

Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice Research & Education

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2010

School Shootings: The Deadly Result of Teasing and Ostracism?

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Abstract

Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips (2003) conducted a comprehensive analysis of school shootings in the United States from their recorded beginnings in 1995 to 2001. Findings involved bullying, isolation, and a strong need to "strike back." Suicide by cop – a term used to describe a way to end one's life in glory by being taken down in a gun-battle with police, was identified as a common goal with infamy often the intended outcome. Present results reported here (2001-2008) reflect a mixture of these variables throughout, but no clear pattern emerges. The impetus for shootings ranges from spurned romantic relationships to bullying to paranoia. Various theories of differential association, social control, and anomie are applied to explain the diverse motives.

Keywords: school shootings; ostracism; teasing; bullying; differential association theory; social control theory; anomie theory

Introduction

In recent years there has been increasing interest in juvenile criminals, specifically those who kill. Outrage is added when the tragic event happens at a school. This tumult has led many people to believe that homicides committed by juveniles at school are on the rise. However, according to National School Safety and Security Services, there has been a general decline of school-associated violent deaths from 1999 to the present, with the exception of an increase from 2003-2004 (National School Safety and Security Services, 2009). Although the trend is on a decline, it is important to understand what it is that leads juveniles to commit such violent acts. In order to increase awareness and prevention to communities, schools, and families of those who would be potentially at-risk.

This paper will focus on three criminological theories—differential association, social control, and anomie, and how they help us to understand the mentality of juveniles who commit these acts of school violence. Differential association theory, developed by Edwin Sutherland, states that criminal behavior is learned in social environments (Sutherland, 1939). This means that juveniles will be influenced by those with whom they interact. Based upon this theory, delinquency, including the violence necessary for school shootings, can be learned.

When defining social control theory, sociological variables such as peer groups, family structures, and schooling have been recognized as major causes of crime and delinquency. Travis Hirschi's description states that deviant behavior is deterred by a variety of communal restraints (Hirschi, 1969). Physical abuse, sexual abuse, instability of caretaker situation and/or residency, absence of a father, parental alcohol or drug abuse, parental psychiatric history, parental criminal background, and violence in the home are eight prominent familial factors that researchers have attributed to the profile of juvenile killers (Heckle & Shumaker, 2001). Hirschi (1969) would propose one reason the students committed these shootings was because they had an unstable family relationship, leading to abnormal societal bonds.

Anomie theory, introduced by Emile Durkheim, states, "...the general procedural rules of a society (the rules that say how people ought to behave toward each other) have broken down and people do not know what to expect from each other" (Durkheim, 1893; Williams & McShane, 2004: 96). Durkheim would suggest that these juveniles who commit school shootings feel a sense of *normlessness* in their society, and, therefore, act out in violence.

In this paper, we seek to establish what factors contribute to the mentality of juveniles who engage in criminal behavior through school shootings. To do so this study will be a continuation of previous research conducted on school shootings by Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips published in (2003). The original study focused on several factors, the prominent ones being rejection and ostracism. It concluded on March 7, 2001, and the current study will

analyze school shootings from that point forward. The answer to this research question will then be used to determine the societal implications of the factors influencing school shooters.

Literature Review

Much research has been done regarding what influences juveniles to commit violence acts in schools; however, there has also been much disagreement. Previous research has suggested that different factors influence different types of violence within schools. Some have blamed violence on the macro structure of the school, while others have placed blame on the more micro-level environment within the school. The focus of this research is to determine whether rejection and ostracism influence youths to commit homicide in schools.

Homicides can be divided into categories specifying the type of killing committed. One type, senseless homicides, can then be subcategorized into six groups—“thrill” killings, “hate” killings, “romantic” murder-suicides, “revenge” killings, “cult-related” killings, and killings that are carried out by mentally disturbed individuals (Ewing, 1990). Senseless killings are “committed by relatively normal juveniles acting on impulse—often in conjunction with or under the influence of other juveniles” (Ewing, 1990, p 63). Most school shootings would be classified as a senseless killing under the subcategory of revenge since the juvenile shooters tend to seek retribution from those who have wronged them at school.

Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth (2004) studied several theories and explanations behind school shootings. In the book *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*, Newman et al. explored ten different theories. They included mental illness, what they called “he just snapped,” family problems, bullying, peer support, changing communities, culture of violence, gun availability, violent media, and the copycat effect. Newman et al. do not specify which factors have the biggest effect on shootings in schools, but they do discredit the “he just snapped” theory, due, at least in part, to the premeditation involved.

School violence in general has also been attributed to the location of the school and of the residence of the student (Kramer, 2000). Kramer argues that “broader social and economic forces such as poverty, inequality, and social exclusion shape most of the problem of youth violence in America” (p. 123). He contends that poverty takes parents and guardians out of the homes for longer periods of time than parents in other socioeconomic strata and these absences allow children to go astray.

Other authorities on the topic of school violence place the blame on the structure and organization of the school itself. This theory of organizational deviance states that it is the different actors in the school system not connecting with one another and creating chains of information that only lead to dead ends which leads to warning signs of violence going unnoticed. Fox and Harding (2005) studied the roles schools played in the shootings in West Paducah, Kentucky, and Jonesboro, Arkansas, and the lack of prevention of the incidents. They found “with few exceptions, school officials were unaware that the shooters in these incidents were experiencing severe emotional, social, and/or behavioral problems or that they had such rage against the institution” (Fox & Harding, 2005, p.69). This is organizational deviance, defined as “when events that are created by or in organizations do not conform to an organization’s goals or expectations and produce unanticipated and harmful outcomes” (Fox & Harding, p. 70). They also argue that “because the problems of individual students often do not interrupt the basic functioning of the school, they can fester unnoticed until a larger problem, such as a school shooting, occurs” (Fox & Harding, p. 73). One of their conclusions is that most students who become school shooters do not attract any attention. They fly under the radar of the school administration, which focuses attention on the children who create problems.

Another factor that some believe helps contribute to school shootings is that schools are not taking sufficient measures in order to prevent these types of disasters. Easterbrook (2002) argued that some of the preventive measures that schools have taken lead to poor outcomes. Easterbrook used violent language as an example of this ill effect. It often occurs that youths who are caught using violent language on school grounds are punished “without considering the context of those statements or the behavioral history of the students” (Easterbrook, p. 56). Instead of an overreaction to violent language and an increase in heightened security, Easterbrook asserted schools with a “nurturing environment and increased access to counseling” would be a better benefit in prevention than turning schools into a prison.

Dewey G. Cornell of University of Virginia's Curry School of Education addressed the House Judiciary Committee at the Oversight Hearing to Examine Youth Culture and Violence in May 1999. He believed that violent youth fall into three categories. The first category is the mentally ill who “suffer from delusions that guide behavior” (Cornell, 1999). The second category, which contains two-thirds of all violent youth, are the antisocial youth who have “a long history of delinquent (sic) disruptive problems evident in early childhood” (Cornell). The third category has no name. These are the “normal youngsters whose acts of violence surprise us” (Cornell). They are “highly sensitive to

teasing and bullying, are deeply resentful, ruminating over perceived injustices” (Cornell). Cornell also noted that the shooters up to the time of the delivery of his speech were the victims of bullying and teasing.

McCabe and Martin (2005) investigated school violence, the effect the media plays in the dissemination of crime information, and what has been done in response to school shootings. According to McCabe and Martin, bullying has four initial elements: an imbalance of power, intent to harm, a threat of further aggression, and terror. They also argue that bullies have a need for power and control and “tend to come from families where physical punishment is the norm and bonding among parents and children is limited” (McCabe & Martin, p. 27). In their research, they also discovered six common traits of bullies. These traits are: a desire for domination, manipulation of others to obtain a goal, egocentrism of the bully, the view that the prey are weaker, the failure to accept responsibility for their actions, and the seeking of attention (McCabe and Martin). The victims of the bullies are often insecure, have low-self esteem, are unwilling to protect themselves, and are only attractive to bullies as long as they do not fight back. In addition, this type of subjugation bonds victims together. Those who are bullied may associate with other victims and may participate in antisocial activities, such as school shootings (McCabe & Martin, 2005). But, as McCabe and Martin point out, no one can be sure that bullying directly influences these incidents.

Along similar lines, the United States Secret Service conducted an investigation in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education on violence in schools in an attempt to develop a profile of a school shooter and to provide a threat assessment. Their preliminary findings are important. Published in October 2000 and studying school shootings up to that point from the 1990s, the School Safe Initiative found that in almost all studied incidents “the attacker developed the idea to harm the target before the attack” and “in well over ¾ of the incidents, the attacker planned the attack” (United States Secret Service, 2000, p.3). They also discovered that “more than half of the attackers had revenge as a motive” (p. 3). In addition, “More than 3/4 of the attackers were known to hold a grievance at the time of the attack” (p. 3). They were also able to identify bullying as a major influence in school shootings. They discovered “In over 2/3 of the cases, the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured by others prior to the incident” and “a number of attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was longstanding and severe” (United States Secret Service, p 7). Yet the Secret Service determined that there was no accurate profile of a school shooter.

One of the key pieces of literature in the area of school shootings, however, is that of Leary et al. Their case study of fifteen schools was able to identify three forms of rejection and three other risk factors that were present in school shootings occurring from 1995 to 2001 (Leary et al., 2003). In their background research, Leary, et al. found that the perpetrators of school shootings were seen as outcasts within their schools and that as rejection increased, so did the danger of aggressive behavior. The rejection that the perpetrators suffered gave them the impression that they were not accepted or valued. To exacerbate these feelings of rejection and hurt, most of the bullying and ostracism occurred in public and in front of other people (Leary et al., 2003). The results of the Leary et al. study found that “in at least 12 of the 15 incidents, the perpetrator(s) had been subject to a pattern of malicious teasing or bullying” (2003: 210). Furthermore, “at least 10 of the 15 incidents involved a perpetrator who had shown previous evidence of having psychological problems” (Leary et al., p. 210). The researchers were adamant in noting that “few of the perpetrators attributed their violent behavior to other equally plausible causes, such as disinterested parents, a broken home, child abuse, academic failure or psychological problems” (Leary et al., p. 211). They saw their transgressions as stemming from their victimizations. In addition, this study provided a fit model for a case study that could be used in future research of other school shootings.

Gillespie (2002) believes bullying at school plays a significant role in the events leading up to a school shooting as well. He used the 1999 Columbine shooting as an example and detailed the humiliating torment that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris faced from peers while attending school. After the deadly school shooting, *Newsweek* printed a quote from a classmate saying Klebold and Harris walked the halls “with their heads down, because if they looked up they’d get thrown into lockers and get called a ‘fag’” (as cited in Gillespie, 2002, p. 11). Gillespie has also examined popular films. When comparing movies such as *The Outsiders*, *Carrie*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—all of which expose school culture as loutish and disturbing—Gillespie states “...we cannot even imagine schools that are not just a few steps removed from *Lord of the Flies*” (2002, p. 12). Bullying is an antagonizing factor in school shootings.

Larkin’s (2007) work also focuses on bullying in Columbine High School both before and after the shooting. He interviewed teachers, students, and community members about the school environment prior to the shooting, the incident itself, and the atmosphere of the school several years later. Through this, he was able to determine that the school system, meaning the teachers and the administration, allowed bullying to happen within the school. Larkin also notes through interviews with students that the bullying was especially rampant before the time of the attack and because of this many students were carrying guns and knives for protection.

In addition, many people believe school shootings occur when students unpredictably snap because they are bullied to the point where they feel they need to seek justice on their own behalf. However, in Joseph Lieberman’s (2006)

The Shooting Game: The Making of School Shooters, he studied school shootings that had taken place over a span of 30 years and came to the realization that many, if not all, shootings were premeditated. As Lieberman describes it: All of them required some degree of planning, and several, such as Columbine and De Anza Community College, were laid out in detail far in advance. The more accomplices are involved, the more plotting was required. Among loners, the plan of attack may have been less well thought out, but all of them required at least the procurement of weapons, a means of transportation, and a consideration of the layout of the school, location of students and timing (2006, p. 1).

Here, this 30 year study took out of consideration the impulsivity of the shooters as a possible factor behind the shootings.

The most important complement to Lieberman of all, however, were the eight warning signs of violence discovered by McCabe and Martin in a slightly earlier study (published in 2005). Those signs include:

1. History of poor academic achievement.
2. Disciplinary problems at school (usually because they do not feel close to the school environment).
3. Difficulties with social skills and peers.
4. History of violence toward peers.
5. Views of aggressive behavior as normal and acceptable.
6. Involvement with alcohol and/or drugs.
7. Access to firearms.
8. History of family problems, such as rejection, violence, and a lack of supervision. (McCabe and Martin, 2005: 82-83).

These do not all need to be present at once, but one or any combination of them could prove to be fatal.

Much research has focused on the real threat of school violence as opposed to the threat that the general public believes based on the media. The Justice Policy Institute funded a study called *School House Hype*, published in 1998, by Donohue, Vincent, & Ziedenberg, that examined the real threat posed to students in schools. It found that there is a one in one million chance of a student being killed in school and that fewer homicides were committed by juveniles at the time of publication than in 1965 (Donohue, et al., 1998). Yet the public does not know this because, as the Justice Policy Institute put it, "Rather than providing context, the media's linking of these shootings as a 'trend' has tended to exacerbate people's fears about the safety of their children and youth in school. The result is that misdirected public policy is being generated to safeguard the schools, even though the real threat may lie elsewhere" (Donohue, et al., 1998, pp. 4-5). Donohue et al. also discovered that the attention the media had placed on the school shootings was leaving impressions on the public that were not congruent with the reality of school shootings. The study found that violence in school was more likely to happen in an urban setting, rather than in rural areas as incidents recently in the news had been depicted. Also, the threat of violence against students was down. Students were more likely to report being threatened or injured by a weapon at school in 1976 than in 1996 (Donohue, et al.).

Sociological Theories

Social Control

Social control theory states that school shootings occur when the perpetrator's bonds to society weaken, also known as a decrease in social capital. Kramer (2000) defines social control as involving "all the sanctions and constraints used in an effort to control another individual's behavior (to make him or her conform to social norms)" (p. 126). Kramer argues that poverty takes parents away from the home, reducing social control. He also says that poverty reduces social supports for children, leading them to feel excluded. When a parent is away from the home, he or she has less time to spend with the child creating bonds. Kramer cites a government study that found "youth crime is related inversely to 'child-parent involvement, such as the amount of intimate communication, confiding, sharing of activities, and seeking help'" (Kramer, 2000: 127). These are all ways that would increase the strength of social control, meaning that when they are absent, the child's bonds to society are weakened.

Welsh (2000) enhances the argument that delinquency is the result of weak social bonds. He states, "Control theorists contend that delinquency is the result of a weakening of effective social and cultural constraints, especially via weakened transmission of values through institutions such as the family and the school" (p. 91). In his research, Welsh examined five scales that coincide with Hirschi's control theory. He examined school involvement, positive peer associations, belief in school rules, school effort, and school rewards. He found that "those who believed in school rules, reported great school effort, and associated with nondeviant peers all evidenced much less offending" (Welsh, p. 98). He also found that not believing in the rules of the school was a strong predictor of misconduct..

McCabe and Martin (2005) also believe that the social control is applicable to school violence. The four elements of social control (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) all play a part. The attachment element regards peers and family. The commitment is to society, and is shown by following the rules. Involvement is an opportunity to create a social bond. This means that if one is involved in a socially acceptable activity, there is little or no time for delinquency. And finally, belief regards the rules of the school. If a student does not believe in the rules, he or she is more likely to break them and become delinquent.

Newman et al. (2004) found “five necessary but not sufficient conditions” based on the shootings in West Paducah and Jonesboro to explain why school shootings occur. Newman et al. state:

The first necessary factor is the shooter’s perception of himself as extremely marginal in the social worlds that matter to him. Second, school shooters must suffer from psychosocial problems that magnify the impact of marginality. Also ‘cultural scripts’—prescriptions for behavior—must be available to lead the way toward an armed attack. The fourth necessary factor is a failure of surveillance systems that are intended to identify troubled teens before their problems become extreme. Finally, we come to gun availability (Newman et al. 2004, pp. 229-230).

All five factors clearly show a weakened bond between the individual and society, thus emphasizing social control as a prominent theory contributing to school shootings.

Anomie Theory

Anomie theory explains that school shootings come about as the result of a state of confusion or normlessness. When Kramer (2000) speaks of anomie theory he builds on the work of Messner and Rosenfeld who believe “External control is achieved through the active involvement of individuals in institutional roles and through the dispensation of rewards and punishments by institutions” (1997, p. 78). Kramer furthers this argument when he states, “when these noneconomic institutions are devalued and rendered impotent, then the attractiveness of the roles they offer to young people is diminished, and the incentives and penalties they can offer for prosocial behavior are limited” (p. 131).

Differential Association

Kramer (2000) argues that when parents are not in the home, the bonds between parents and children are weakened, with these weakened bonds extended peer relationships. A weakened home bond “leads to greater association with alienated peers, who form peer group control structures that interact with various community opportunity structures to produce delinquency” (p.133). When children bond, there is a chance for delinquency if one child is already in trouble or the surrounding environment is conducive to delinquency.

Other research has related violence by juveniles to the way they are disciplined. Marshall (2000) states: “some well meaning programs designed to control aggressive children may be worse than useless: They may be doing harm. For example, collecting young people in group homes or sending them to boot camps or on wilderness ordeals—popular in many states—may intensify rather than reverse antisocial behavior” (p. 573). One can envisage that once a student returns to school, delinquency and the new-found violent nature will follow. As supporting evidence, Marshall cited the research of Dishion, a clinical psychologist, who found antisocial children teach others how to misbehave.

McCabe and Martin (2005) also saw differential association as an influence on school violence. They state, “Under the theory of Differential Association, a person becomes delinquent when social conditions are more favorable to delinquency than to nondelinquency” (p. 62). They based this on several propositions which include that criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in the process of communication, and the principle part of learning criminal behavior occurs within intimate, personal groups. McCabe and Martin argue that bullying is a result of social learning that works through reinforcement and punishment. Because the bullies are gaining something from their actions and are not being punished, bullying is being reinforced and is, therefore, acceptable. This is exacerbated when friends or peers participate in these actions as well. This can lead the victims to associate with other victims, and then they may make a plan to seek revenge against their aggressors.

Policy Implications

The Justice Policy Institute found in their 1998 study that after the first shootings, many schools were posting additional police at schools, despite the fact that 99% of juvenile homicides happened off-campus (Donohue et al., 1998: 14). Schools, due to funding shortages, were also ending after-school programs, especially in Virginia, at the behest of Governor James Gilmore (Donohue et al.). These programs were some of the few institutions keeping children off the streets and out of trouble. In addition, the study found that school expulsions and suspensions also

increased with the implementation of zero tolerance policies (Donohue et al.). Furthermore, states were eliminating the minimum age for children to be tried as adults, and Texas was considering expanding the death penalty to juveniles (Donohue et al.).

In light of all this, the Justice Policy Institute study made three suggestions (Donohue et al., 1998). The first was the expansion of afterschool programs. This would occupy youths during the peak hours of crime, 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. The second was the restriction of mass gun sales by implementing a one gun a month law. This would curb the illegal selling of guns on the streets. The third and last suggestion was for the media to put whatever shooting occurred into context rather than sensationalizing it. This could be done through the use of statistics, such as comparing the percentages of shootings committed by youths to those committed by adults, and the percentages of homicides committed on campus compared to those committed off campus.

Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips (2003) meanwhile, argue that steps need to be taken to reduce bullying and ostracism within schools. They note an anti-bullying law recently passed in Georgia that states that after a student has been the perpetrator in three bullying incidents in one year, he or she will be sent to an alternative school (Leary et al.).

Mental health services in schools are beginning to be seen as a way of preventing school shootings as well. Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta & Roth (2004) suggest that for children with severe psychological problems “we need to move away from a law enforcement model and toward devoting greater resources to counseling, mental health services, social workers, and development of communication skills” (Newman et al., p. 294). These services could possibly be the help that is needed in order to prevent a tragedy. Along with these services, school resource officers, or SROs, are often deemed necessary in preventing school violence. Newman et al. explain the importance of their presence:

Both Heath and Westside have added SROs and see them as an unqualified success. Like traditional police officers, SROs carry a radio, a gun, handcuffs, and a club, but they try to blend in at the school by wearing a “soft” uniform. By acting as a presence on the school campus and reaching out to students, they combine the functions of security and communication (p. 280).

Newman et al. (2004) argue that there need to be more resources in the schools in order to provide for a wide array of preventative measures.

Fox and Harding (2005) make other suggestions based on their study of the West Paducah and Jonesboro shootings. They note that the school counselors were overextended doing paperwork required by the state, and not spending adequate time helping students with their problems. Fox and Harding’s suggestion was to split the role of the guidance counselor into two positions, one to deal with the paperwork and college preparation for the students and the other to focus on mental health and social and emotional problems. This would enable the counselor to focus on the students who need attention but who are not receiving it. In addition to this, Wetterneck, Sass, and Davies (2004) believe that “Educators should be encouraged to help create an environment where students feel comfortable telling an adult when they hear about a potential target for violence” (p. 13). This would put necessary pressure on the schools.

Cornell (1999) is another to suggest new policies. In his address at the House Judiciary Committee Oversight Hearing to Examine Youth Culture and Violence, he presented his plan based on previous school shootings. His suggestion was to “address the motives of violence through education and training for students and their parents” (Cornell). He recommended mandating “at least 1 hour of instruction each month on conflict resolution and understanding of violence” (Cornell). He also suggested to having “a professionally trained staff member designated solely to provide risk assessment, crisis intervention, and short-term mental health counseling with potentially violent students” (Cornell). In addition to these suggestions, he made several others including stricter policies regarding violent video games, and minors’ access to firearms (Cornell).

Earlier researchers have made considerable attempts at suggesting new policies. Some have been well-founded while others remain unrealistic. Several studies have revealed the need to consider youth violence a matter of public health. Just as one would curtail a disease through prevention, the same needs to be done with youth violence. However, as Kramer’s (2000) background research reveals, these prevention policies are most likely to work in the places that need them the least.

Though the belief in the correct policy implementations differs, previous research converges on the idea that something needs to be done to curb school shootings. It appears that the new policies need to be reflected both inside of the school and outside because children live in both realms.

Data & Methods

Leary, et al. (2003) conducted research regarding common themes behind school shootings by using news magazines—*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report*— articles from commonly circulated newspapers—*USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*— and websites upheld by trustworthy news organizations—*CNN* and *The Associated Press*. The goal of their study was to test the hypothesis that school shootings are preceded by some form of rejection or ostracism. By examining these articles for significant, well-known attributes, they were able to distinguish three types of rejection that almost all school shooters from 1996 to 2001 faced. However, a similar study has yet to be conducted on more recent school shooting incidents. The purpose of this research is to repeat the Leary, et al. study using more recent incidents to reveal if the characteristics found in the first study are applicable to later shootings.

The data were obtained from newspapers outlining the cases of twelve school shootings which have occurred since March 22, 2001. Each case examined was committed by a middle school or a high school student in a learning environment within the United States. Articles were obtained through three national newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, and papers from the local areas in which the shooting occurred. Data were gathered from the day of the shooting to seven days after.

The secondary analysis method of research was used to analyze the data (mainly extracted from newspaper accounts of the tragedies). Each researcher was randomly assigned six cases to examine, making a total of twelve school shootings. The following indicators were sought while reading each article: teasing, ostracism or other ongoing rejection, acute rejection, psychological problems, a fascination with guns or explosives, and a fascination with death or violence. Data from each case were then recorded in a table created by the current researchers. After the researchers collected the data for their individual cases, they exchanged cases with one another and then conducted their own research. The two sets of analyses were then compared in order to cross-reference each researcher's work. The consistency of the data collected was guaranteed through the use of this method.

Social Control, Anomie, and Differential Association Theories Applied

Social control theory can be applied through the secondary analysis of the newspaper articles. Indicators about the individual, such as a criminal history or a weakened family bond, will help to explain the background of the perpetrator and possibly contribute information as to why the shooting took place. These can be identified by references to relationships, or lack thereof, in which the perpetrator was involved.

Anomie theory can also be applied to the analysis of the data. Researchers looked for signs which suggested the individual was experiencing normlessness and therefore acted out by shooting his or her peers and school officials. Examples of words the articles may have used in order to portray this sense of normlessness in the individual include loner, unrepentant, Gothic, etc.

Finally, differential association was also identified through this secondary analysis. The perpetrators' relationships with, and influences by, peers, partners, or fellow perpetrators was uncovered through the articles. This was recorded in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of School Shootings¹

Location Perpetrator(s) (Age)	Date	Killed/ Wounded	Teasing, ostracism or other ongoing rejection	Acute Rejection	Psychological Problems	Fascinated with guns or explosives	Fascinated with death or violence	Other
El Cajon, CA Jason Hoffman (18)	3/22/01	0/6	Loner; outcast; was not picked on because he was intimidating	Rejected by Navy; blamed the school dean	Anger management issues	Loved guns; owned the weapons used in the incident; read gun magazines; asked a Navy instructor gun questions	Made references to Columbine (wished to repeat it); Fan of World Wrestling Federation (WWF)	Previous assault charge
New York, NY Vincent Rodriguez (18)	1/15/02	0/2	Revenge for the teasing of his girlfriend; possibly afraid of his victims; felt humiliated by victims					Previous criminal history; prior altercation with victims over his girlfriend
Red Lion, PA James Sheets (14)	4/24/03	2/0		Recent breakup with his girlfriend		Bragged about guns	Thought it would be funny if someone shot up his school	May have been recently disciplined; listened to hardcore rock music
Cold Spring, MN John Jason McLaughlin (15)	9/24/03	2/0					In 5 th grade got into a fight with a teacher and formed a gun with his hands and pretended to shoot the teacher	Quiet; "Didn't seem like he was there."

¹ Table adopted from Leary et al. (2003).

Location Perpetrator(s) (Age)	Date	Killed/ Wounded	Teasing, ostracism or other ongoing rejection	Acute Rejection	Psychological Problems	Fascinated with guns or explosives	Fascinated with death or violence	Other
Red Lake Indian Reservation, MN Jeff Weise (16)	3/21/05	10/7	Ignored by peers		Received mental health counseling; on medication for depression; transferred to a psychological facility after failed suicide attempt	Talked of guns; posted on websites about weapons	Visited a Nazi website; posted on websites about violence (one post said he believed in a past life he was a WWII German soldier); drew graphic and violent pictures	Never appeared to recover from the death of his father
Jacksboro, TN Kenneth Bartley, Jr. (15)	11/8/05	1/2						May have brought gun to school to trade for OxyContin and panicked when caught by a school official
Cazenovia, WI Eric Hainstock (15)	2/29/06	1/0	Teased by other kids (called sexually derogatory names); felt the principal was not listening to his concerns		Behavioral and anger issues			Disciplined the day before for having tobacco at school; told friend of violence to come; could not interact well with others

Location Perpetrator(s) (Age)	Date	Killed/Wounded	Teasing, ostracism or other ongoing rejection	Acute Rejection	Psychological Problems	Fascinated with guns or explosives	Fascinated with death or violence	Other
Tacoma, WA Douglas S. Chantahabouly (18)	1/3/07	1/0			Possible schizophrenia; possibly on antipsychotic medications; previously admitted to mental health facility after attempted suicide; confused, depressed, experienced hallucinations upon arrest	Previously taken guns to school; previously possessed firearms with the purpose of buying/selling them	Associated with gang (Crips)	Shooting may have happened because of dispute over money or property
Cleveland, OH Asa H. Coon (14)	10/10/07	1/4	Mocked for the way he dressed; neglected by mother; taunted for strange behavior		Suicidal; previously cared for by a mental health facility; refused medication		Liked Marilyn Manson music	Disgruntled for being suspended for fighting
Memphis, TN Cornelius Cheers (17)	2/11/08	0/1						Shooting stemmed from an earlier argument; previous criminal record; may have been gang related

Location Perpetrator(s) (Age)	Date	Killed/Wounded	Teasing, ostracism or other ongoing rejection	Acute Rejection	Psychological Problems	Fascinated with guns or explosives	Fascinated with death or violence	Other
Oxnard, CA Brandon McInerney (14)	2/12/08	1/0						Ongoing dispute with victim; argued with victim day before; possible hate crime
Fort Lauderdale, FL Teah Wimberly (15)	11/12/08	1/0	No relationship with her mother; father in jail (they shared a strong bond)	Rejected romantically by victim; had an unrequited crush; intense feelings for victim not reciprocated; recently stopped talking with the victim	Behavior problems for the past year which resulted in seeing a psychiatrist; held for a psychological evaluation once arrested			Forcefully pursued students for relationships

Advantages

There are numerous advantages to using the secondary analysis method. One is that the data were already compiled (Champion, 2006). There was no need to travel to the locations of the school shootings to conduct interviews with everyone influenced by the incident. This saved both time and money. Another advantage of this method is that the data archives were readily available, making information easily accessible (Champion, 2006: 320). With secondary analysis, the data were gathered from primary sources, thus offering a larger database in order to collect more researchable sources.

Disadvantages

However, there are several disadvantages to go along with this method of research. One was that the articles may have been biased. For instance, in regard to the shooting in Granite Hills, California, on March 22, 2001, there had been another shooting at a school nearby only three weeks prior. This could have led the newspapers to overreact to the incident at Granite Hills High School, and could have also created a need for the local newspapers to vilify the perpetrator to fulfill demands from the public. In addition, there was no way for the researchers to fill in any missing information (Champion, 2006). In keeping the study consistent, no further research could be conducted on one school that had not been done on all the rest. If further information was not provided, it was simply not there to be analyzed. Furthermore, there was also the possibility for misinterpretation (Champion, 2006). What the current researchers interpreted as significant or insignificant may have been the opposite of what the researchers of the original study (Leary et al., 2003) would have concluded or was not what the author of the initial article meant. It is hoped that this was prevented by the cross-referencing/inter-reliability cross-checking conducted on the data compiled by each researcher.

Summary and Conclusions

Results

Each incident was unique in its perpetrators, motives, and presence of rejection and ostracism. A look at each school individually is required.

Incidents

El Cajon, California (March 22, 2001) Justin Hoffman, 18, injured five people (three students and two teachers) as he fired shotgun rounds at the administration building of Granite Hills High School. The on-duty security officer shot Hoffman before he could cause more harm. The motive is believed to be that Hoffman blamed the dean for his rejection from the Navy, which happened only days before the incident.

New York City, New York (January 15, 2002) Vincent Rodriguez, 18, entered Martin Luther King Jr. High School through an unmonitored side door, hid a gun in a fire extinguisher case, and left the building. He soon returned, through the front door, this time passing through the metal detectors. At the end of the day, he confronted two students by whom he felt aggrieved because they harassed his girlfriend and then shot them. Both victims recovered from their injuries.

Red Lion, Pennsylvania (April 24, 2003) James Sheets, 14, killed his junior high school principal and then himself at Red Lion Area Junior High School. He had recently broken up with his girlfriend and had previously told classmates it would be funny if someone attacked the school. He also may have had an undisclosed grievance against the principal.

Cold Spring, Minnesota (September 24, 2003) John Jason McLaughlin, 15, killed two classmates in gym class at Rocori High School. He was described as quiet. A classmate said, "It didn't seem like he was there." He is the son of a sheriff's deputy.

Red Lake Indian Reservation, Minnesota (March 21, 2005) Jeff Weise, 16, killed nine and wounded seven before killing himself at Red Lake High School. He also killed his grandfather and an acquaintance of the grandfather's earlier that morning. He was ignored by his peers and had psychological problems. He often spoke of guns and posted on violent and Nazi websites.

Jacksboro, Tennessee (November 8, 2005) Kenneth Bartley, Jr., 15, killed the assistant principal and injured two more administrators at Campbell County High School. The motive was largely unknown, but it is believed that Bartley may have brought the gun to school to trade for OxyContin and then panicked when he was caught.

Cazenovia, Wisconsin (February 29, 2006) Eric Hainstock, 15, shot and killed the principal at Weston Schools. He was teased by other students and believed that the principal was not doing enough to stop it. He also faced punishment for being found with tobacco on school grounds.

Tacoma, Washington (January 3, 2007) Douglas S. Chanthabouly, 18, shot and killed a classmate in a hallway of Henry Foss High School. The motive was largely unknown, but rumors circulated regarding an argument between the perpetrator and the victim over money or property. Chanthabouly exhibited numerous signs of psychological problems.

Cleveland, Ohio (October 10, 2007) Asa H. Coon, 14, wounded four people before killing himself at Success Tech Academy. He had been neglected by his mother, and taunted and mocked by classmates. He had previously been in the care of a mental facility, and had been suicidal.

Memphis, Tennessee (February 11, 2008) Cornelius Cheers, 17, wounded a fellow student after an earlier argument at Mitchell High School.

Oxnard, California (February 12, 2008) Brandon McInerney, 14, killed a classmate in what was possibly a hate crime at E.O. Green Junior High School. The victim was publicly gay and the two had fought in the past, including the day before the shooting.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida (November 12, 2008) Teah Wimberly, 15, shot and killed a friend at Dillard High School after having been romantically rejected. Wimberly allegedly had intense feelings for the victim and had stopped talking to her when those feelings were not returned. Wimberly was known to aggressively pursue fellow students for relationships.

Conclusions

The findings of the research are shown in Table 1. All pertinent information is recorded and empty cells indicate that no information was found. In all, twelve incidents were studied and all proved to have various motives. The most recent incident, the shooting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was the only one committed by a female perpetrator. Furthermore, the two most recent, the Oxnard, California, and the Fort Lauderdale shootings, were the only two dealing with sexual preferences. The outlier in the cases appears to be the shooting in Jacksboro, Tennessee, as the shooter did not intend to harm anyone with the weapon, but rather trade it for drugs. The shooting was a result of the perpetrator panicking when caught by school administrators.

The findings of this study, however, are not as compelling as those of the initial study conducted by Leary, et al. (2003). There is less evidence of extreme teasing or ostracism. While they are still present in the current study, they are not prevalent throughout all of the cases as shown in the previous research. Only half (roughly 50%) of the case studies involved ongoing teasing or ostracism, but one of those was revenge for the teasing of a girlfriend and not of the perpetrator. This is far lower than the twelve out of fifteen found in the Leary, et al. study. The Leary, et al. study also found that half of the school shooters had faced recent rejection, one that was "most commonly a romantic breakup or unrequited love" (Leary, et al., p. 210). The current study found recent rejection in only three of the twelve shootings, and one was not from a failed romance. In addition, the Leary, et al. study found previous psychological problems in two-thirds of the school shooters. The current study found those problems in half (again, roughly 50%) of the shooters. In the current research, with the exclusion of the Jacksboro incident, all incidents were planned and the shooter did not "just snap."

While the findings differ, both studies do illustrate that rejection, teasing, and ostracism can be prominent factors in school shootings. There may be other factors, however. Future research may examine the same case studies for other possible significant factors to reveal if the shootings did happen because of rejection or if it was a combination of internal and/or external forces.

Each of the sociological theories tested in this study fit with one case or another. From the twelve studies, it is seen that the shootings all occurred for a variety of motives and there was also a wide variety of teasing or ostracism. In some cases, the perpetrator had not experienced any bullying prior to the shootings, and in other cases, there was evidence of ostracism.

Sociological Theories

Social Control

Through the analysis of the newspaper articles, social control theory emerges as the theory that explains best violent behavior. It was seen in two of the twelve studies. In the Success Tech Academy incident in Cleveland, Ohio, Coon was neglected by his mother, and his father was not in his life. These lost relationships meant that the social bonds a child gets from his or her parents were not in place. This means that Coon had weak social bonds to begin with, and this absence was aggravated by the ridiculing that he received from classmates at school.

The lack of parental relationships was also a factor in the Fort Lauderdale shooting. It is important to note that the mother was not present in the life of the shooter for a great while before the incident, and that the relationship with her father was suddenly cut off the year before. The shooter was raised by her father and the two shared a strong bond. He was sent to jail, and the child faced psychological and behavioral problems afterward. This can also be seen as a symptom of anomie.

Anomie

Anomie also played a role in some of the shootings. At Granite Hills, it is unknown whether Hoffman was anomic or not, but one could imagine that not being admitted into an institution on which one based his or her entire future would be confusing and might leave a feeling of literally nothing else left to live for.

In the Fort Lauderdale shooting, the perpetrator was raised by her father who went to jail a year before the shooting. She was then forced to live with her grandparents and she began to suffer from psychological and behavioral problems. This can be seen as a result of anomie. She was accustomed to having her father present and was dependent on that relationship. Suddenly it was taken away from her. It is very possible that she was left confused and faced a sense of normlessness. She could have also felt anomic by her recent romantic rejection from the victim. In the Red Lion, Pennsylvania shooting, the perpetrator, James Sheets, recently broke up with his girlfriend. The breaking of relationships can leave one feeling anomic, as was present in both this study and the Leary, et al. (2003) study.

Differential Association

The shooting at Henry Foss High School was one of two incidents that could be explained by differential association. It was alleged that the perpetrator was a member of the Crips gang in Tacoma, Washington. Gangs bond the members together and they begin to act more like one another the more time they spend together. In addition, through the gang, criminal behavior is learned. There is a strong possibility that this was a factor in the shooting. The other shooting took place in Memphis, Tennessee, by Cornelius Cheers. This also may have been gang related, though relatives of the perpetrator deny his involvement in gangs.

There were several shootings, however, in which differential association theory played no part in an explanation of the violence. One example was the El Cajon, California, shooting. The perpetrator, Jason Hoffman, was described as a loner, so he could not have been influenced by friends he did not have. It is also important to note that the original Leary, et al. (2003) study did have two shootings conducted by more than one gunman, while this current study did not encounter any.

Future Research

The future research and policy implications will depend on the interpretation of this research by various groups. To prevent other incidents such as these, however, it is clear that society must play a part, and adults must become role models to help eliminate the rejection and ostracism that push youths to commit these shootings. In addition, a better gun control policy is one move the government needs to consider in order to stop juveniles from even obtaining their weapons of choice. Juveniles today are receiving guns too easily, whether bought or stolen. New gun control policies need to reinforce thorough background checks of all potential buyers and implement a legal obligation to keep the gun safely and securely stored. To make sure individuals obey the legislation in a serious manner, jail time or a large fine should be imposed if the agreement is broken.

Typically, studies similar to this one have suggested that schools do work to put an end to bullying. The same studies have also called for student action to reduce incidences of bullying (Leary, et al., 2003). In the future, schools should lay out a policy in their handbook where if one should witness bullying, he or she is obligated to report it. If one hears of someone threatening another individual or the school, the same obligation should apply. Sanctions would be in

place for those in nonobservance of the rules. These actions would reduce bullying episodes that may incite a student to seek retribution.

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