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RISK FACTORS RELATED TO SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

by

Best Iriah Anaele

Master of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2020

Thesis

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Abstract

School shootings have become a major issue in the United States for over the past 20 years, contributing to the resurgence of the debates surrounding gun control policies. However, further research is needed to better understand the risk factors of school shootings. The FBI constructed the Four-Pronged Threat Assessment Model, a risk assessment specifically applied to school shooters (O'Toole, n.d). Within the current study, the Four-Pronged Threat Assessment Model will be applied to five school shooters: Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold (both Columbine school shooters), Seung Heung Cho (the Virginia Tech School Shooter), Adam Lanza (the Sandy Hook School Shooter), and Nikolas Cruz (the Stoneman Douglas School Shooter). Five separate case studies will be conducted for each school shooter, aiming to answer the following three questions: (1) What are some of the possible risk factors of becoming a school shooter across the cases? (2) Can the Four-Pronged Threat Assessment Model be effectively applied to the five school shooters? (3) What are the possible policy implications that could be considered? The results of the research should provide a greater understanding of the common predictors of school shootings and policy suggestions that may help in addressing such a major concern.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Gun violence has long been a major problem in the United States of America (US). The US has the highest number of deaths by firearms out of all the 34 developed countries in the world (Shultz et al., 2013). First, about 70% of homicides in the US are caused by firearms (Shultz et al., 2013). Research has revealed that the homicide rate in the US was found to be seven times higher than in other developed countries (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). Gun-related homicides were 25 times higher in the US than in any other developed country (Morain & Crifasi, 2019).

Between 2000 and 2015, there have been 200 active shooter cases within the US. Within this time frame, 578 people were killed, and 696 people were injured (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014). Incidences concerning mass shootings have been found to be increasing for 30 years in total and 48 states have faced mass shooting incidents (Lin et al., 2018) The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have defined mass shootings as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area with a firearm” (Glasofer & Laskowski-Jones, 2018, p. 51). School shootings can also include people who move from one location to another throughout the massacre. Such a scenario was evident during the Virginia Tech school shooting in 2007 where Seung-Hui Cho moved from one residence to another, shooting up each of the areas.

On February 14th, 2018, a mass shooting took place at Stoneman Douglas Secondary school in Florida. Since then, there has been a greater focus from politicians and academic researchers on the possible factors and forms of intervention for mass shootings in the US.

However, further studies should be conducted on the shooters themselves to find possible factors that may have contributed to their actions. The present study focuses on furthering our understanding of the possible risk factors that prompt school shootings.

Theoretical Framework

According to Kathy Charmaz (2014), grounded theory is an inductive style of research where one enters the research field with no hypothesis or little to no knowledge of the potential findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define grounded theory as the development of theories based on “close up contact with the empirical world” (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014, p.8). In other words, grounded theory is when theories are generated throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2014; Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Lan et al., 2018). Grounded theory was first applied in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss who were researching to better understand the appropriate treatment types for patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Lan et al., 2018). Both argued that it was not ideal to use theories to verify the results of the research (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Rather, it was important to generate theory from research as opposed to just forming theories after researching to better illustrate how the theories and the empirical research were connected (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Since then, researchers have used grounded theory to further bridge the gap between theories and empirical research.

Feliciano et al. (2019) for example, applied grounded theory in their research, where they created focus groups to evaluate the preferences of lung cancer patient’s relatives and caregivers on ways to address the disease. Grounded theory was appropriate for this study because the researchers entered the study with no pre-existing themes or ideas on how the relatives and caregivers perceived lung cancer interventions. Rather, their opinions were all generated throughout the research, allowing them to develop theories. Grounded theory has also

been used to better understand the themes researchers identified when looking at the knowledge and experience that Somali refugee women had with family planning (Zhang et al., 2020).

Similar to the previous study, Zhang et al. (2020) began the research without prior knowledge of how Somali refugee women perceived family planning. Grounded theory would have been useful for my research because it would have provided a clearer understanding as to how the theories and analyses developed were related to my research as a whole. In this case, the analyses would be the common risk factors that may prompt school shootings. Through grounded theory, the connections made between risk factors and empirical research would be clearer since risk factors were generated throughout the data collection process.

Some of the strengths of grounded theory include providing a more flexible data analysis and data collection process. The application of grounded theory allows for the change in data gathering techniques along the way (Bryant, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory also helps the researcher to step away from the study and to critically analyze the research (Bryant, 2002). One can use the opportunity to ask: Are there biases in the study? Are there ways to change how data is gathered? Are there other data that can be investigated, which may provide richer information? When grounded theory researchers can refine the research process, they can explore various aspects of the phenomena being studied.

Despite some of its benefits, grounded theory also has its weaknesses. Some criticize grounded theory for focusing more on storytelling as opposed to building and constructing theories (Charmaz, 2008). In other words, grounded theory is believed to be based more on opinion as opposed to theory, and such analysis can differ depending on the researcher. Additionally, critics argue that grounded theory often involves generating theory based on excerpts of the observed phenomenon without factoring in the whole picture and using these

theories to generalize (Charmaz, 2008). According to Anthony Bryant (2002), grounded theory also could be used to disguise incompetence throughout the study, including underdeveloped research ideas without a clear objective or research goal.

Such criticisms have led to greater use of constructivist grounded theory. In contrast to traditional grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the subjectivity in research and makes note of the fact that despite how much focus is placed on formulating theories and analyzing data, preconceived opinions and beliefs are contributing to the data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). My research was based on constructivist grounded theory in that I constructed theories and analyses throughout the research process. However, I recognized that most of the ideas informing my analysis were based on my prior general knowledge and understanding of school shooters. I have gained a high interest in learning about the possible risk factors to school shootings after the Florida massacre in 2018 and read more into the topic. Thus, I entered the current study with some assumptions on school shooters based on my initial readings on school shooters following the Stoneman Douglas massacre.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Gun Control Policies

Vizzard (2000) identifies four paradigms surrounding the gun control debate.

1. The crime control paradigm that focuses on how gun control policies can reduce crime
2. The social order and sovereignty that focuses on the role that the law and rights play
3. The symbolic conflict that focuses on opposing viewpoints
4. The public health focusing on major health concerns surrounding gun violence

The gun control debate was believed to have begun after the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012 where 26 children and staff were killed (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). However, some may argue that gun control has been an issue since the Columbine shooting in 1999. Following the Columbine massacre, gun control proposals were found to be the second most proposed bill in congress (Kleck, 2009).

Nicolas Kuhl and Monica Lieberman (2018) argue that increased access to firearms has contributed to a significant increase in gun-related deaths. Using Berkowitz's and Alcantara's (2018) results, they found that between 2015 and 2018, there have been 19 mass shootings in the US and 253 deaths. Brown and Goodin (2018) argue that a possible way to reduce mass shootings is to increase the legal age permitted to possess a firearm from age 18 to 21. Another way may be to reduce access to specific guns. The assault rifle-style long gun firearms, for example, made up approximately 61% of the deaths in mass shootings; about 71% of these firearms were legally purchased. This type of gun was used in the Stoneman Douglas high school shooting in 2018, the Las Vegas shooting in 2017, and the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012. Similar findings were supported by Charles DiMaggio et al. (2019) who compared the rate of mass

shootings in the period when the Federal Assault Weapons were banned (1994-2004) to the rate following the ban. The results showed that fatalities were 70% less likely to occur during the ban period than the post-ban period (DiMaggio et al. 2019). Assault Rifles made up 85% of homicides caused by firearms and mass shootings were found to make up a great portion of homicides caused by firearms in the US (DiMaggio et al.2019). DiMaggio et al. (2019) results were supported by Babak Sarani et al. (2018) who found that out of the mass shootings that involved rifles, 81% of them included assault rifles.

The gun control debate has been ignited once again since the Stoneman Douglas Secondary School shooting. The National Rifle Association (NRA) has received constructive criticism over the access that unlicensed people have to firearms. On one side of the debate, many believe that to prevent mass shootings, further policies restricting or limiting access to firearms is necessary (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). Countries such as Australia for example were found to have a reduction in mass shooting incidences following the passing of stricter gun control policies and the elimination of high-powered rifles (Lin et al., 2018). Injuries caused by firearms are among the top five causes of death in the US among those below the age of 65 (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). More than 38,000 people are killed yearly and near 85,000 people are injured each year from gun violence in the US (Morain & Crifasi, 2019).

Thomas Metcalf (2018) proposes a further decrease in firearm production to reduce gun violence. Metcalf (2018) suggests placing excise taxes on the manufacturing of firearms to reduce the incentive of producing them. Gun violence is believed to have major financial costs, whether that being through justice or the medical care system (Metcalf, 2018). Follman, Laurie, and Lee (2015) found that gun violence costs over \$700 for each American taxpayer per year. Such costs resulted in greater spending on medical care, incarceration, mental health facilities,

and police resources. Metcalf (2018) argues that increasing the financial cost of gun production may reduce the opportunity of illegal gun purchases and gun violence since they will be more expensive for purchase. It is up for debate however if this would reduce illegal gun purchases. Even if fewer guns were produced, guns may still be sold underground or in the “black market”. Regarding the DiMaggio et al. (2019) study, research should be conducted on how other possible variables have or could influence gun deaths. Variables can include the passing of additional laws or the mass change in police regulation of shootings which may have also led to the reduction of fatalities.

Additionally, Morain and Crifasi (2019) proposed an increase in the minimum age restriction of gun ownership and use to the age of 21. They found that increase in minimum age restriction of access to firearms can reduce the likelihood of suicide among those below the age of 21 (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). According to the Centers for Disease Control (2016), approximately 40% of suicides committed by those under the age of 21 were the result of firearm use (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). After the Federal Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (FCCLEA) was passed in 1994, suicides and unintentional deaths caused by firearms reduced for those below the age of 20 (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). The FCCLEA was the law that banned the possession of handguns below the age of 18. Moreover, areas with greater restrictions on gun shows and internet sales, more intense background checks, and longer waiting periods to receive guns had far fewer deaths from firearms than those with fewer gun restriction policies (Morain & Crifasi, 2019). The studies illustrate that more policies that restrict firearm use may help contribute to reducing mass shootings in the US.

However, Gary Kleck (2009) argues that the restriction of firearm purchases may not have that great of an impact on mass shootings as some may believe. The Columbine shooting

that took place in 1999 was among the last seven shootings in the late '90s where the firearms were purchased at a gun show (Kleck, 2009). This may imply that as some have proposed, banning gun shows may not be as effective at reducing mass shootings. Kleck (2009) also argues that gun restriction policies may bring more compliance from non-criminals than criminals, placing citizens in greater danger since law-abiding gun owners would no longer have guns to protect themselves. Wright and Rossi (1986) found that between 46% and 70% of guns used in mass shootings were stolen. A ban on firearms may just increase the use of other weapons. Similarly, Sandro Galea and Roger Vaughan (2018) found that mass shootings only accounted for about 1% of firearm deaths in the US. These results weaken the findings of a great portion of the studies cited above supporting increased gun control laws. If mass shootings only make up 1% of firearm deaths in the US, then most firearm deaths may not be caused by mass shooting sprees.

Like Galea and Vaughan's results (2018), Brown and Goodin (2018) found that there were only 97 mass shootings between 1982 and 2018. Duwe (2007) also found that the worst mass murders in the history of the US (with 32 or above deaths) were caused by explosives or set fires. In essence, mass shootings do not make up most of the mass murders in the US. One may hypothesize that as a result, further gun control policies may not have a great impact on mass murders as most may believe since they are not as frequent and are not the main cause of most firearm deaths in the US. Researchers and politicians place greater focus on firearm restriction, but less focus on why individuals engage in an active shooting. The factors indicating a propensity to be involved in a mass shooting will be explored in the next section.

What Makes a School Shooter?

Adam Lankford (2018) reviewed previous literature to better understand some of the common risk factors of mass shooters and suicide terrorists. The warning signs included suicidal motives, social and situational pressures, desire for attention, and identifying with other famous terrorists and/or mass shooters (Lankford, 2018). Lankford (2018) also found that mass shooters and suicide terrorists often have a history with leaking out their intentions in subtle ways or through alternative platforms (i.e social media). They are also likely to have family members who have committed suicide and often face mental health concerns. Additional research should be conducted on applying these factors to specific mass shootings as will be done in the current research. Such research will further support these as risk factors that may indeed contribute to mass shootings.

One of the factors listed by Lankford (2018) was the desire to gain public attention, a factor that has received support from literature (Towers et al., 2015; Zarembo, 2016; Dahmen, 2018). Mass shootings can also be a result of being exposed to violent crimes from home or media outlets (Towers et al., 2015; Zarembo 2016; Dahmen 2018). It's been found that increased online media coverage and internet browsing of mass shootings were strongly associated with an increase in mass shootings (Lin et al. 2018). This may be because violent mass shooters often see the attention mass shooters receive from the media, causing them to take similar action (Surette, 2015). Zarembo (2016) found a significant increase in shootings approximately 13 days following a well-known mass shooting. Studies should compare the effects of mass shooting news coverage with fictional murdering characters to find which factor is the stronger predictor of mass shootings. More news outlets may be becoming more aware of this and have begun to act in concealing the identity of the perpetrators to prevent other would-be mass shooters from

wanting to seek fame (Zaremba, 2016; Dahmen, 2018). It is difficult to know if mass media coverage of mass shooters is influencing further mass shootings or if there are additional factors to consider. One possible explanation is that the criminal justice system places a greater focus on gun-related crimes immediately following a tragic mass shooting incident, explaining the spike in reported shootings following well-known mass shootings (Dahmen, 2018). Moreover, the mass media may cover more mass shootings since that will become a hot topic following a tragic mass shooting. Research should be conducted to isolate additional factors that may explain the increase in reported shootings following a well-known mass shooting attack.

Lankford (2018) also cited that social and situational pressures may contribute to mass shootings. Such pressures can include being bullied at school or being abused at home. Between 1974 and 2000, approximately 71% of mass shooters viewed themselves as being threatened and victimized by others, possibly prompting them to murder (Lankford, 2018). Further research should demonstrate why this may have been the case, as there is a difference between feeling victimized and being victimized.

Furthermore, some in the public believe that religion may contribute to mass shootings (Mercier, Norris, & Shariff, 2018). Mercier et al. (2018) conducted four studies focused on the following:

1. Comparing how often non-Muslim mass shooters were attributed with mental illness versus Muslim mass shooters
2. Comparing how likely news articles viewed Muslim mass shooters as being mentally ill versus Christian mass shooters

3. Comparing how likely news articles viewed Muslim mass shooters as being mentally ill versus non-religious mass shooter
4. Testing if Muslim mass shooters are less likely to be considered mentally ill than Christian mass shooters, even when both are considered mentally ill

After conducting these four separate studies, three key observations were made; first, those with prejudice towards Muslims were more likely to use religion as an explanation for mass shootings committed by Muslim shooters; next, those with Muslim prejudice claimed that religion played a greater role in mass shootings committed by Muslims than by Christians, even if both were classified as being mentally ill; finally, Muslim mass shooters were less likely to have their shootings explained by mental illness than those with an unknown religion.

Lankford (2018) would likely agree that mental health may contribute heavily to the risk of school shootings. Similarly, Maria Ioannou et al. (2015) found mental illness to be a major concern across many school shooters. However, Emma McGinty (2018) argues that mental illness does not play as great of a role in mass shootings (regardless of race) as media and additional outlets often make people believe. Studies have shown that mental illness may be positively correlated with violent behavior (McGinty 2018). McGinty (2018) argues that there are risk factors to mental illness such as poverty and substance abuse and that mental illness is more of a correlation than causation. Thus, it is unknown if mental health concerns directly contribute to school shootings or if unknown factors play an even greater role. In addition, the results brought by the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) does not account for those who suffer from substance abuse, which is found to exacerbate violent behavior regardless of whether one has mental health issues or not (McGinty, 2018).

Further studies should be conducted to compare the correlation between mental health and mass shootings versus the correlation between poverty and mass shootings or substance abuse and mass shootings. Although McGinty's (2018) assertions may indeed be correct, little evidence is provided as to how and why substance abuse and poverty are stronger predictors to mass shootings than mental health concerns. There also needs greater clarity in terms of which mental health concerns are most connected to mass shootings as this includes a larger scope.

Studies have also supported how mass shooters can demonstrate their intentions in subtle ways (Lankford, 2018). This could be through posting cryptic posts on social media, harming oneself, or publicly demonstrating their intentions to commit suicide. Arluke, Lankford, and Madfis (2018) found that one way how some mass shooters let their intentions be known is through harming other animals. Many mass shooters classified their victims as "animals" or "savages". Further studies should be conducted explaining the correlation between mass shootings and the history of animal abuse. Although the studies suggest that there is a positive correlation between the two, quantitative research may be more beneficial to rule out alternative cases that may influence both mass shootings and animal abuse.

Although possible risk factors are provided, there remains a greater need for applying the factors to specific cases to better understand how these factors may have played out in the lives of the mass shooter. Factors such as mental health could have been a key contributor to mass shootings (Lankford, 2018). Greater research should apply this to multiple cases to see how they were demonstrated in the lives of the shooter. This can also be said for factors such as bullying, need for attention, and religious extremism. The current study will fill in these gaps by not only identifying key risk factors that may contribute to mass shootings but by applying such factors to specific mass shootings.

Case Study Research

Case studies are the investigation of a person, a group, or any other specific situation or phenomenon (Starman, 2014; Zainal, 2007). An example of case study research is the work of James Beasley II (2004) who completed case studies on seven serial killers to better understand their backgrounds and their thinking processes while making comparisons between them. Similarly, Verlinden et al. (2000) conducted multiple case studies for school shooters, looking at four different factors: the individuals, their peers, their family, and their environment. These examples demonstrate that case studies can be applied to the specific criminological phenomenon.

There are three kinds of case studies. The first is the exploratory case study where the researcher explores a phenomenon to gain further knowledge about it (Yin, 1984; Zainal, 2007). An exploratory case study poses questions that will encourage researchers to conduct further studies to answer them. Exploratory case studies often come with prior information or a hypothesis that needs to be further examined (Yin, 1984; Zinal, 2007). An example of an exploratory case study was the study conducted by Lisa Ilomaki et al. (2020) who looked to better understand how trailological design principles can be used to improve student learning and how teachers structured their courses. With such understanding, this case study can serve to encourage researchers to continue to ask questions and delve deeper into understanding student learning.

The next kind of case study is a descriptive case study, where the researcher describes the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 1984; Zinal, 2007). To provide more detail, it is suggested that the researcher should have a descriptive theory coming into the study and the collected data should be used to support the theory (Zinal, 2007). An example of a descriptive case study was

the study conducted by Allyson Kelly et al. (2018) who studied how community members perceived the current sexual behavior policies and policy reforms pertaining to youth. The study involved a description of current sexual behavior policies while accounting for three policy levels to support implementing community-based services: practice level, system level, and funding level (Kelly et al., 2018). As suggested by Zinal (2007), Kelly et al. (2018) come into the study with the three policy levels to support the implementation of the programs. Thus, this example illustrates how descriptive case studies does not only involve describing the phenomena but also using theories to support it.

The final kind of case study is the explanatory case study, where the researcher notes down the findings and the possible explanations as to how they came to be (Yin, 1984; Zinal, 2007). An example of an explanatory case study was the study conducted by Daniela Argento et al. (2019) who aimed to gain a better knowledge of how institutional entrepreneurs legitimized new corporate reporting practices. The example illustrates how researchers used the perspectives of institutional entrepreneurs to interpret and explain how corporate reporting models are legitimized within a company.

Nonetheless, critics have argued that there are several limits to case studies (Smith,1990). First, case studies are unreliable since they often consist of small sample size, making it implausible to generalize to a larger population (Smith, 1990). According to Smith (1990), the severity of this weakness depends more on the focus and purpose of the research. If the objective is to understand a larger population, then a larger sample size is ideal. However, this may be less of a concern if the objective is to better understand the sample being studied. Admittedly, my research does not fully address this limitation. Although the goal is to gain further information on

the selected school shooters, policies will be suggested on how to possibly prevent future school shootings.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that quantitative research tends to receive greater political consideration since it is numerical and deductive, making it less biased (Bonoma, 1985; Smith, 1990). It would be difficult to address concerns using case studies since interpretation may lie in the opinion of the researcher. Nonetheless, case studies can indeed be more effective than quantitative studies under certain circumstances. This includes gathering a more in-depth and detailed understanding of the phenomena being studied.

Risk Assessment.

Risk Assessments are models used to predict the likelihood of one's engagement in criminal or anti-social behavior (Henning & Labrecque, 2017). Such assessments are often used to prevent deviant behavior and provide policy suggestions addressing these concerns. Risk Assessments are applied to those who may pose a high risk to others before they decide to harm others. The Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance System (YRBSS), for example, is a risk assessment model monitoring six categories amongst youth: (1) behavior contributing to unintentional violence or injuries; (2) alcohol or illicit drug use; (3) tobacco use; (4) lack of physical activity; (5) poor diet; (6) sexual behavior (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). In addition, the Virginia Threat Assessment Model developed by researchers at the University of Virginia, assesses whether the threat is transient (i.e., a minor threat that can be addressed through minimal effort) or substantive (i.e., a serious intervention is needed) (Borum et al., 2009). Furthermore, the Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment (DTVRA), a model developed by staff in the Dallas Independent School District, consists of 19 risk factors including the lack of academic success and aggressive behavior (Borum et al., 2009). Similarly, the

National Threat Assessment Centre created a threat assessment model consisting of identifiers and prevention measures for school shootings (Stubbe, 2019).

Moreover, John Milby (2015) studied how law enforcement has applied clinical methods to better assess the risk a school shooter has to the public. Many school shooters have had contact with the police before their shootings and Milby (2015) looked to better understand how law enforcement can address mental illness amongst school shooters. Law enforcement expertise has also been used to implement the *threat matrix*, a threat assessment model used to identify sex offenders to reduce recidivism and harm (Jones et al., 2015).

In contrast to traditional profiling, threat assessments are not meant to label people as criminals based upon specific characteristics (Borum et al., 2009). Rather, threat assessments are applied to participants consistently posing a threat to the community (Borum et al., 2009; O'Toole, n.d; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The threat matrix, for example, is applied to those who already pose a threat to others (Jones et al. 2015). In my research, the Four-Pronged Threat Assessment Model (FPTAM) will be applied to the school shooters who have consistently posed serious threats to their schools and their communities. These threats will be illustrated further throughout the findings and analysis of the study.

The Four-Pronged Assessment Model

The current study is based on the FPTAM that was constructed by the FBI (O'Toole, n.d). Like other risk assessments, the FPTAM assesses the likelihood that one will engage in criminal or anti-social behavior (Henning & Labrecque, 2017). In contrast to others, however, this model was used to understand the possible risk factors to school shootings in the US, thus making it more specific than others. Further, there is no evidence that this assessment model was

applied to these five particular school shooters to assess how effective it could have been in preventing the most deadly school shootings in the US. The four categories include:

Personality

Personality is defined as "the pattern of collective character, behavioral, temperamental, emotional, and mental traits of an individual." (O'Toole, n.d, p. 11). Their personality may include how they dealt with stresses in life, how short their temper was, or a need for being in control (O'Toole, n.d). This category also covers mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety. Various factors can contribute to the development of one's personality. Such factors may include how they were raised, their health conditions, their environments, and their relationships with others. The three additional factors (which will be discussed further) can also contribute to the student's personality depending on how frequently they manifested in the student's life.

2. Family Dynamics

Family Dynamics involves the shooter's relationship with family members and how this may impact their attitudes and beliefs. Impacts may include the values, beliefs, or customs instilled onto the student by their closest family members or the customs held by the family as a whole (O'Toole, nd). Some students for example may come from families that teach their children how to use guns or practice shooting at a range. This may be a way one can express rage or frustration towards others. However, there will be a combination of many other factors that can increase the risk of a school shooting threat.

3. School Dynamics

The school dynamic of the shooter involves how the shooter felt they fit within the school setting and how this also influenced their behavior and attitudes. Like family dynamics, school dynamics can also involve the overall culture of the school as well as the customs and values that

may have been imbued onto the student. Although certain values of school culture may be a factor to such a threat, the lack of belief in such values may also play a role as well. It may be suggested that some young people, for example, may disagree with the values and codes the school may display and may want to fight against it by any means necessary (O'Toole, n.d). Nonetheless, further research must be conducted on this category and there is relatively little evidence that school dynamics are a factor in school shootings.

4. Social Dynamics

The final category mentioned was the social dynamics of the shooter. Social Dynamics involved the shooter's relationship with peer groups or with other friends (O'Toole, n.d). This category also includes beliefs and attitudes instilled by their larger community, how entertainment and technology have influenced their lives, as well as their use of and beliefs regarding alcohol and recreational drugs. Does the shooter play a lot of video games? If so, what type of video games did they play and how may it have influenced their beliefs and perspectives on life? This can also include what they watch on television and how this may factor in the risk of violence. Were their shootings inspired by shootings from the past? Each of these four categories will be applied to five school shooters to find if such a model can be applied to various cases. The study may also help in better understanding the common risk factors to school shootings in the US.

Compared to Other Assessment Models

Researchers have applied the FPTAM and similar risk assessments to school shooters. As previously demonstrated, Verlinden et al. (2000) applied a threat assessment model similar to the FPTAM. In contrast, however, Verlinden et al. (2000) focused on youth violence and did not include adults. Thus, the shooters from Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Stoneman Douglas were not included in their study since they were all adults.

Moreover, Weisbrot and Carlson (2016) conducted a psychological autopsy on Seung-Hui Cho, the Virginia Tech school shooter, to better understand his personality and any psychological concerns he had. Similarly, Leary et al. (2003) conducted separate case studies on specific school shooters focusing on how they related to others and if they were victimized in any way. Both researchers, however, did not focus on the FPTAM entirely. First, Weisbrot and Carlson (2016) looked at one specific school shooter, focusing only on his personality. Moreover, Leary et al. (2003) focused only on how they related to others, not on their personalities nor their upbringing. Therefore, the FPTAM is unique from other risk assessment models in that it analyzes the personality of the school shooters, as well as how they related to peers, family members, and their school environment.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Case Study

As previously mentioned, a case study is a qualitative research method that involves conducting a holistic investigation of an observable entity (Starman, 2014; Zainal, 2007). In contrast to other quantitative research methods, case studies gather rich data and information but study a limited number of samples (Zainal, 2007). For my research, I conducted five separate case studies to provide a more elaborate understanding of who the shooters were, what their thought processes were, and how they related to their family members and peers. For my research, a case will be classified as the investigation of one school shooter, not the event itself.

Based on Yin's (1984) categorization of case study types (exploratory, descriptive, explanatory), my research is a mixture of both exploratory and explanatory case studies (Zainal, 2007). First, my research is an exploratory case study since I explored who the school shooters were and what may have led to their eventual massacres. However, the study can also be an explanatory case study. I interpreted the data for each of the school shooters with theories and conducted comparative analyses by comparing the school shooters to one another, to mass murderers, and serial killers. I have included serial killers in the comparative analysis because my main focus is not on how the school shooters went about killing their victims, but the factors that may have prompted them to do so. The risk factors that prompted many school shooters to kill were similar to the risk factors that may have prompted many serial killers to go on killing sprees. Even though serial killers murder their victims at different locations and times, all school shooters in my sample demonstrated their intentions to harm others long before their massacres, meaning that the massacres were not abrupt. Some wanted to kill all their victims at once, while

others wanted to murder different people on different occasions. Nevertheless, they all decided to kill, and I will be focusing mainly on the factors that may have led to this decision.

The case study method is a more ideal methodological strategy than other qualitative methods to fulfill my research goals. First, one cannot conduct qualitative interviews since four out of the five shooters are deceased, and the one currently alive is still on trial for his shootings. Further, it would be difficult to gain access to those who knew the shooters since they all most likely reside in the US.

Additionally, the case study method is more appropriate than a content analysis for my research because case studies focus less on the symbolic meanings behind the content. Rather, they involve gathering the facts to better understand the phenomenon being studied (Smith, 1990; Zainal, 2007). In contrast, a qualitative content analysis does not involve looking at the descriptions provided, but rather at the symbolic meanings behind the observed content. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis involves focusing on understanding the content, whereas in my research, I do not look to understand how the articles were presented, but rather to understand the school shooters themselves.

Research Questions:

There are three central questions of the study that I intended to answer:

- 1) *What are the common risk factors for becoming a school shooter across the cases?*

Based on the reports and data, I looked for any common traits, lifestyles, or characteristics across school shooters to inform a better understanding of risk factors that may have contributed to the massacres since they were common across my sample of school shooters.

2) *Can the FPTAM be effectively applied to the five school shooters?*

Within my research, I discuss and analyze reports of each school shooter while applying the FPTAM to determine whether this model will help researchers better understand school shooters. This includes a better understanding of their personalities and their relationships with their peers, their schools, and their family members.

3) *What are some policy implications to be considered to prevent possible school shootings?*

Based on the common risk factors found across the school shooters, I developed policy suggestions to help address school shootings in the US. Existing policy suggestions for school shootings in the literature tend to focus on gun control policies that are more reactive as opposed to proactive (Morain & Crifasi, 2019; Vizard, 2000). Within the current study, the FPTAM allows for the development of policy suggestions that are proactive based on the understanding of common risk factors.

Research Design

The current study will be a mixture of an exploratory and explanatory case study applying the FPTAM to five of the school shooters. This model considers personality, social dynamics, family dynamics, and, school dynamics for each school shooter. The collected data will be the foundation for a comparative analysis between mass murderers and the application of theory and findings from academic sources.

Case Selection

I included five school shooters in my sample: Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Seung-Hui Cho, Adam Lanza, and Nikolas Cruz. I selected these five because these massacres had the highest death toll out of all the school shootings in the past 25 years in the US (Shultz et al., 2013). Furthermore, all school shooters selected were from the US. The US has had a long history of school shootings and there have been enough cases to permit a thorough analysis

(Croitoru et al., 2020). Studies have shown that school shootings have been increasing in the US and that the US has the highest death by firearm amongst all developed countries (Auxemery, 2015; O'Toole, n.d; Shultz et al., 2014). Additionally, only male school shooters were selected since most school shooters tend to be Caucasian middle-class males (Auxemery, 2015; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; O'Toole, n.d; Reuter-Rice, 2008). The only exception in my sample was Seung-Hui Cho, who was an Asian male. However, it was essential to add him to my sample since his massacre had the highest death toll out of all school shooters in the US (Shultz et al., 2013). Finally, I selected these cases because they acted as a catalyst to debate and public discussion surrounding gun control policies (Shultz et al., 2013). This reason is critical because it indicated that these cases have generated significant attention in the media and amongst government and citizens.

Data Collection

Sources of Case Information

In my thesis, the sources included online news reports, documentaries, clips from news programs, government reports, interviews, interview transcripts, books, and academic journal articles. To maintain reliability, I collected more than three different sources of data for each school shooter. This helped ensure accuracy to allow for greater consistency across units. Additionally, I focused on reports, video clips, and documentaries consisting of people who knew the shooters personally. These people are likely to bring greater accuracy due to the personal relationships they had with the shooters before the massacre. Similarly, government reports and academic sources were also included since they provided greater professional expertise in discussing the school shooters and were used to critically analyze and interpret the data.

I used these sources to learn more about the descriptions of the school shooters that related to any of the four categories of the FPTAM. I attempted to learn each of the school shooter's behavior, personality, and how they related to their family members, peers, and with their school environment (refer to 'Four-Pronged Threat Assessment Model' section for more details)

Data Collection Strategy

Most of the data were collected online. News articles, government reports, and interview transcripts were collected using google searches. Clips from news programs, documentaries, and interviews were collected from YouTube. In addition, I collected academic sources using ProQuest and google scholar. Finally, I collected hard copy books from the library.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data through a comparative analysis. This was done by comparing the school shooters with one another and with other mass murderers and serial killers outside of my sample. In addition, I used theories to interpret some of the findings of the school shooters. If for example, a school shooter stated that they lacked a sense of purpose in life, I may use labeling theory to explain it. Furthermore, I interpreted some of the findings on the school shooters based on my analysis. This may be based on findings from other academic literature about mass murderers or my own deep analysis.

Table 2: Description of school shooters

School Shooter	School	Deaths	Suicide?	Date	A part of School during the time of Massacre?	Race
Eric Harris	Columbine Secondary School	15 (including self)	Yes	April 20 th , 1999	Yes	Caucasian
Dylan Klebold	Columbine Secondary School	15 (including self)	Yes	April 20 th , 1999	Yes	Caucasian
Seung-Hui Cho	Virginia Tech University	33 (including self)	Yes	April 16 th , 2007	Yes	Asian
Adam Lanza	Sandy Hook Elementary School	28 (including self)	Yes	December 14 th , 2012	No	Caucasian
Nikolas Cruz	Stoneman Douglas High School	17	No	February 14 th , 2018	No	Caucasian

Chapter 4

Findings/Analysis

The Columbine School Shooting

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, 18 and 17-year-old students at Columbine Secondary School murdered 13 students and staff before both killing themselves.

Eric Harris

Personality

Eric Harris was known as a smart student who craved for approval. This crave was illustrated in his journal when he explained that he wanted to be famous and known worldwide for murdering thousands of people in the massacre (Cullen, 2009). Lankford (2018) cites public notoriety to be a key motivator amongst mass shooters. It is common for school shooters to be inspired by previous school shooters or mass murderers due to the public attention they often receive from the media (Auxemery, 2015; Murray, 2017; Lanford, 2018). According to the US National School Safety Centre, approximately 3000 similar shooting threats were made to US schools a week following the Columbine Massacre (Murray, 2017). Reports illustrate that Eric Harris had the desire to outdo other school shooters from the past during this massacre and become infamous (Cullen, 2009). Harris was said to be highly inspired by Timothy McVeigh, an American terrorist responsible for killing 168 people in the Oklahoma City bombing (Cullen, 2009).

According to David Cullen (2009), students and staff reported that Eric Harris was highly involved in class and was viewed as an obedient and responsible student who maintained a calm head during times of adversity (Dawson et al., 2016; Cullen, 2009). Harris was known for being logical and could read people (Cullen, 2009). Harris had the confidence to talk to police or customers whenever there were concerns at the Blackjack Pizza store (the store where Harris and

Klebold worked). He was also able to talk his way out of trouble whenever they had run-ins with authority (Cullen, 2009). Based on these findings, Harris came off as an average person from the public eye.

It is common for serial killers and mass murderers to present themselves as non-descript individuals whose true intentions are masked (James, 2019; LaBrode, 2007). Serial killer Jeffery Dahmer came off as an average person and a good neighbor to those who knew him and lived near him, causing greater shock to learn that he was responsible for the sexual assault and murder of 17 men (James, 2019). Similarly, John Wayne Gacy was known by many to be a likable and social man who volunteered in the community and even dressed up as Pogo the Clown to entertain children (James, 2019). Society was unaware that he was responsible for sexually assaulting and murdering 33 young boys and men. Regarding Harris, many including Sue Klebold, the mother of Dylan Klebold, were shocked that he had videos and a journal planning to commit the massacre (Dawson et. al., 2016).

However, Harris was also known for having a quick temper and hated rejection (Cullen, 2009; Gumble, 2009). This was evident when Harris got upset whenever Susan (the girl he was interested in at the time) failed to answer his phone calls (Cullen, 2009). In one of Harris's journal entries, Harris wrote, "I have a goal to destroy as much as possible" (Cullen, 2009, p. 276). Harris's journal included writings on destruction and destroying people and places (Cullen, 2009; Gumble, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010b). For example, in his journal he wrote, "God I want to torch and level everything in this whole fucking area" "but bombs of that size are hard to make" (Cullen, 2009, p. 276).

According to Alessandro Angrilli et al. (2013), emotional deficit or detachment can play a significant role in the actions of serial killers and mass murderers. The serial killer studied by Angrilli et al. (2013) was found to have high rates of embarrassment and anger according to their emotional/social cognition tests, and his victims were intentionally selected. As discussed in *The Columbine Massacre: In the Killer's Mind*, a documentary directed by Stephanie Kaim, Harris's massacre did not only include random people, he indeed had specific people he wanted killed, which included Brooks Brown (worldofkillers28, 2010c). Harris wrote in his journal, "...all I want to do is kill and injure as many of you pricks as I can, especially a few people. Like Brooks Brown" (worldofkillers28, 2010c, 6:04). Studies have shown that Harris had felt victimized by others in his school, despite little evidence existing of him being bullied (Cullen, 2009; Gumbel, 2009; worldofkillers, 2010b). According to Lankford (2018), it is common for mass shooters to attribute their actions to being victimized by others whether physically, emotionally, or psychologically. It is possible that many of the more popular students did not accept Harris and looked down on him, possibly causing Harris to feel emotionally victimized (worldofkillers28, 2010b).

Robert Keppel and Richard Walter (1999) developed a rape-offender typology, where they looked at four separate dynamics used to classify serial killers: Power assertiveness when rape is planned and murder is unplanned and killers use aggression to maintain power over the victim; power reassurance, when a rape is planned and murder is unplanned and killers act out sexual fantasies; anger retaliatory, when both murder and rape are planned and killers seek revenge on others; and anger-excitation, when murder and rape are planned and killers torture out of excitement. Although rape was not a part of this case, Harris displays the characteristic of anger retaliatory, as he uses the Columbine massacre to seek retribution towards those within the

school. The acts were planned months before, including where the bombs would explode and when he and Dylan Klebold would begin shooting (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010c).

Furthermore, Harris was reported to feel a lack of direction in life, as he did not have any plans, goals, or ideas on what he wanted to do after high school, despite telling people otherwise (Cullen, 2009). According to Robert Merton's strain theory, one is pressured to commit crime due to the pressures or "strain" instilled by society to achieve economical wealth or the American dream (Ministry of Children, 2010). The four adaptations include conformity, rebellion, ritualism, retreatism, and innovation. Harris' lack of direction illustrated that he fell into the ritualist category. Although he came from a middle-class family, he did not have goals he wished to attain according to the findings. This may explain why Harris engaged in videotaping short films with Klebold, engaged in petty crimes, and ultimately decided to launch the massacre, as this may have provided him with a false sense of direction in life. Harris also displayed the adaptation of retreatism where he not only lacked goals but also the means to achieve them, which may explain why he planned to commit suicide weeks before the massacre (Cullen, 2009).

A psychiatrist diagnosed Harris with psychopathy, as he was charming, cunning, manipulative, and had many other symptoms of psychopathy shown in his personality (Cullen, 2009; Dawson et al., 2016). Hare (1996) describes psychopaths as "remorseless predators who use charm, intimidation and if necessary, impulsive and cold-blooded violence to attain their ends" (LaBrode, 2007, p.152). The definition accurately describes Harris as he had no remorse, and used charm, intimidation, and violence to get what he wanted. Harris may likely have portrayed his polite and kind demeanor to gain the trust of others and to better hide his true intentions.

Similarly, serial killer and sex offender Theodore “Ted” Bundy was known as a polite and charming individual who used such traits to gain the trust of his victims to lure them in and ultimately murder them (Piel, 2015). This was also the case for John Wayne Gacy, a serial killer who gained the trust of adolescent boys promising to pay them money but luring them into rape and murder them (LaBrode, 2007). Although Harris did not use his psychopathic traits necessarily to lure victims in like Bundy and Gacy, one can argue that these traits may have been used to hide his ambitions to partake in the massacre. According to Sue Klebold, Harris came off as extremely charming and polite, and she was completely unaware that Harris had a journal or made a video with her son Dylan on exploding the school (Dawson et. al. 2016).

Like Ted Bundy, Harris was manipulative and a compulsive liar. When Harris and Klebold were arrested for stealing a van and weapons, Harris blamed Klebold and informed the deputy that he was coerced by Klebold to steal the property. Harris then told the deputy that when in front of the car, Klebold was the one pushing to break into the van, despite this not being the case (Cullen, 2009). In his journal, Harris wrote, “I lie a lot, almost constant, and to everybody, just to keep my own ass out of the water...I know that I hate liars. And I am one myself, oh fucking well” (worldofkillers28, 2010c, 2:32). According to an FBI agent, Harris was writing in his journal about how people get what they deserve while writing a sincere-sounding apology letter for stealing the computer equipment from the stolen van (worldofkillers28, 2010c). According to neutralization theory, offenders use techniques to reduce the harm of their acts to make them seem less harmful and to rationalize them (James, 2019). One of the techniques used by Harris is the denial of the victim, where he denies responsibility for his acts and places more of the responsibility on the victim (in this case the owner of the truck). He also displayed a denial of responsibility by blaming his accomplice Klebold.

Harris viewed others in Columbine to be inferior and he had a superiority complex and desired to kill those he felt were inferior (Cullen, 2009). In his journal, he wrote, "I feel like God...I am higher than almost anyone in the fucking world in terms of universal intelligence" (Cullen, 2009, p. 234). Harris would be considered a mission-oriented murderer, as he planned to eliminate certain people from society (Dehart & Mahoney, 1994). Similarly, Jack the Ripper would be classified as a mission-oriented murderer as he planned to rid society of prostitutes (Dehart & Mahoney, 1994). Harris believed that it was his responsibility to create the rules and to punish those who failed to comply with them. Harris referred to his journal as "the book of God" in his entries (Cullen, 2009, p. 234): "I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a fucking wolf. Strangle them, squish their head, rip off their jaw, break their arms in half, show them who is God" (Gumbel, 2009). As will be seen with Adam Lanza and Seung-Hung Cho, writings from Harris's journal may have inspired them to take similar actions to eliminate those who they believed victimized them.

Family Dynamics

Eric Harris came from a middle-class family with both of his parents present in the household (Cullen, 2009). Harris' dad, Wayne Harris, was in the military and his mother was a stay at home mom and took care of the children. Harris was close to his parents as he often went fishing with his father. His father was a coach and a scoutmaster who gave quick and harsh punishments whenever Harris misbehaved. "When are you going to get on track?" he yelled at Harris after finding out that he and Klebold talked a friend's mom into buying them alcohol. "What are you going to do with your life" (Cullen, 2009, p. 279). According to Randy Brown,

the father of a friend of Klebold and Harris, Harris got into so much trouble that his father kept a personal journal of all the evil deeds Harris committed (worldofkillers28, 2010c).

According to labeling theory, the act of labeling someone a criminal or deviant can be a self-fulfilling prophecy (Knutsson, 1977). When someone receives this label often, they begin to internalize the label, reducing the likelihood of individuals escaping the criminal lifestyle and prompting engagement in secondary deviation, deviance caused by the negative labels instilled by others. Such statements made by Wayne Harris may likely have acted as self-fulfilling prophecies labeling Harris with the deviant identity. By also internalizing these questions, this may have reinforced that Harris lacked direction in his life, further pushing him to find that direction through deviant behavior. The relationship between the offender and parent has been found to play a critical role amongst the school shooters within the current study. In contrast to Dylan Klebold, Adam Lanza, and Nikolas Cruz (who will be discussed further), there is a greater focus on the relationship between Harris and his father as opposed to his mother. Harris wrote little about the relationship he had with his mother in his journal.

Harris discussed in his journal that his parents wanted him to conform, implying that the values, customs, and beliefs of his parents greatly differed from his own (Cullen, 2009). According to social control theory, people commit crimes due to the lack of the strength of the social mechanisms in controlling behavior. The type of social bonds includes attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Downes, Rock, & McCormick, 2003). Based on these observations, Harris lacked belief in his family's values, which may have caused him to rebel against them. Thus, the family dynamic had weak control over Harris' behavior according to social control theory. As was seen with how he viewed his classmates and teachers, he also had

weak ties with the educational institution. The other school shooters in my study also lacked the belief in values and the key institutions in society.

Social Dynamics

Harris was very popular and well-known by other students contrary to popular belief (Cullen, 2009; Gumbel, 2009). It was reported that Harris was invited to parties and often went on dates. Harris was well known in the Blackjack Pizza Shop, the place where he and Klebold worked (Cullen, 2009). He was viewed by many as being a leader, was able to talk to customers, and was able to talk his way out of trouble (Cullen, 2009).

A trait within psychopathy includes being manipulative, and it is possible that Harris's ability to socialize helped him to manipulate others and get what he wanted similar to Ted Bundy. Harris was viewed as being attractive to others which may have assisted in reducing suspicion of his plans to commit the mass shooting (Piel, 2015). Similarly, Ted Bundy was able to use his looks to lure women in to eventually assault and kill them (Piel, 2015). In contrast, Harris' social traits may have been used to further reduce suspicion of his plans, keeping students and staff less prepared for the coming events.

In addition, Harris only had a few close friends, including Klebold and another student named Zach. Brooks Brown was another good friend but disassociated from them once he began dating Deavon Adams (worldofkillers28, 2010a). Harris had a falling out with Brooks after he broke the windshield of his car with a rock after Brooks was late for one of their group meetings. This caused Judy Brown, Brook's mother, to ban Brooks from hanging out with Harris and to call the police (worldofkillers28, 2010c).

Together, Harris and Klebold committed crimes like vandalism, theft, and even created pipe bombs to set off. Harris and Klebold also shot videos together where they expressed traits of aggression, which was evident in clips of them screaming at the camera and at one time destroying a bicycle (worldofkillers28, 2010a). As argued by Lankford (2018), these video clips may have been subtle ways in which Harris and Klebold leaked their intentions of committing a massacre by showing acts of rage and aggression. It is common for school shooters to display their intentions to kill through media outlets (Lankford, 2018). It was reported that in some of the unreleased clips, they discussed how they wanted to blow up the school and kill as many people as possible (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010c).

School Dynamics

Harris managed to get admission into the university for computer engineering as he was highly proficient in technological courses throughout school (Cullen, 2009). Although he did not play any sports in school, he was a smart student who got good grades (Cullen, 2009). In contrast, Otham Alkhadher and Nicolas Scull (2019) found a negative correlation between political violence and education. However, the study only included the members of ISIS and Desh groups within the Kuwait central prisons. I was unable to find specific studies on the associations between mass murderers in the US and education. Besides Klebold, Harris's accomplice, there is little evidence that the other three school shooters within the current study were successful in the last schools they attended before their massacres.

Fellow students believed Harris to be just a normal student. Alternatively, this could also be a reason for Harris's need for attention. As mentioned, many school shooters exhibited the need for attention and to be famous (Lankford, 2018; Murray, 2017). It was known that Harris hated popular students but also hated the more inferior students (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28,

2010b). Likely, Harris did not receive the attention he desired through behaving normally or conforming to the values of society and his school. As a result, he decided to take matters into his own hands and engage in deviant behavior, film skits, and ultimately kill many. As concluded by FBI Agent Mark Holtlaw, “They wanted to be famous.....and they are. They’re infamous” (Gibbs & Roche, 1999).

Dylan Klebold

Personality

Dylan Klebold was known as a shy, quiet, and an insecure student (Cullen, 2009; Gumbel, 2009). According to reports, Klebold always followed Harris around and tried to emulate and impress him as much as possible (Cullen, 2009; Gross, 2016). This was evident in the videotapes Klebold and Harris created. Many times, when Klebold would scream something in the film, he stared at Harris as if he were seeking his approval and wanted Harris to confirm if he did it correctly (Cullen, 2009; Gross, 2016). Since Klebold viewed himself as being incompetent and lesser than others, he likely felt that to feel more important, it would be ideal to be like Harris. While working at the Blackjack Pizza store, Klebold was known as being unreliable and could not be put in charge of anything in the store unlike Harris, who was viewed as a leader (Cullen, 2009). This was evident even when Klebold and Harris were apprehended for committing deviant acts. Klebold was more likely to get caught and would end up confessing his crimes as he was known to be a bad liar and bad at talking himself out of a situation unlike Harris (Cullen, 2009). Klebold may have worked with Harris in partaking in these acts to feel just as superior as Harris and boost his self-confidence and self-image (Gross, 2016).

Like Harris, Klebold also had a short temper and was very sensitive (Alpert & Spiegel, 2000; Cullen, 2009). In contrast to Harris, however, Klebold was not good under pressure especially during confrontations with authority (Cullen, 2009). When caught scratching

inappropriate content on a freshman's locker, for example, Klebold lost his temper and screamed at the dean for calling him out (Cullen, 2009). Klebold's temper was also evident as a child. Judy Brown first saw Klebold lose his temper at the age of eight or nine when he slipped in a pond and Judy's kids laughed at him. Klebold screamed "Stop!"... "Stop laughing at me! Stoooooooooooooooooop!" (Cullen, 2009, p. 127). It took a while for Judy Brown and Sue Klebold to calm him down.

The lack of impulse control seems to be common amongst most of the school shooters within the current study, as this was evident in Nikolas Cruz's life as well (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). This runs contrary to the findings of Scott Culhane et al. (2011) who found that most serial killers tend to score lower on the aggression measure than others. This may be because most serial killers are often psychopathic and are less likely to express emotion during their attacks, which was evident in Harris' case (Culhane et al. 2011; LaBrode, 2007). In the same study, however, Culhane et al. (2011) found that most serial killers often feel hostility towards others. This may have been evident here as Klebold felt he was a victim like Harris did (Cullen, 2009). Regardless if such feelings were the result of his lack of acceptance or being looked down upon by other students, it remains unclear nevertheless, since there was a lack of evidence that he was bullied.

Such hostility may have derived from his feelings of loneliness and isolation, as Klebold had a history of depressive thoughts according to findings (Cullen, 2009; Dawson et al., 2016; Gross, 2016; worldofkillers28, 2010a). According to Sasha Reid et al. (2019), serial killers growing up often feel the need to be emotionally self-reliant and are uncomfortable bringing concerns to others. In Klebold's case, his feelings were expressed in his journal and even his mother Sue was unaware of them (Cullen, 2009; Dawson et al., 2016; Gross, 2016). In contrast

to Harris, Klebold's journal was not centered around hatred but rather centered around depression, loneliness, and even thoughts of suicide (Gross, 2016; Gumbel, 2009; worldofkillers28,2010a; Dawson et al., 2016). Klebold's journal consisted of hearts, weapons, coffins, and headless people (worldofkillers28, 2010a). In his journal, for example, he states, "My god, I want to die so bad" (worldofkillers28, 2010a, 5:42). Klebold also wrote, "...not fair. I wanted happiness, I never got it. Let's sum up my life...the most miserable existence in the history of time" (worldofkillers28, 2010a, 5:45).

Klebold may have engaged in video skits, deviant behavior, and ultimately the massacre was to find happiness and fulfillment. Such emptiness is similar to Harris's lack of direction discussed earlier (Cullen, 2009). In contrast, Klebold seemed to focus on satisfaction and happiness, and he may have thought that he could find it through the massacre (Gross, 2016). As mentioned earlier, Harris falls under the anger-retaliatory classification according to Keppel and Walter's (1999) rape-offender typology (refer back to page 29). On the contrary, Klebold falls under the anger-excitation category. Although Klebold's crimes do not involve rape or torture, he gained far more joy and excitement from murdering people than he did going about his regular day-to-day life (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010d). One of the survivors of the Columbine massacre reported that during the shooting, Klebold was laughing hysterically throughout the entire shooting (worldofkillers28, 2010d).

According to Dana Dehart and John Mahoney (1994), one of the motives of serial killers includes sensational seeking, where killers gain excitement through murder. Klebold's excitement throughout the massacre may demonstrate that sensational seeking could have been his main motivation in working with Harris to partake in the shooting. This contrasts from Harris, whose main motivation was to eliminate the inferior and to seek revenge. The sense of

joy that Klebold seemed to be searching for was unfortunately found by taking the lives of others.

Family Dynamics

Like Harris, Klebold was from an upper-class family with both parents in the home (Cullen, 2009; Gumbel, 2009). The family believed in not being greedy for material wealth despite their riches (Cullen, 2009). Klebold's family situation contrasts greatly from most serial murderers who often come from broken families (Reid et al., 2019). They were a religious family who celebrated holidays such as Easter and Passover (Cullen, 2009). They attended the St. Philip Lutheran Church. Their pastor Reverend Don Marxhausen described the Klebold family as "hardworking, very intelligent, sixties kind of people. They don't believe in violence or guns or racism and certainly aren't anti-Semitic" (Cullen, 2009, p.128).

Klebold's mother Sue worked within higher education while his father, Tom Klebold, used to work in the oil business before he started doing renovations and renting out apartments (Cullen, 2009). Similar to Harris, Klebold may have felt that such values and beliefs were used to make him conform to values he disagreed with. Klebold likely did not agree with the values of his religious upbringing, explaining why he expressed many racist and anti-Semitic sentiments during the massacre (Cullen, 2009; Gross, 2016). Klebold lacked the attachment and beliefs to both the family and the religious institution in this case and had weak bonds with them according to social control theorists. Most likely, Klebold felt that many of the practices, values, and upbringing failed to bring him satisfaction and fulfillment, possibly explaining why he tried to find it through crime and murder.

In one situation, many people were staring at Klebold while he was having dinner with his mother and dressed in a long black trench coat (worldofkillers28, 2010b). Sue Klebold

questioned why people were staring at him as if they were intimidated by him. According to Judy Brown, the fact that people were afraid may have made Klebold feel more powerful (worldofkillers28, 2010b). This desire further illustrates Klebold's insecurity and desire to feel powerful and dominant, something he may have lacked (Alpert & Spiegel, 2000). This may explain why he attached himself to Harris and committed the crimes and the massacre (Gross, 2016). Sue did not know until after the massacre that Klebold was dealing with depressive thoughts and had journals talking about his feelings (Dawson et al., 2016; Gross, 2016). Dylan Klebold's relationship with his mother took a downturn closer to the massacre which included fights and various shouting matches (Dawson et al., 2016). Unstable relationships with their mothers or primary caregivers have been a common theme amongst school shooters and serial killers (LaBrode, 2007; Reid et al., 2019). As we will see, Nikolas Cruz's relationship with his adoptive-mother took a downturn closer to the Florida massacre, as well as the relationship Adam Lanza had with his mother that deteriorated (Baker, 2017; Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018).

Social Dynamics

Klebold was not as social as Harris was, as he was very shy and did not like talking to strangers (Cullen, 2009). His closest friends included Harris and two other boys. They all spent time completing various missions which included engaging in pranks and crimes such as breaking into cars, stealing property, building pipe bombs, and vandalizing houses (CNN, 2019; Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010c). According to broken windows theory, the theory first proposed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, signs of less serious crimes can create an environment leading to more severe crimes if not handled or addressed swiftly and harshly enough (Marat, 2019). This theory may have not exactly been demonstrated in the case here as Klebold and Harris had planned the massacre well in advance. However, less severe crimes

could have been used as a gateway to the ultimate crime that eventually took place. In other words, these could have been signs or hints of something more serious to come.

According to the reports, however, Klebold did not enjoy the missions nearly as much as Harris did, which further supports the notion that Klebold's involvement may have been more about finding self-fulfillment even if it meant engaging in acts he may not have enjoyed (Cullen, 2009; Gross, 2016). When one of their friends who was involved in committing crimes with them started dating someone, the friend began to dissociate from the group. Klebold was extremely angry about it because he was his best friend at the time, even more so than Harris. Reports indicate that Klebold's feelings of non-acceptance increased drastically (Cullen, 2009). Loneliness has been a common factor amongst many serial and mass murderers (Reid et al. 2019). According to Reid et al. (2019), 70% of serial killers classified themselves as feeling isolated from others and not having any friends. Serial killers did not have friends because they chose to be to themselves and many chose not to befriend them in many cases (Reid et al. 2019). Although loneliness may not have been as prevalent within Klebold's life compared to other school shooters, the feeling of being isolated and alone was evident. It is likely that working with Harris to commit the massacre may have assisted in alleviating his feelings of loneliness while increasing his feelings of being a part of a group or having a calling.

According to Willem Martens (2011), sadism and loneliness are found to be positively correlated to one another, which was evident in the case of infamous serial killer Jeffery Dahmer. Jeffery Dahmer was charged for sexually assaulting and killing 17 men. According to Martens (2011), some of the traits Dahmer suffered from included envy, shame, feelings of inferiority, feeling unloved, and unacceptance. Dahmer unfortunately gained satisfaction and excitement when he murdered and assaulted his victims (Martens, 2011). Like Klebold, Dahmer would fall

into the anger-excitation category according to the rape-offender typology since he found great fulfillment through his attacks as did Klebold (Keppel & Walter, 1999; Martens, 2011). Klebold suffered from similar traits of feeling unloved, isolated, inferior, and shameful (Alpert & Spiegel, 2000). According to Deavon Adams, a friend of Klebold's, many of the more popular kids in the school looked down on Klebold and did not want to associate with him. Adams stated that one of the football players pushed her and asked, "Why are you talking to that faggot?" (worldofkillers28, 2010b, 1:24) after he saw her talking to Klebold. These may have contributed to his feelings of shame and unacceptance. However, there still lacks evidence that Klebold faced any sort of physical or emotional abuse from other school mates (Cullen, 2009). Klebold possibly felt that the best way to alleviate his negative feelings was to partake in deviant acts and ultimately commit the massacre to feel powerful. As Judy Brooks stated, Klebold loved people being afraid of him because it made him feel powerful (worldofkillers28, 2010b).

School Dynamics

Klebold had a history of bullying kids and challenging authority (Cullen, 2009). This runs contrary to the well-known narrative that he and Harris were the ones getting bullied. These were possible ways to gain the power and excitement he seemed to crave. Like Harris, Klebold also got into trouble in school which included carving inappropriate content onto people's lockers and sleeping during class (Cullen, 2009). This may go back to the broken windows theory in which the incentive of engaging in relatively smaller deviant acts may increase the drive and motivation to engage in more serious crimes (Marat, 2019). Klebold possibly saw Harris as a role model to look up to as inspiration for power which was why he had no problem working with him to commit crimes and complete the massacre. Similarly, school shooters such as Seung-Hui Cho and Adam Lanza looked up to the Columbine shooters as inspiration to commit massacres (BBC News, 2013; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). According to the differential

association theory, one becomes a criminal by associating with other criminals (Matsueda, 1988). This is evident here as Klebold was likely greatly influenced by Harris (Dawson et al., 2016; Gross, 2016).

According to Sue Klebold, Dylan Klebold was spending more time with Harris and grew less interested in school as time grew closer to the day of the massacre despite getting accepted into four colleges (Dawson et al., 2016). Klebold may have still not felt satisfied or happy about his life even after receiving the acceptance letters from the colleges. Klebold may have enjoyed the feeling of power he received from partaking in other crimes and was looking more forward to engaging in the massacre than to fulfilling his educational goals. Thus, Klebold may have believed that this massacre was his main purpose or goal in life.

Virginia Tech Shooting

In 2007, Seung-Hui Cho, a 23-year-old college student, murdered 32 students and staff at Virginia Tech University. Cho would then kill himself following the massacre. The NBC News received copies of pictures and videos sent by Cho discussing his frustrations.

Seung-Hui Cho

Personality

Seung-Hui Cho was known by family and classmates as being quiet, introverted, and shy growing up (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Cho was known as being withdrawn and antisocial going back to the sixth grade and was even diagnosed with selective mutism by his therapist. As he grew older, he began speaking less and less and when he had to speak to a group of people, he grew pale, sweaty, and even cried (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). According to Lucinda Roy, the chair of Virginia Tech's English department who also tutored Cho, Cho often whispered when he spoke (Hacker, 2008). Shyness and keeping to themselves have been common amongst most of the school shooters including Klebold and Adam Lanza. Similar to Cho, Lanza disliked

interacting with others and also hated people touching him (Liebert & Birnes, 2011; PBS, 2013). In Cho's case, the data shows that his discomfort with engaging with people had less to do with shyness, and more to do with his selective mutism (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011).

School shooters are often found to illustrate psychological concerns such as narcissism and paranoia, traits displayed by Cho (Auxemery, 2015; Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011; McGee & Debernardo, 1999; TriData Division, 2009; Verlinden et al., 2000). Cho struggled with psychosis throughout his life (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). He began experiencing somatic delusions, a false belief that there was an issue with a part of his body or appearance (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). An example was when his body was itching and he stated that it was the result of mites despite the mites not being present (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). David Berkowitz, the serial killer often referred to as 'Son of Sam' and responsible for murdering six people, suffered from similar delusions and said he was possessed by demons and ordered by a devil-possessed dog to commit the murders (Brody, 2013). On the contrary, such delusions were not what contributed to Cho's massacre directly as many factors need to be considered.

Cho struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts like other school shooters (Auxemery, 2015; Hacker, 2008; Verlinden et al., 2000). In contrast to Klebold, someone who also suffered from depression, Cho was medically diagnosed with this and those around him were aware of his concerns. Many were not aware of Klebold's depression until his notebook was found after his death (Cullen, 2009; Gross, 2016; Dawson et al., 2016). Further, data shows that Cho may have had a mixture of both psychopathic and depressive symptoms, as he was considered to be manipulative, narcissistic, and controlling according to teachers, thus mostly meeting the psychopathic definition laid out earlier (Hares, 1996; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Carl Bean, a former professor of Cho's, stated that he was very manipulative, controlling, and

displayed narcissistic tendencies (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). This would be a mixture of both Klebold's and Harris's traits as Harris was said to suffer from psychopathic tendencies while Klebold suffered from depressive thoughts (Cullen, 2009; Gross, 2016; Dawson et al., 2016; worldofkillers28, 2010a).

Similar to Adam Lanza, it was reported that Cho was heavily inspired by the Columbine shooters after writing an essay on how he identified with them shortly following that massacre (Auxemery, 2015; Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). The Columbine massacre was believed to be the catalyst for many other school shootings in the U.S. (Murray, 2017). Cho considered Harris and Klebold to be martyrs in his letter sent right before he committed the Virginia Tech massacre. Many of Cho's writings were similar to the writings of Eric Harris, who was also viewed as arrogant (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010c). In one of his video manifestos, for example, Cho compared himself to Jesus to "inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people" (Langman, 2014, p. 1). In his manifesto, he identified himself as a "God of power-seeking revenge" (Liebert & Birnes, 2011, p. 8), similar to when Harris said that he felt "like God" (Cullen, 2009, p. 234).

Consistent studies have shown that mass shooters have often been inspired by previous mass shooters leading to imitation or the copycat effect (Auxemery, 2015; Cantor et al. 2000; Cantor et al. 1999; Coleman, 2004). Research has shown that many offenders often desire the fame that previous killers received, usually causing them to contact media outlets themselves to report their own wrongdoings (Lankford, 2016; Lankford, 2018). This may explain Cho's desire to send out video manifestos to media organizations. As a result, his manifestos were continuously played by the news providing him with fame even after his death. According to previous housemates, Cho had always had a desire for attention (Hacker, 2008; Tridata Division,

2009; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). In one house party, for example, he began stabbing a carpet because he thought people would find it funny (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). It is common for serial killers and mass murderers to desire public attention (Kass-Gergi, 2012). Carl Panzram, a serial killer responsible for murdering 21 people, wrote to his warden before his execution:

“A bunch of these kind of newspaper clippings and my picture would go good to fill in the last part of the book. They would be very good because they would be both authentic and interesting, After all my part of the book to finish it off in proper style you as the author could write my wind up or epitaph with perhaps a picture of [me] after death or the grave or the Electric Chair. You write the Preface, use my writing for the book and your own explanations as the conclusions. This ought to make a hell of a good book. I have never seen or heard of one like it. It ought to have a big sale, with all of the interest that would be aroused by all of the papers publishing so much about me.” (Kass-Gergi, 2012,p.25; King, 1997, p. 192).

The letter illustrates how serial killers have often been used as selling points for media outlets, providing a greater incentive for them to kill. Serial killers like David Berkowitz have admitted to media attention as a prime motivator for continuing his murders (Kass-Gergi, 2012). Since media outlets have created cults of personalities for mass murderers, many tend to buy into the hype, providing greater incentive to kill. In Cho’s case, people like Harris and Klebold were heroes in his eyes due to the fame they received, similar to how a superhero or villain would gain public notoriety due to their actions.

An example of Cho creating his own cult of personalities was when he took up personas like ‘question mark’, ‘spanky’, and ‘axe’ (Hacker, 2008). Many serial killers have taken a similar route where they created personas or gave themselves nicknames. The serial killer Dennis Radar

referred to himself as the BTK (Bind, Torture, Kill) Strangler (Kass-Gergi, 2012). Similarly, David Berkowitz and John Wayne Gacy also had an alter egos known as ‘Son of Sam’ and ‘Pogo the Clown’ respectively (Kass-Gergi, 2012, 2012; Sullivan & Maiken, 2013). The most notable however is the Zodiac killer, a serial killer whose identity is still up for debate (Pedrini, 2018).

Cho and many other serial and mass murderers likely take up these personas to make themselves larger than life. According to Jayne Henson and Loreen Olson (2010), serial killers often neutralize their killings by rejecting their stigmatized identities, which often includes blaming society for their actions. Serial killers can also do this by creating false personas and blaming the massacres on the personas themselves as opposed to themselves. Although Cho did not necessarily use these personas when he committed the massacre, he does reject the false identity by placing the blame on society as opposed to himself. It was reported that Cho had feelings of victimization and isolation, often illustrated in his poems and plays he wrote in university (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009). According to one of his videos, Cho viewed himself as a victim and someone who was hurting within:

“Do you know what it feels like to be spit on your face, and have trash shoved down your throat? Do you know what it feels like to dig your own grave? Do you know what it feels like to have your ...slashed from year to year? Do you know what it feels like to be torched alive?” (City News, 2007)

It is not certain as to why this was the case, but there was no evidence of him being bullied throughout school. Similarly, school shooters like Klebold and Harris often rejected their stigmatized identities by blaming students and teachers for their massacres. In Cho’s case, the lack of responsibility taken by the school to address his psychological and mental health concerns probably contributed to his decision to commit the murders.

Virginia Tech University did not note down his history with previous therapy nor his counseling sessions in secondary school, preventing them from providing enough solutions to address such concerns (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Similarly, Nancy Lanza, the mother of school shooter Adam Lanza, did not believe that the school system was able to provide enough solutions in addressing her son's mental health concerns (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019).

Furthermore, Cho had confrontations with authority similar to school shooters like Cruz, Klebold, and Harris. This includes professors having negative opinions on his story writings due to the violent content within them (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Similarly, Nikolas Cruz had issues with authority which included getting into shouting matches with his teachers (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). Harris and Klebold were also known for engaging in deviant acts such as stealing weapons and a van (Cullen, 2009; CNN, 2019; worldofkillers28, 2010c). As previously mentioned, such outbursts and anti-social behavior may have possibly been symptoms or hints of things to come.

In the case of Cho and the Columbine shooters, it may relate more to rational choice theory. According to rational choice theory, people make decisions based on if the benefits of acting upon them outweigh their costs (Ray et al. 2020). The Columbine shooters may have found that the benefits of partaking in deviant acts (attention, feelings of empowerment, and fulfillment) outweighed the costs of committing them (apprehension). Similarly, Cho may have found that the benefits of writing dark stories (fulfillment and satisfaction) outweighed the costs of writing them (criticism from teachers).

School Dynamics

Cho graduated Westfield high school with a 3.5 GPA (accounting for his special accommodations and individualized education programs) and went to Virginia Tech to study

Business Information Technology (Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009). However, his parents and counselor did not want him to go to Virginia Tech because they thought it was too big of a school which could exacerbate his feelings of isolation (TriData Division, 2009). As shown across many other school shooters and serial killers, isolation, and loneliness are common traits (Martens, 2011; Ried et al., 2019). Serial killers like Jeffrey Dahmer and Keith Jesperson were considered loners (Reid et al. 2019). Isolation has been strongly correlated with a lack of trust for others and a lack of feeling safe (Reid et al. 2019). The possible lack of trust he had for his school in addressing his needs may have been a possible reason as to why he considered himself a victim. As mentioned, Cho did not talk to many people and felt isolated and victimized (Hacker, 2008).

According to Roy, school officials did not do enough to address the concerns Cho faced (CBS, 2009). During high school, his counselor suggested that Cho should go to a university with a more structured environment and that was closer to home to make it easier for Cho to cope and to be monitored (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). However, Cho was adamant to go, and no one prevented him. Cho felt more isolated when he got into Virginia Tech as it was bigger and he had less access to counseling and a psychiatrist (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Cho was never required to go through counseling or a psychiatric assessment until he voiced his desire to commit suicide (CBS, 2009). Entering Virginia Tech, key information on Cho's permanent record was not noted (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). This included his counseling and therapy sessions, and individual educational programs. It was also reported that Cho did not receive any evaluation despite requesting to see a mental health counselor (CBS, 2009). It has been commonly known that school authorities were not fully aware of or were believed to have not taken enough actions in addressing someone's mental health or psychological concerns. No one

was aware of Klebold's battles with depressive thoughts until after his death and reading his journals (CBC, 2018; Cullen, 2009; Dawson et al. 2016). Similarly, school authorities were not fully aware of Harris's psychopathic tendencies (Cullen, 2009). Additionally, Nancy Lanza pulled Adam Lanza from school and did not trust school authorities in handling his mental health and psychological concerns in an appropriate manner (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). Such examples may illustrate that these schools may not have been considered safe spaces according to the analysis of Reid et al. (2019), possibly contributing to further isolation.

Other possibilities for Cho's continuous demise included his experiences of rejection. Cho did well academically but decided to change his program to English in his sophomore year as he grew a passion for writing poems and plays (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009). Cho sent a book idea to a New York publisher, but his idea was rejected. Since he never took criticism of his writings well, his negative feelings were exacerbated as a result (Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009). Rejection is common amongst many mass murderers and serial killers, whether through feeling rejected by parents, friends, or other loved ones (Auxemery, 2015; Reid et al. 2019; Simon, 2015). Within the family sphere, studies have shown consistent findings of serial killers and mass murderers growing up in fatherless homes (Auxemery, 2015; Reid et al., 2019; Simon, 2015). Studies have shown how many mass murderers and serial killers are often characterized as being loners and isolated by others (Auxemery, 2015; Reid et al., 2019; Simon, 2015). Birgit Pfeifer and Ruard Ganzevoort (2017) observed that isolation and death were two key existential concerns faced by Cho. Pfeifer and Ganzevoort (2017) define isolation as "conflict between the wish to be connected to others and experiences of rejection; realization that one's subjective experience of reality can never be

fully shared” (p.125). Cho may have felt rejected and isolated when his writings were rejected, thus possibly creating the sense of ‘otherness’ for himself.

Many of Cho’s sinister thoughts and feelings were displayed through his writings (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009). Professor Robert Hicok stated that Cho’s writings often lacked creativity but consisted of a lot of violence (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Further, Professor Bean told Cho to drop his writing class due to his inappropriate topics and writings, causing a verbal altercation between the two (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Cho also had various confrontations with authorities for his deviant behavior (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009) This included stalking female students and taking pictures without their permission, causing concern for many residence advisors (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Similarly, Harris and Klebold also had issues with the police. As mentioned in their cases, these crimes may have allowed them to get more accustomed to engaging in deviant behavior. According to the broken windows theory, authorities take on relatively minor crimes to prevent bigger ones (Marat, 2019). This may have been the case here but unfortunately ended up being unsuccessful.

Social Dynamics

There was no evidence that Cho had any close friends throughout his life, as he was known by classmates and housemates as being antisocial and isolated from others (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011; TriData Division, 2009). Other students found him odd and even joked about him possibly exploding due to his behavior in class (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). A student told a friend that Cho was the “kind of guy who might go on a rampage killing” (Liebert & Birnes, 2011, p. 41). Similarly, students from the Stoneman Douglas Secondary school suspected Nikolas Cruz to someday go on a rampage (Wallman et al., 2018). Adam Lanza was also

perceived as an abnormal student by peers as is often the case for many mass murderers (Stone, 2011; Reid et al. 2019).

According to Lucinda Roy, classmates were afraid of Cho due to his many disturbing writings in his English classes (CBS, 2009). Studies have found that having positive relationships with peers can often help reduce behavioral problems (DeBaryshe & Ramsey, 1989; Reid et al., 2019). Serial killer Richard Cottingham was also known for not being accepted by others growing up: “No one was that close to me . . . inside I always felt I was a loner, apart from the crowd . . . “ (Reid et al., 2019, p.1638). This could likely have contributed to many of his inappropriate actions to receive positive attention from others (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Resident advisors warned one another of Cho’s behavior following his inappropriate advances on other female residences and taking pictures without their consent (Hacker,2008; TriData Division, 2009; Liebert & Birnes, 2011).

Cho may have used writing and poetry to escape his reality since he spent most of his time by himself writing (Hacker,2008; TriData Division, 2009). Serial Killer Arthur Shawcross was described as having imaginary friends to compensate for the lack of connections he made with others (Reid et al., 2019). Although this was not the case for Cho, his writings may have been meant to create his ideal world. One of the stories he wrote in class was about a depressed boy named ‘Bud’ who fanaticized of killing everyone in his school for not accepting him (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). He was eventually accepted by a gothic girl and they did deviant acts together like steal cars and guns. The story ended with the line “You and me. We can fight to reclaim our deserving throne” (Liebert & Birnes, 2011, p.39). The desires of the character of Bud turned out to be similar to that of Cho. Furthermore, the characters of Bud and the goth girl were similar to that of Harris and Klebold, as it was believed that Harris had a major influence on

Klebold similar to how the goth girl influenced Bud (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). It was reported that Cho's elementary school teachers suggested to his parents to seek out more friends and get further involved in groups to communicate with people and to get him talking (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). It was believed that his lack of communication was the result of being isolated from others and not having friends. Thus, his lack of friendships and connections to others may have forced him to enter his own world through his writing.

Family Dynamics

Cho grew up with his two parents and older sister (Hacker, 2008; TriData Division, 2009). They moved to the US from South Korea when he was eight and they moved to Virginia when he was nine (Hacker, 2008). However, his parents would visit weekly and called them every week (TriData Division, 2009; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). His parents worked at a dry-cleaning company (Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). It was reported that Cho's parents were not home as often due to their busy schedules.

According to social control theory, the lack of control of social mechanisms has over the behavior of others can be a contributing factor to deviant behavior. In the case of Cho, a possible contributing factor may have been the lack of connection with his family. One of his former roommates did not believe he was close with his parents as they just dropped him at college on his first day and left (Hacker, 2008). Although they reportedly called weekly, physicians recommended that Cho stayed close to home in a small school and remain connected to others (Liebert & Birnes, 2011). This may have been a way to help maintain social control over him and keep him from committing deviant acts. Similarly, Adam Lanza was taken out of school and was homeschooled to stay close to home and be easily monitored (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). All the school shooters studied seemed to have weak social bonds with certain

institutions, whether that being with the family, school, or the government (due to the breaking of laws and conflict with authority). Cho seemed to be disconnected from such institutions. Elliot Roger, the school shooter at the University of Santa Barbra City College at Isla Vista, was similarly known for being disconnected from some of these institutions such as school due to his lack of social interaction with others (White, 2017).

Sandy Hook Shooting

Adam Lanza

In 2012, 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot his mother to death before killing 27 students and staff at the Sandy Hook elementary school and eventually killing himself.

Personality

Adam Lanza was diagnosed with anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and autism according to medical records (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019; Baker, 2017). School shooters often suffer from mental health or psychological disorders (Auxemery, 2015). Documents reported Lanza as being introverted and often isolated himself from others by staying in his room and playing video games (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). Three of the school shooters mentioned seemed to have a difficult time connecting with others and were often viewed as loners.

As mentioned, loneliness has been strongly correlated to sadism and has been found in serial killers like Jeffery Dahmer (Martens, 2011; Ried et al., 2019). According to Reid et al. (2019), isolation may be due to the lack of safe spaces or people of trust to turn to. Similarly, Keith Jespersion, who was responsible for murdering eight different women, was known for keeping to himself as he often did not trust others to address his concerns (Reid et al., 2019). Jespersion stated during one of his interviews, “To protect myself... I closed in on myself” (Reid et al., 2019, p. 1639; Fezzani, 2015, p. 88). Likewise, Joel Rifkin, a serial killer responsible for

killing nine different women, was known for not interacting with others and often had a distrust for those around him (Reid et al., 2019; Fezzani, 2015).

Most likely, Lanza felt most comfortable by himself and only preferred interacting with people online, hence his time playing video games. Thus, Lanza most likely hated human physical presence. As a child, he did not like being touched and would get into physical altercations with kids who touched him (PBS, 2013). In one of the yearbooks, Lanza's face did not appear and instead had the words "camera shy" (McVeigh, 2012). Lanza may have avoided taking pictures as it would have required being around people when taking the picture.

Additionally, Lanza had a deep hatred for others according to documents. He wrote to a person online that we "incessantly have nothing other than scorn for humanity" (Jaeger, 2018). Similarly, Harris had a deep hatred for others which was evident through his journals (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010b). Lanza was obsessed with the Columbine massacre according to his journals, just like Cho (BBC News, 2013; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Media has been known for contributing to the copycat effect where mass murderers imitate previous mass murderers to attain notoriety for themselves (Auxemery, 2015; Cantor, Mullen & Alpers, 2000; Cantor et al., 1999; Coleman, 2004). Harris and Lanza both used journals to illustrate their deep hatred for the world. Lanza also wrote in his journal about violence which included violence towards children and even had content rationalizing pedophilia according to reports (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). Similarly, Harris drew coffins and expressed his hatred for the world and desire to kill as many people as he could, while also praising past mass murderers. In contrast to Harris, Lanza was never classified as a psychopath and was not known for being manipulative, charming, or social. In addition, Lanza had never had any altercations with the police before the shooting, nor had the police received previous calls regarding Lanza's behavior unlike Harris and Klebold

(McVeigh, 2012). According to Alan Diaz, one of Lanza's only friends growing up, it was difficult to imagine Lanza holding a gun (CNN, 2012). However, it is unknown as to where such hatred and thoughts may have derived from.

Social Dynamics

According to reports, Lanza did not have many friends since he was homeschooled since the 10th grade (McVeigh, 2012). Both Cho and Cruz were known as being to themselves and not having many friends. It has been common for serial killers and mass murderers to be viewed as social misfits as previously mentioned (Stone, 2011; Reid et al., 2019). As mentioned under the personality section, Lanza seemed to be uncomfortable with human presence, a possible reason as to why he had very few friends. According to the findings, Lanza's closest friends were gamers he interacted with through playing video games (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019; Jaeger, 2018).

It was through video games where most of his intentions and feelings towards children were leaked (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). In an exchange with someone online, Lanza stated, "it should be up to the child to decide if it is right or wrong" when discussing pedophilia (Jorgensen, & Stulberger, 2019, par. 19). Similarly, Nikolas Cruz leaked his intentions through social media, which is common amongst mass murderers and amongst all five school shooters studied in the current research (Lankford, 2018; Pfeifer & Ganzevoort, 2017). These findings may illustrate that many school shooters use social media to express their emotions and frustrations with life, before eventually committing the murders.

Alan Diaz, a former schoolmate and one of the very few friends of Adam Lanza, stated that his mother Nancy Lanza used to invite him and others over for them to play video games with Adam Lanza (CNN, 2012). They played games like StarCraft and Warcraft, but he

eventually lost touch with Lanza once he started getting homeschooled (CNN, 2012).

Homeschooling Lanza may have further pulled him away from human interaction, possibly causing further isolation and forcing him to interact more with people online. Although some findings may show that he may have preferred isolation, this likely created more harm than good.

School Dynamics

Reports illustrate that Lanza had a negative outlook on the Sandy Hook elementary school. He classified it as being “unsanitary” and stated in his journal that he “can’t learn the way the school teaches” (Jorgensen, & Stulberger, 2019, par. 7). As mentioned, Lanza was homeschooled by his mother and reports demonstrate that she was very protective of him (Kovner, 2018).

According to Zhang et al. (2019), parental divorce, maternal control, and overprotection were positively correlated with adolescent rebellion towards their parent, all variables being prevalent with Lanza. Similarly, Stijn Van Petegem et al. (2019) found a positive correlation between overprotectiveness and psychological frustration needs. Lanza may have suffered from similar frustrations and decided to take it out on the school. It has been common amongst all the school shooters in the current study to have existing issues with their parents or primary caregiver. Serial killers like Edmund Kemper and Henry Lee Lucas were both known for having dysfunctional relationships with their mothers, likely causing them to eventually kill them (LaBrode, 2007). Similarly, Lanza would go on to kill his mother who he often isolated himself from despite both being in the same house (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019).

Adam Lanza may place blame on his mother for further isolating him from the outside world by homeschooling him. Such frustrations may have caused him to eventually kill her and

others. The school may have reflected how he viewed his mother which may explain why he had great disdain towards the school and took his anger out on it.

Family Dynamics

Adam Lanza's parents divorced in 2009 and he lived with his mother Nancy and brother Ryan Lanza (ABC News, 2012). He did not see his father two years before the massacre (Solomon, 2014). Nancy Lanza previously worked as a stockbroker while his father was the executive. Nancy Lanza later stayed at home to homeschool Adam (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). Even though Adam Lanza lived with his mother, he drifted away from her as he spent most of his time in his room playing video games, once again showing how isolated he was from his mother. According to reports, Lanza often communicated with his mother through email despite being in the same house together (Baker, 2017). Similarly, Klebold began drifting away from his mother shortly before the Columbine Massacre (Cullen, 2009; Dawson et. al., 2016).

According to Reid et al. (2019), the mothers of most serial killers often face stressful situations, such as domestic violence or drug addiction. In the case of Nancy Lanza, it was most likely after the divorce as friends reported that Nancy Lanza began acting strangely following the divorce (Memmot, 2012). This included disallowing guests from entering the house. She also kept counselors away from Adam Lanza as she felt that they could not address any of his mental health concerns (Jorgensen & Stulberger, 2019). Similarly, Virginia Tech University also received great criticism over how the concerns relating to Cho were addressed (Liebert & Birnes, 2011).

As previously mentioned, serial killers like Edmund Kemper and Henry Lee Lucas had disdain towards their mothers and ultimately killed them, as did Lanza (LaBrode, 2007). Nancy had many guns and even brought Adam Lanza to shooting ranges to practice shooting (CBS

News, 2018). Some blame Nancy Lanza for buying her son guns in the first place and maybe Adam Lanza did as well. Adam Lanza was unlikely to be someone who always enjoyed firearms in contrast to Nikolas Cruz and the two Columbine shooters. Thus, Lanza may have had resentment towards his mother and decided to take it out on her.

Stoneman Douglas Shooting

On February 14th, 2018, 18-year-old Nikolas Cruz murdered 17 students and staff at Stoneman Douglas Secondary School. Cruz was arrested and is currently in custody.

Nikolas Cruz

Personality

Nikolas Cruz was diagnosed with developmental delays at the age of three. He was also diagnosed with conditions such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Wallman et al., 2018; Wallman & O'Matz, 2018). Similarly, school shooters like Cho and Lanza were both medically diagnosed with medical conditions. Although both Harris and Klebold dealt with psychological and mental health concerns, both were not formally diagnosed. Nonetheless, a medical and psychological condition has been a common denominator amongst all five school shooters. This has been prevalent for many years, as most mass murderers have often had some sort of mental or psychological condition (Auxemery, 2015; Hempel et al., 1999). In contrast, however, some studies have shown that school shooters tend to have less of a history with psychological or mental health concerns, but display psychiatric symptoms such as depression, anti-social, and narcissistic traits. (Auxemery, 2015; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999).

Cruz displayed anti-social behavior due to his quick temper. Cruz often had physical altercations with both his adoptive mother and his brother Zachary Cruz, which included putting

a gun to both of their heads on different occasions (Wallman et al., 2018). Documents also reported that he had outbursts at home and school (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). After his adoptive mother passed away, Nikolas Cruz and his brother moved in with former neighbor Roxanne Deschamps (Wallman et al., 2018). Deschamps stated that whenever she did not give Cruz what he wanted, he had an outburst, which included banging his head onto the wall (Wallman et al., 2018). It was reported that Cruz punched Roxanne's son in the face when he tried to intervene during one of the altercations (Wallman et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Cruz was expelled from Stoneman Douglas for fighting (Schuppe, 2018). Students and teachers have stated that he had a history of cursing out teachers and having random outbursts (Mazzei, 2018; Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). In comparison, Harris, and Klebold also had quick tempers and were easily angered as mentioned in the previous sections. Anger is a common denominator amongst many school shooters (Auxemery, 2015; Verlinden et al., 2000).

Cruz displayed other anti-social behavior at school and in the neighborhood. He was always known for being a troublemaker in the neighborhood, as police often received calls from neighbors about Cruz (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). This included Cruz looking through neighbors' windows (Schuppe, 2018). Many considered him to be socially off and even joked that he would be the one to shoot up the school, similar to what students predicted about Cho in Virginia Tech (Liebert & Birnes, 2011; Schuppe, 2018).

Cruz also displayed traits of depression. There were reports that he attempted to commit suicide by drinking gasoline before his mother stopped him and has also cut his wrist various times (Wallman et al., 2018). All the other four school shooters in the study succeeded in

committing suicide but Cruz was the only one who did not commit suicide following the massacre. Suicide is often common amongst school shooters and those who commit suicide tend to have more victims than those who do not (Auxemery, 2015; Lester et al., 2004). It is unclear as to why Cruz did not commit suicide, unlike the other school shooters. A possible reason is that unlike the others, there was no evidence that he felt victimized by others. Reports illustrate that Harris, Klebold, and Cho all felt victimized by classmates while Lanza may have felt victimized by family, possibly making them feel of lower worth (Cullen, 2009; Hacker, 2008; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). In Cruz's case, he likely just enjoyed school shootings and using guns, hence why he liked to classify himself as a "professional school shooter" (Schuppe, 2018). Reports showed that Cruz loved collecting guns and knives and showed pictures of guns and dead animals through his social media pages (NBC News, 2018; Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018).

According to Arluke, Lankford, and Madfis (2018), many mass murderers often express their desire to kill through killing or harming animals. Serial killer Jefferey Dahmer was known for dissecting dead animals as a child, including dogs, tadpoles, and pigs (Palermo & Bogaerts, 2015). The acts committed towards animals can be viewed as a means to slowly build up to eventually murder people. Although this was not the case for Harris and Klebold, they also engaged in deviant behavior before committing their crimes. Mass murderers may commit deviant acts to build-up to the eventual massacres. Jefferey Dahmer was dissecting animals since he was a child, possibly normalizing committing similar acts once he grew older (Palermo & Bogaerts, 2015). Similarly, shooting and torturing squirrels may have contributed to normalizing what Cruz would eventually do at Stoneman Douglas.

Family Dynamics

Nikolas Cruz and his brother were given up for adoption shortly after being born (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). Both had different fathers but the same biological mother. Both were adopted by Lynda and Roger. “They [Zach and Nikolas] had a very close relationship with their father” a close friend reported, and that Roger was “all about his kids” (Wallman et al., 2018, sec A Loving Family). This is in contrast with the previous school shooters who both seemed to be more distant from their guardians despite them being their parents. Roger Cruz traveled frequently, but Lynda Cruz was a stay at home mom.

Lynda Cruz was close to Nikolas Cruz, as she taught him basic skills such as how to do laundry and chores. However, their relationship took a downturn later (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). Although Cruz does not kill his primary caregiver as was the case with some mass murderers, there are many instances where he was involved in heated altercations with her which included putting a gun to her head (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). This goes back to the conflict that most serial and mass murderers often have with their mothers (LaBrode, 2007). Such evidence runs consistent with studies illustrating the frequent stress that tends to be placed on the mothers of mass shooters (Reid et al., 2019). This seemed to be ignited following the passing of his adoptive father Roger Cruz at the age of 68 from a heart attack (Contrera & Leaming, 2019; Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018).

A year later, Lynda Cruz passed away a few months before the massacre at 68 of pneumonia (Contrera & Leaming, 2019; Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). Cruz’s mishaps in behavior continued after moving in with Roxanne Deschamps. Reid et al. (2019) found that over half of the male serial killers grew up in single-parent households. Furthermore, many serial killers grew up in unstable families, which was the case for Cruz (Simon, 2015). Cruz did not

know his real parents and his adoptive parents died at a very early age. He and his brother Zach Cruz were later kicked out of the house due to his inappropriate behavior and constant outbursts (Wallman et al., 2018). It is possible that Cruz felt abandoned due to the lack of stable parental figures in his life, possibly contributing to further isolation. After being kicked out by Deschamps, he called the police shortly after, telling them that, “I just lost my mother....I’m dealing with a bunch of things right now” (CNN, 2018, 0:47).

Studies have shown that many school shooters tend to struggle with attachment difficulties (Auxemery, 2015; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999). The passing of his father may have contributed greatly to his outbursts due to the strong bond he had with him. This likely caused him to harm others and this may have been further exacerbated following the death of his mother. Deschamps was another parental figure who was removed from his life. A family in Parkland later took him in and they stated that Cruz behaved well and followed the rules, including keeping the guns locked in a safe place (NBC News, 2018; Wallman et al. 2018; CNN, n.d). They were possibly the closest thing to his original adoptive parents at this point in his life.

School Dynamics

Cruz was expelled from two private schools and was later expelled from Stoneman Douglas high school for fighting (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al. 2018). Referring back to the types of social bonds laid out by social control theorists (involvement, attachment, belief, commitment), Cruz lacked the involvement since he was not involved in any activities like extra-curricular. It is also clear that he lacked the attachment to school because he was isolated and had no friends throughout school. Further, Cruz lacked the beliefs to display appropriate conduct within the school, including being respectful to teachers and classmates. Cruz had a long history of fighting students and causing trouble in the classroom (Mazzei, 2018; Schuppe, 2018;

Wallman et al., 2018). He often cursed out teachers and threw tantrums in class (Schuppe, 2018). Cruz also got into physical altercations with classmates, was unable to graduate high school, and has threatened multiple times to bring guns to school (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). A teacher in Stoneman Douglas labeled Cruz as being an undisciplined kid who misbehaved often (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018). In other words, Cruz was an uncontrolled student who may have had a deficient amount of social bonds to the educational system. Similarly, Cho and Harris were labeled by teachers and their parents as being unruly students due to their many altercations with teachers and the police respectively (Cullen, 2009; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). This goes back to labeling theory, as labeling someone as deviant may unintentionally cultivate a deviant identity for the individual.

Additionally, the lack of social bonds to the educational system seems to be common amongst all five school shooters, even the ones who did well in school. They often had poor relationships with classmates and were not fully committed to excelling, possibly further exacerbating their feelings of isolation (Auxemery, 2015; Verlinden et al., 2000). In the case of Cruz, his lack of social bonds to the educational institution may have been related to the bond with his family. Due to growing up in an unstable environment, his mistrust in the family institution transferred to the educational institution. If he did not feel fulfilled in his family, he will likely be less satisfied in the school environment, which may be a possible explanation for ultimately committing the massacre. Many serial killers grew up in unstable family environments and had less attachment to the family dynamic (Auxemery, 2015; Simon, 2015; Verlinden et al., 2000). This lack of belief and control likely spilled over to the mistrust in other institutions. In Cruz's case, his lack of bond to his school may have derived from his chaotic family upbringing.

Social Dynamics

Many throughout his school thought of Cruz as being socially off. It is unknown whether he had friends or people he spent time with besides his adoptive mother and brother (Wallman et al., 2018). Students from Stoneman Douglas classified Cruz as a loner and anti-social (Wallman et al., 2018). Similarly, school shooters such as Lanza and Cho who were known as loners and could not make friends (Hacker, 2008; McVeigh, 2012; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Isolation is found to be common amongst many mass shooters and serial killers (Auxemery, 2015; Reid et al., 2019; Verlinden et al., 2000). Additionally, the school shooters in my sample were often viewed as socially off or suspicious to their peers. However, no school shooter had as much suspicion of their eventual massacre as Cruz did. Many students stated that they were not surprised that Cruz would be responsible for the massacre and even made jokes previously that he would be the most likely to become a school shooter (Schuppe, 2018). This may be because he has made countless threats about shooting the school and his intentions were made clear and public for others to see before the massacre, unlike the other four shooters whose manifestos and journals were not discovered until after their massacres (Cullen, 2009; Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018).

As mentioned, many school shooters commit massacres for public attention (Lankford, 2018). This may explain why there is an increase in copycat shootings where school shooters are often inspired by previous school shooters due to the attention received from the media (Surette, 2015). Cruz likely desired similar attention as previous school shooters, explaining why he always classified himself as a professional school shooter through social media platforms.

Such massacres illustrate the power of the media in inspiring school shooters (Auxemery, 2015). The 'Zodiac Killer' an unidentified serial killer responsible for murders between the

1960s and 1970s in North Carolina, garnered heavy media attention mainly due to his concealed identity (Pedrini, 2018). Similarly, Dennis Radar, The BTK (Bind, Torture, Kill) strangler obsessed over media attention for his killings and even stated “How many times do I have to kill before I get a name in the paper or some national attention?” (Gibsson, 2006, p. 58). These examples illustrate the media attention mass killers often crave for and that seems to remain consistent in Cruz’s case, who made social media posts of weapons, dead animals, of his desire to be a school shooter, and of self-harm (Schuppe, 2018; Wallman et al., 2018).

Chapter 5

Common Patterns:

Based on my data analysis, several common patterns became apparent. These patterns included the following: a need for notoriety, a quick temper, previous intentions, a poor relationship with parents, isolation, mental and psychological concerns, and history of deviance.

Need for Notoriety

Based on the data and analysis, the school shooters desired notoriety, which was consistent with Lankford's (2017) findings. All five school shooters wanted to be famous and known by others, and they believed that committing such massacres was an ideal way to achieve that objective. Harris, for example, wanted to outdo previous school shooters and be known as a famous mass murderer like Timothy McVeigh (Cullen, 2009). Similarly, Klebold felt inferior and wanted to be noticed and recognized by committing crimes and killing others. This may explain why he felt powerful when people stared at him in fear while having dinner with his mother (refer to family typology under Dylan Klebold) (worldofkillers28, 2010b). Moreover, both Cho and Lanza were inspired by the columbine killers and wanted to be as recognized as they were (BBC News, 2013; Liebert & Birnes, 2011). Finally, Cruz consistently referred to himself as a "professional school shooter" and even made social media posts of himself cutting his wrist (Schuppe, 2018). These examples are consistent with Lankford's (2018) and Murray's (2017) researches, who both found that attention and fame were key motivators for many mass murderers to commit massacres. As mentioned in the analysis, mass murderers and serial killers are known for loving the attention they receive from the media because it makes them feel important, often leading them to continue murdering people. Thus, public attention is likely a key motivator to committing massacres and shootings.

Quick Temper

Based on the data, it was found that all five school shooters had quick tempers and were easily angered. The school shooters tended to have emotional outbursts, taking out their frustrations on others before the massacres. Harris demonstrated his anger in his journal when he discussed his desire to “grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a fucking wolf” (Gumbel, 2009). Within this part of the journal, Harris wants to take out his frustrations by murdering younger students in his school. Similarly, Klebold was known for having a short temper, which was demonstrated since his days as a child when he yelled at the other kids for laughing at him when he fell in the puddle (Cullen, 2009). Moreover, both Cho and Lanza hated being touched by others and would lash out if they were. Finally, Cruz had a history of many outbursts, which included altercations with his adoptive mother, his brother, his guardian Roxanne Deschamps, and her son. This pattern identified in my analysis is consistent with the findings of Angrilli et al. (2013), who determined that serial killers were often found to have high rates of anger and embarrassment. Thus, it appears to be a common characteristic for school shooters to have quick tempers.

Intentions

Moreover, all five school shooters demonstrated their intentions to kill before committing the massacres. Both Columbine killers discussed their desires to kill in each of their journals (Cullen, 2009). They had also planned well in advance to bomb the school and kill themselves (Cullen, 2009: worldofkillers28, 2010c). Similarly, Cho demonstrated his intentions to cause harm through his writings in class and specifically the story of bud and the goth girl (Liebert & Birnes, 2009). Moreover, Lanza’s destructive thoughts came out in his journal writings, as well as in his online gaming. Finally, Cruz declared himself a “professional school shooter” on social media and made videos on his desires to shoot up the school. These examples show that there

has been at least one instance where each school shooter exhibited their intentions before the massacre. Such patterns are consistent with the results found by Lankford (2018) and by Pfeifer and Ganzevoort (2017), who observed that mass murderers often use various means to express their intentions to commit massacres.

Relationship with Parents

Four out of the five school shooters in the research had rough relationships with one or both of their parents during their childhoods. These rough relationships included frequently having altercations with their parents, being isolated from their parents, or lacking trust in the relationship with their parents. For example, Harris's father had a lack of trust for his son, questioning what he was going to do with his life while tracking down all his mishaps along the way (Cullen, 2009). In contrast, Sue Klebold was not fully aware of her son's change in behavior despite noticing he became more distant from her and got into more altercations with her months before the massacre (Cullen, 2009). Similarly, Lanza grew more distant from his mother despite being homeschooled. Cruz, on the other hand, had many verbal and physical altercations with his adoptive mother following the passing of his adoptive father. Cho was the only one who may not have had the roughest relationship with his parents, but we are unsure as to how close he was with them. These examples demonstrate that most of the school shooters had poor relationships with their parents, which is consistent with research that has found that most serial killers grew up having poor relationships with their mothers to the point of wanting to kill them (Reid et al., 2019). However, it is unclear as to if this characteristic was a contributing factor to the eventual massacres as there were many other factors prevalent with each school shooter.

Isolation

It was found that all school shooters had few friends or felt isolated from others for most of their lives. Even though it may have looked as if the Columbine shooters had many friends, they felt isolated and distant from others according to each of their diaries (Cullen, 2009). Such feelings may account for Harris' desire to harm others and Klebold's inferiority complex. In contrast, however, Cho, Lanza, and Cruz did not have any friends at all according to the data. All three were known as social misfits and loners. All of them spent time on their own taking up hobbies that only required little social interaction with others: Cho was interested in writing poems and stories, Lanza spent his time playing video games, and Cruz spent his time shooting animals and target shooting. These examples are consistent with the results of Reid et al. (2019) who found that it was common for mass murderers and serial killers to be social misfits and loners. Therefore, isolation, whether that means not having any close peers or simply feeling isolated, was a common factor across all the school shooters that may have contributed to their decisions to murder.

Mental and Psychological Concerns

Furthermore, all school shooters suffered from some sort of mental and psychological concerns. Harris displayed traits of psychopathy, while Klebold showed the traits of depression (Cullen, 2009; worldofkillers28, 2010a). Cho had selective mutism, as well as OCD and depression. Similarly, Cruz suffered from depressive traits and OCD, as did Lanza. Lanza, however, also suffered from anxiety. These examples are consistent with the results of Reid et al. (2019) who found that many mass murderers and serial killers suffered from mental and psychological problems (Reid et al., 2019). Thus, this is a common trait not only amongst the school shooters in the study but also among other mass murderers.

History of Deviancy

Finally, four of the five school shooters had a history of displaying deviant behavior. Both Harris and Klebold completed various missions where they committed crimes like stealing vans, computers and carving inappropriate content on lockers. Cruz got into fights with others and disrupted the peace many times through peeking at people's windows or through making noises by shooting animals and other objects. Similarly, Cho had a history of stalking students and having outbursts towards teachers, family members, and peers. Lanza is the only exception, but this could be because he was mostly homeschooled and kept in the house by his mother. While we know that deviant behavior is a predictor for such crimes, I was unable to find associations specifically linked between a criminal record and mass shootings. Nevertheless, since four of the five school shooters displayed deviant behavior before the massacres, it may be suggested that someone's deviant and criminal history may be a common factor to account for when analyzing school shooters.

Knowing the common patterns found across school shooters is important to better understand the key problems that high-risk youths may struggle with that may prompt a massacre. This knowledge provides a better insight into where intervention is needed and can be achieved through policy development.

Chapter 6

Policy Implications:

The policy implications discussed will be the suggested intervention measures deriving from patterns discussed in the previous section. These policy suggestions will include reducing media coverage, more anger management classes in schools, further approaches to track down high-risk students, and conflict mediation sessions between students and legal guardians when necessary. Such policy suggestions are critical to better understand how to address some key risk factors to prevent future massacres.

The first of the possible policy suggestions is reducing the media coverage of school shooters. In 2019, a shooting took place at the Christchurch Mosque that killed 51 people, and the Prime Minister of New Zealand tried to not mention the terrorist by name to avoid giving him notoriety. With enhanced technology and social media, it would be difficult to go about reporting massacres without mentioning the name of the killer. However, it may be helpful to place less focus on the murderers and more on the act itself to illustrate the severity of the shooting and why mass shootings must be addressed as soon as possible. Fewer media coverage of the shooter would prevent would-be school shooters from having inspirations or influences to commit massacres since fewer mass murderers are receiving notoriety. With less notoriety, there is less of an incentive for high-risk youths to commit similar actions.

The second recommendation is that more therapy and counseling sessions focusing on anger management can be implemented in schools. If teachers suspect that students have a tendency of having outbursts or if parents were aware of such tendencies previously, students could be referred to anger management programs within the schools. The counselors are then able to follow up frequently with the students to check whether they are behaving appropriately.

Such an initiative would have a positive effect on reducing school shootings because students can find healthier ways to address their anger without taking it out on others. By learning alternative ways to address anger, it becomes less likely for students to harm and pose a lesser threat to the school environment.

Moreover, although the privacy of students should be protected as best as possible, there can be different approaches to track down students who are high risk and are threats to other students and faculty. If a student poses a high risk, police officials can monitor student behavior, whether through their social media accounts or other platforms to better understand whether intervention is necessary to prevent a potential massacre. Also, further social media policies can be implemented to identify dangerous and inappropriate posts and comments that may indicate that the person is a risk to the public. With these interventions to better monitor high-risk behavior, school shootings can be prevented by learning earlier that a student has the potential to cause harm to others. By learning of the potential harms, the police authorities can take more swift action in apprehending the student and apply the appropriate measures early on before it is too late. Had similar actions been taken with Nikolas Cruz for example, the Stoneman Douglas Massacre may have been prevented since he showed his intentions to be a school shooter on social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram long before.

Finally, the fourth recommendation is for schools to have counselors conduct conflict mediation sessions between students and parents if necessary. However, such measures would only be used if the student has consistently displayed deviant behavior, has been a high risk to the school and is known to have had a history of conflicts with parents or primary caregivers. This could also be implemented following the intervention measures mentioned earlier. Since most of the school shooters in the sample had a conflict with their parents at some point, a

chance to mend any conflict with their parents may help alleviate any frustrations that students have with them. Similar to anger management sessions, this intervention has the potential to prevent students from taking their frustrations and anger out on their peers and family members if issues between parents are addressed.

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Chapter 7

Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to better understand the risk factors contributing to one becoming a school shooter. As mentioned, three research questions were addressed in this study:

- a) What are the common risk factors for becoming a school shooter across the cases?
- b) Can the FPTAM be effectively applied to the five school shooters?
- c) What are some policy implications to be considered to prevent possible school shootings?

It is important to answer these questions to better understand factors that may lead to becoming a school shooter and how these factors can be addressed to prevent school shootings.

Within the study, five school shooters in the US were analyzed: Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Seung-Hui Cho, Adam Lanza, and Nikolas Cruz. Based on the data and the analysis for each school shooter, seven key patterns were observed. First, all school shooters craved public notoriety and attention from the mass media. This desire for public attention has been prevalent amongst much other mass and serial murderers over the years. Thus, increased efforts would be needed to reduce the coverage of school shooters in the mass media to minimize public attention and reduce any incentive to try to achieve fame through a killing spree. Second, all school shooters were found to have a quick temper. To address this concern, I suggested the implementation of more anger management classes in schools to help students mitigate their anger to prevent them from taking out their aggression through more violent means. Third, all school shooters exhibited intentions to cause harm in the future, and fourth, they all had a history of deviant and criminal behavior long before the massacre. I suggested for school and government authorities to place extra efforts on monitoring and tracking down high-risk behavior

to identify more promptly someone who poses a risk to others. Fifth, all school shooters were found to have poor relationships with their primary caregivers. I suggested for schools to implement parent-student conflict mediation sessions for high-risk youth. Sixth, all school shooters suffered from some sort of mental or psychological concern, and seventh, they all suffered from feelings of isolation. I was unable to make a policy suggestion in addressing these issues directly, but future research can look for ways to do so.

Despite these results, the current study comes with some limitations. First, the study is based on a small sample size. Since it is based on a small sample size, it would be difficult to generalize the results to other mass and serial murderers. Similarly, it is difficult to apply the results in the current study to a population outside of the US. Since the sample is based on school shooters in the US only, it remains questionable whether such risk factors remain consistent with mass and serial murderers outside of the US. Furthermore, the analysis was produced by a single researcher. Another researcher analyzing the data may interpret it differently than myself and produce different results. Thus, the common risk factors and policy implications may be different for other researchers. Despite these limitations, the study remains significant as it provides support for more proactive measures in dealing with school shootings as opposed to reactive measures.

Future research can apply the FPTAM to other serial killers and mass murderers to better understand whether the patterns found in the current study remain consistent with other murderers. Additionally, future studies can involve an analysis conducted by more than one researcher. The current study is based solely on the analysis of a single researcher. Thus, by including the analysis of more than one researcher, it can allow for further reliability and objectivity as well as further insights on the data. Moreover, a similar study can be conducted on

serial and mass murderers outside of the US to better understand whether the patterns in the current study remain consistent for murderers outside of the US. Finally, while the study identified several policy initiatives that may reduce the likelihood of future school shootings, it remains unclear how effective such policy suggestions can be at reducing school shootings. Therefore, the effectiveness of such policy suggestions can be explored further in future research.

In conclusion, the research shows some of the common risk factors amongst some of the deadliest school shooters in the US. Although similar research needs to be applied to other serial and mass murderers to generalize the findings to a larger population or beyond the US, the results illustrate that by applying the FPTAM, key risk factors contributing to future violence can be identified. Moreover, this study produced several policy suggestions that may aid in addressing some of these common risk factors and prevent future massacres. Thus, the results of the current study provide further knowledge to the US government on how to potentially deal with school shootings.

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