4
Victim Characteristics

Shooter Name	Student/Faculty	Random	Singled out Victim	Ex-Girlfriend	Bully	Parent
Barry Loukaitis	X	X	X		X	
Evan Ramsey	X	X			X	
Luke Woodham	X	X	X	X		X
Michael Carneal	X	X			X	
Joseph “Colt” Todd	X	X			X	
Mitchell Johnson	X	X	X	X		
Andrew Golden	X	X				
Andrew Wurst	X	X				
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X	X	X		X	X
Dylan Klebold	X	X				
Eric Harris	X	X				
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon	X	X			X	
TOTAL:	12	12	4	2	6	2

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In this chart, I analyze the victim characteristics of the school shootings. Most victims are students attending the school or school faculty. Majority of the victims are random, as the school shooter isn’t targeting specific people or groups. However, some have singled-out specific students and ex-girlfriends. Others have committed patricide as a predecessor to the school shooting. Furthermore, bullying is a common theme for many school shootings, as the student is motivated to commit a shooting based on bullying incidents.

Table 5
Situation Characteristics

Shooter Name	School Parking Lot	Location Hosting School Activity	Inside School	A.M.	P.M.
Barry Loukaitis	X		X		X
Evan Ramsey			X	?	?
Luke Woodham	X			X	
Michael Carneal			X	X	
Joseph “Colt” Todd	X			X	
Mitchell Johnson	X				X
Andrew Golden	X				X
Andrew Wurst		X			X
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel			X	X	
Dylan Klebold			X	X	X
Eric Harris			X	X	X
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon			X	X	
TOTAL:	5	1	7	7	6

? This symbol means that there is little information on the factor.

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Table 6
Situation Characteristics (cont.)

Shooter Name	Surrendered	Caught on Campus	Suicide	Triggering Event Beforehand
Barry Loukaitis	X	X		X
Evan Ramsey	X	X		X
Luke Woodham	X	X		X
Michael Carneal	X	X		X
Joseph “Colt” Todd	X	X		X
Mitchell Johnson	X	X		X
Andrew Golden	X	X		X
Andrew Wurst	X			X
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X	X		X
Dylan Klebold			X	
Eric Harris			X	
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon	X	X		
TOTAL:	10	9	2	9

Tables 4 and 5 exhibit the circumstances of school shootings. The placement where shootings occur generally transition from the school parking lot to the inside of the school. This is the same for time, with many of the shootings occurring in the morning and ending in the afternoon. However, some incidents do not last that long and are disputed when school faculty or students get involved to stop the school shooter.

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Table 7
Risk Factors

Shooter Name	Mass Media	White Supremacy	Trench Coats	Religion	Satanism
Barry Loukaitis	X		X		
Evan Ramsey					
Luke Woodham			X	X	X
Michael Carneal				X	X
Joseph “Colt” Todd					
Mitchell Johnson			X		
Andrew Golden			X		
Andrew Wurst			X	X	X
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X		X		
Dylan Klebold	X		X	X	
Eric Harris	X	X	X	X	
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon	X				
TOTAL:	5	1	8	5	3

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Table 8
Risk Factors (cont.)

Shooter Name	FPS Video Games	Stockpiling weapons	Music	Manifestos
Barry Loukaitis		X	X	
Evan Ramsey	X	X		
Luke Woodham		X	X	X
Michael Carneal		X		
Joseph “Colt” Todd		X		X
Mitchell Johnson		X	X	
Andrew Golden		X	X	
Andrew Wurst		X	X	X
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X	X	X	X
Dylan Klebold	X	X	X	X
Eric Harris	X	X	X	X
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon		X		X
TOTAL:	4	12	8	7

Risk factors are extremely prevalent in all of the school shootings analyzed. All of the cases have at least one or more factors, with weapons being the most common factor. Alternative music and trench coats came in second. Religion is defined here as a disregard of any religion by the school shooter, which is different from satanism. Statements such as “God is Dead” or a superiority complex suggests a disregard for religion. Manifestos means any verbalized statements of harm or writings of violent events to come. It is imperative to note that the only school shooting in which the shooter

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recognized viewed himself as a “school shooter” occurred after the Columbine school shooting.

Table 9
Hirschi’s Social Bond Theory Application

Shooter Name	Broken Bond to Family	Broken Bond to School	Broken Bonds to Friends	Conformity	Beliefs	Prior Deviancy
Barry Loukaitis	X		X		X	X
Evan Ramsey	X	X	X	X	X	
Luke Woodham	X		X	X	X	X
Michael Carneal				X	X	X
Joseph “Colt” Todd			X	X	?	?
Mitchell Johnson		X	X	X	X	X
Andrew Golden		X		X	X	X
Andrew Wurst	X				X	X
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dylan Klebold				X	X	X
Eric Harris				X	X	X
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon	X	X	X	X	X	X
TOTAL:	6	5	7	10	11	10

? This symbol means that there is little information on the factor.

This chart examines broken bonds to several categories: family, school, and friends. A broken bond to family is not engaging in familial events or becoming

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withdrawn from parents/siblings. A broken bond to school is when the student is actively getting poor grades or not participating in clubs/extracurriculars. The last category, friends, is when the student is not making friends at the school or outside school or missing social school events. Conformity is also defined as “stakes in conformity³,” which is when a person assesses how much they are going to lose if they engage in deviant behavior. Most of these school shooters do not have “stakes in conformity,” but rather are conformist with the idea that their actions are ‘ok’ or destined to happen because of their superiority complex and because of how much they truly hate humanity.

Only a couple cases, Barry Loukaitis and Andrew Wurst have extreme ties to their mother, which affect how they perceive themselves and push the blame to them. Therefore, they are uncertain why they have committed a school shooting. Beliefs is defined as the school shooter’s view of whether or not the rules of society should be obeyed. All of the cases believe that engaging in deviancy and committing a school shooting did not go against the rules of society. Lastly, deviancy is defined as whether or not the school shooter had time before the school shooting to engage in prior acts of deviancy. One of the most prominent acts was theft, as many stole a weapon or a vehicle for the school shooting.

³ Hirschi, Travis. *The Causes of Delinquency*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1969.

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Table 10
Labeling Theory Application

Shooter Name	Labeled by Teacher	Labeled by Parent	Labeled by Other Students	Internalized Label	Post-Deviancy
Barry Loukaitis		X	X	X	
Evan Ramsey			X	X	
Luke Woodham		X		X	X
Michael Carneal			X	X	
Joseph “Colt” Todd			X	X	
Mitchell Johnson			X	X	X
Andrew Golden					X
Andrew Wurst		X	X	X	
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X	X	X	X	X
Dylan Klebold	X		X		X
Eric Harris			X		X
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon		X	X		X
TOTAL:	2	5	10	8	7

Most of these school shooters were labeled by students, with few of them being labeled by teachers or their parents. However, the ones that are labeled internalize the label by thinking that they are said label. For example, Kip Kinkel got labeled as a “psycho” at school, and he started writing that he was a psycho in many writings. The

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post-deviancy category refers to if the school shooter engaged in deviancy after they were labeled.

Table 11
General Theory of Crime Application

Shooter Name	Street Crimes	Substance Use	Authoritarian Family Background	Academic Difficulties	Risk Taker
Barry Loukaitis					
Evan Ramsey	X	X		X	X
Luke Woodham	X			X	
Michael Carneal				X	X
Joseph “Colt” Todd	X			X	X
Mitchell Johnson	X		X	X	X
Andrew Golden	X		X	X	X
Andrew Worst			X	X	
Kipland “Kip” Kinkel	X		X	X	
Dylan Klebold				X	
Eric Harris			X	X	X
Anthony “T.J.” Solomon					X
TOTAL:	6	1	5	8	7

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According to Gottfredson and Hirschi⁴, impulsivity and low self-control is measured through attachments with juvenile delinquency and street crimes. Many of these school shooters exhibit impulsivity issues by academically performing badly in school and putting themselves into risky situations. The research further suggests that authoritarian parenting creates low self-control in children, which is present in many of shooters’ backgrounds.

⁴ Gottfredson, Michael R., and Travis Hirschi. *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford University Press, 1990.

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PART 3: CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL SAFETY POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS

In today’s world, schools are modeled like prisons, because of the increasing amounts of gun threats and school shooting incidents. After the 1990s, two big school shootings were committed: Sandy Hook Elementary School and Parkland High School. There are definitely connections between the two shootings based on offender typology, but we are seeing males of older ages commit shootings. These two shootings outnumbered the number of fatalities from Columbine and sparked national debates amongst the country on gun violence. After Columbine many safety measures were implemented or updated across schools in the U.S. Some measures were metal detectors, hiring more police on campus, updating surveillance camera systems, creating a stricter dress code, not allowing an open campus anymore, and eliminating backpacks on the last day of school. However, today’s threats come in the form of manifestos on social media by the shooter, such as through Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook. The shooter may write a message stating that they are going to shoot up their school on a certain date accompanied with a picture of a firearm. Swatting is a form of offense that occurs mainly amongst the gaming community in which gamers make a threat on another gamer, prompting the SWAT team to come to their location (Slatter). This is similar to how school shooters make threats today, prompting in many of them to be false and waste police resources.

Why Intensive Measures Aren’t the Solution

Intensive measures that were implemented after Columbine were created with the purpose of detecting a weapon or trying to be one step ahead of a school shooting.

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However, mental health is not being made the priority for these school shooters and with every incident that happens a gun debate is started instead of a mental health one. One measure that should be implemented is creating a more inclusive campus for all students. This can be achieved by eliminating circle tables in cafeterias and being more accepting of students joining clubs. For example, in the Columbine school shooting, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were active participants of a school drama club, yet they were constantly criticized and not accepted. School faculty should put a halt to this type of behavior because if continued, unaccepted students become isolated from their peers and feel as if they are outsiders. Furthermore, in some of the case studies that have been analyzed certain students did not even know who the school shooter was, which is a large part of the problem of why the phenomenon exists because of a lack of belonging and acceptance as part of school culture.

The way that schools are modeled can cause a student to feel isolated and distant from the rest of their classmates. For a student that is introverted, navigating a school day can be challenging. Although there is no research on whether or not schools intentionally limit the number of chairs in a school cafeteria, it is evident that many students struggle with finding a seat. Therefore, securing a seat in a high school cafeteria is near impossible, as circle tables can be crammed with multiple students, and with many other tables filled with students who are “saving” seats for others. Because of this, students resort to eating lunch in a bathroom stall, or sitting on the floor, being made to feel as “unpopular” and the lowest of the low in high school. A pivotal reform in schools would be removing circle tables and implementing rectangular tables so all students are guaranteed a seat at school. This reform would also eliminate cliques in the cafeteria by

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opening the exposure of different groups on campus and introducing some introverted students to other groups based on where they sit.

Bullying seems to be one of the biggest motives for school violence. Many incidents would be resolved if bullies were punished for their actions towards students. However, teachers chose to ignore it and neutralize the situation by recognizing it as “kids being kids.” In one of the instances in Columbine, an object was hurled by one of the bullies to either Eric or Dylan. However, teachers ignored this act of bullying, and let this go on under their own supervision. As faculty of the school, teachers are there to put stops towards any act of bullying. Teachers often take the side of the bully without even realizing it, making the bullied student feel like less of a victim.

Another intensive measure implemented by schools is hiring more school police or school resource officers (SROs). According to professor of law Maryam Ahranjani in her article, “The Constitutional Costs of School Policing,” Ahranjani states that implementing more police on school campuses is not an effective way to create safe schools (Ahranjani, Saing 377). If anything, school police and SROs contribute to the “harsh treatment” of minority students and disabilities. Creating a hostile environment where students view themselves as a target is dangerous, as it can cause them to disrespect authority because of apparent discrimination. Since many school shooters are white, they may not feel antagonized by the school, but they find other ways to act in violence since they are not being viewed as the problem. In general, school police and SROs create hostility and fear amongst students since in many cases police arrest students for minute issues that are not crimes.

[A World with Guns – How to Recognize the Signs of Violence](#)

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In a world where there are more guns than people, the issue of school shootings would be eliminated if there was no access to guns. However, based on the Second Amendment and controversy surrounding the right to bear arms, the readily accessibility of guns is being debated on. This is evident since as a response to the “March for Our Lives” movement, a protest regarding major school shootings, retired Justice John Paul Stevens stated that the Second Amendment should be repealed (Naylor). The U.S. currently leads with the most guns in the world and with many taken too soon by gun violence.

However, the gun, like any weapon, is a material for violence. School administration, students, and parents should be conscious on the signs of violence that a student may exhibit, whether that be an extreme fascination with violence or verbal statements of violent nature. For example, in the Columbine school shooting, Eric Harris’s parents were aware that Eric built pipe bombs, and in the Thurston school shooting, Kip Kinkel gave a report on “how to build a bomb” (Langman 179). Again, in Columbine, Eric and Dylan submitted a video project titled “Hitmen for Hire,” which depicted them killing bullies for a harassed student (Langman 185). What do all of these events have in common? Guns. An extreme fascination of stockpiling weapons in order to fulfill an internal need of superiority. For all of the case studies analyzed, the boys felt that having an arsenal of weapons, or obtaining a weapon would put them on a pedestal above their classmates and teachers.

Ineffective School Punishments

Since the Parkland school shooting, schools across the country have increased their physical security by implementing student identification badges, metal detectors,

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and making surveillance cameras more technologically updated. However, if these measures have been in place, why haven't school shootings stopped? These measures do not target the risk factors of a school shooter and do focus on detecting these factors early on. Furthermore, suspension and expulsion methods only further throw a student into deviancy. All the time that a student spends out of school as a “punishment” is ineffective because there are opportunities for deviancy and the student cannot make attachments at school. When students have an occupied mind, such as through clubs or extracurriculars, they are less likely to go into deviancy.

Based on the FBI's 2000 report, students who exhibit warning signs such as stating a violent phrase could be punished severely by the school. From what we know from Steinberg, adolescence is an emotional time period, which could result in phrases that are unnecessarily interpreted as violent or as a threat. Students who are viewed as “unpopular” or as an outsider need, more than anything, guidance and to know that someone is on their side. Therefore, by targeting a student just because he or she likes alternative music or wears trench coats is unacceptable. This thesis proves that it is a combination of risk factors that produces a “school shooter.” Furthermore, an indirect punishment to students is having to deal with antagonistic teachers at school. As we have seen through labeling theory, putting a label towards a student can be detrimental as to how they view themselves. Labels are interconnected to self-identity and putting a name on a student or picking on them during class does nothing but further anger them and develop a vendetta against the school.

Mental Health

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There needs to be stronger mental health resources in schools, starting with hiring mental health professionals and more school psychologists. In general, students need to be able to trust in school faculty and know that their problems are valid. In the main study, most school shooters had underlying psychological problems and were isolated. Talking to a trusted person at a school and creating an environment where mental help is not viewed as taboo, is a pivotal way to prevent school shootings. Many of these school shooters come from a family where seeking mental health resources is viewed as being weak, with their parents enforcing a “get tough” rhetoric on them. Therefore, creating a school environment that exposes parents to the benefits of mental health resources such as counseling will lead to safer schools. This will also create a discussion amongst students and their parents in mental health resources.

Active Shooter Protocols

Although this thesis only analyzed school shootings in K-12 public schools, active shooter threats can exist in universities, private schools, and any other place in public. However, the threat of school shootings has skyrocketed since the 1990s, as seen in Fig. 1. Until any gun reform legislation is passed in the United States, students and faculty have to aware of these current threats and introduce ways to respond to them. The proposed protocol below is my take on how schools should respond to active shooter incidents. Ultimately, this protocol should be implemented nationally in schools and introduced to students and faculty to combat school shootings. I have created the acronym, SECURE, in order to memorize the steps easier. Again, these are all effective practices to have in mind for active shooter incidents.

1. Stay Vigilant

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As a student or faculty, it is imperative to be aware of your surroundings. If you see someone who looks out of place or is concealing an object, run and report them immediately. Based on this thesis, students who wear trench coats and are carrying a large bag can be school shooters. If you hear something, do not assume that it is fireworks. In many active shooter situations, people think that a gunshot is a firework and that they aren't experiencing an active shooter incident. Before they know it, it's too late. That's why it is necessary to keep your eyes and ears open. Call 911 or campus police if possible.

2. Expect the Unexpected

Expect that the shooter is on a mission to kill as many people as possible. Start running and telling everyone you come across that there is an active shooter situation. Think about a safe place that you can shelter in place and bring whoever is with you to that place.

3. Call for Action

Once in the hiding place, barricade the door with as many objects as possible. It is necessary to take action as the shooter could be anywhere. Start to direct everyone to move heavy objects towards the door. There is strength in numbers, and in this situation, you outnumber the shooter.

4. Utilize Self-Defense

Grab heavy items, weapons, and be prepared to defend yourself. Be ready to throw items at the door if necessary.

5. Remain Calm

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Although this is a high stress situation, it is evident to remain calm. If you see someone struggling, it is your job to reassure them that everything is going to be alright.

6. Evacuate

Be aware of campus police updates or school updates through text messages. In an active shooter situation, law enforcement will most likely go to buildings/areas where the incident first occurred. If law enforcement comes to your location, be weary that it is really them, and double check with police updates.

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DISCUSSION

This paper’s first research question aimed to determine when and how the categorization of the school shooter become “naturalized.” It is evident that based on the spike in fatalities in 1993 that the category of the school shooter was developed before the 1999 Columbine school shooting. A component of the risk factors was also developed before the 1999 shooting and it wasn’t something that came upon sporadically.

My second research question aimed to find out to what extent, if at all, might media representation shape public perceptions of the profile of the school shooter during the 1990s. Through my case study of the ten school shootings from 1996-1999, I saw that students and faculty had a skewed opinion of the school shooter based on the risk factors that they were engaged in. The media definitely shaped public perceptions of the school shooter profile as many of the risk factors, such as music, were being hit with lawsuits, as parents believed they were the root cause of school shootings.

My final research question investigated whether the Columbine school shooting created a new era for the policing of public schools, or if it only accelerated trends already in place. The 1999 shooting did create a new era of policing as the high number of fatalities from this shooting sparked numerous discussions on reforming schools. Many safety initiatives that schools have created because of Columbine include metal detectors, student IDs, hiring more police, and implementing a closed campus.

The purpose of this project was to engage interdisciplinary approaches between adolescent development and juvenile justice in order to understand the warning signs behind school shooters. Through the analysis of the criminological theories, we can see that familial bonds have been broken, school shooters engage in deviancy early on, and

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that labeling is prevalent. There is much for research to be done concerning school shooting incidents that occur today. Research should be done on online safety and how to monitor school threats and assess them effectively. Now that swatting is prevalent, many threats don't follow through, but rather the school shooter does it for the thrill of it.

Although the 1990s is different from our contemporary era based on the new technological aspects, broken bonds are evident for all school shooters. As we learned from the case studies, many of them are internally “loners” or view themselves as “outsiders,” or different from the rest of society, causing them to commit a school shooting.

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CONCLUSION

There are many unanswered questions to this issue of school shootings and there is more to be done in order to create a functional threat assessment towards “the school shooter.” The school shooter has become part of our lexicon, a definition that nearly everyone knows of in the United States. Columbine flashes into the minds of many Americans, as it dramatically changed the environments of schools and enforced a stricter era of school policies. As of now, school reforms and initiatives have not been effective, as fatalities have increased and the debate amongst the right to bear arms has gained even more controversy. However, we do have to listen to the voices, those students who are actively going to public schools around the country, who have to live in fear every day. We live in a world where there are more guns than people, and unfortunately, school shootings is our reality. Consequently, with this study in mind, it is up to the United States government, educational institutions, law enforcement, and the public to administer change. We have a choice in our hands: To acknowledge school shootings, or ignore it, like we always do.

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