School Shootings: A Nexus of Adolescent Masculinity, and Homophobia

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ABSTRACT

Though overall gun violence has plummeted since 1993, multi-victim school shootings have increased in frequency over the last fifty years and the number of adolescent perpetrators has more than doubled since 1996. I borrow from Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) format to examine seven shootings that have occurred in the fifteen years since their paper's original publication. I replicate their qualitative methodology and conduct my own analysis of these attacks. My findings suggest that these boys that open fire are mired in a history of routine, merciless bullying and that the content of the bullying is homophobic in nature. I also show that even in cases where the victim is not routinely subjected to homophobia, their masculinity has been somehow compromised. I propose that toxic masculinity—the notion that masculinity is something that can be constituted through violent action (Haider 2016)—influences the boys' decisions to engage in mass violence. I also examine possible reasons as to why white boys perpetrate multi-victim school shootings more often than boys of other races, citing the inability of white boys to collectivize their feelings of cultural marginalization. The link between gender and mass violence is also explored, namely the inability of girls to constitute their own gender identity through violence in the way that is allowed to boys.

School Shootings: A Nexus of Adolescent Masculinity and Homophobic Bullying

INTRODUCTION

Though overall gun violence has continued to plummet in the United States since 1993, multi-victim school shootings have increased in frequency over the last fifty years, and the number of perpetrators under 16 has more than doubled from 1996 to 2015 (Chappell 2013, Langman 2016). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2013) there were, on average, 16.4 shootings a year from 2007 to 2013 vs. only 6.4 from 2000 to 2006. America's teenagers are shooting each other, and themselves—23.3% of juvenile perpetrators commit suicide, as do 58.8% of adults (Langman 2016).

How do we account for these statistics—where do we place the blame? Many factors have been offered by politicians and media figureheads as explanations for this increase in mass violence. Are these children the victims of a consumer culture plagued increasingly by violent media—video games, television, movies, music? Are they simply the unwitting pawns of terrorist propaganda, or perhaps they are simply terrorists themselves? Are these teenagers just emotionally or psychologically unhinged—or perhaps the lock on their parents' gun cabinet was all too easily bypassed?

Regardless of the validity of such accusations, there exists a factor that has been egregiously ignored by the mass media, the talking heads, the political pundits, the pop psychologists, and even many academics—a factor so intrinsically tied to violence that it has been all too easy to miss, even as it universally links almost every occurrence of mass violence in our society; gender. Nearly every instance of mass violence in schools—and mass violence in

general—is perpetrated by a male. For multi-victim (3+) school shootings, a whopping 97% of perpetrators are boys or men (Xie 2014).

Though gender is the primary link between these rampages, other factors exist as well. Race also plays a significant factor—79% of multi-victim school shooters are white (Xie 2014). Additionally, these attacks do not occur in a vacuum. A startling majority of the perpetrators are mired in a history of bullying, and the teasing is often homophobic or otherwise targeted against the individual's masculinity (Kimmel and Mahler 2001). In this paper, the link between toxic masculinity, race, bullying, homophobia, and adolescent violence is explored. This is not the first piece of scholarship to do so—in particular, the groundbreaking work of Kimmel and Mahler (2001) initially proposes a similar link. Here, the link will be further explored, first through an analysis of recent media and political commentary on the subject of mass violence. I explore research that debunks many of these accounts and emphasize the need to take seriously the subject of gender as it relates to our understanding of violence—particularly adolescent violence.

Next, I analyze eight school shootings that have occurred since the initial publication of Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) study. In this analysis, I explore the backdrops against which these horrors were enacted—not to glorify them or their perpetrators, but to explore the links between these events and illuminate the surrounding cultures (not the psyches of the individual culprits) that allowed them to occur. Examining the narratives that surround these incidents and the local cultures that create them reveals a startling pattern of gendered bullying that each shooter fits easily within—these were boys that failed to meet expectations for a particular brand of normative masculinity and, as a result, over-conform to a deadly degree. Once we fully understand that pattern—and once we begin to take it seriously—we might better understand the aspects of our society that breed such violence and begin to act against it.

THE PHENOMENON

On the subject of mass violence, it seems that everyone is an expert—particularly politicians, who have always been at the forefront of any conversation on the topic. Video games are a popular topic of critique, and are perhaps one of the only things that the 2016 U.S. Presidential Candidates found themselves agreeing upon. Hillary Clinton, in 2005, stated that violent video games were "stealing the innocence of our children" and argued that they were churning out desensitized kids with the capacity for murder. Donald Trump, in 2012, tweeted that "video game violence & glorification" were "creating monsters".

Different politicians have different ideas. Newt Gingrich argued that the social upheavals of the 1960s were to blame for the rise in mass violence. Wayne LaPierre, president of the National Rifle Association, argued that the mentally ill ("delusional killers") were to be blamed for incidents such as the Sandy Hook shooting (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). Former President Obama, on the other hand, blames inadequate measures for gun control (Herring and Jacobson, 2015). Tom Delay attributed several causes to a rise in juvenile violence, including "daycare, the teaching of evolution in schools, and working mothers who take birth control pills" (Kimmel and Mahler 2001).

Public opinion mirrors this diversity of opinion—63% of Americans say "shootings reflect a failure to identify and treat people with mental health problems", and 23% blame inadequate gun control laws (Washington Post-ABC News Poll, 2015). Others blame the influence of radical Islam, especially in the wake of the recent Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida in which the perpetrator had sworn allegiance to ISIL.

So what, then, is the cause of this violence? Unfortunately, when placed under scrutiny, none of these claims answer that question to a satisfying degree. Despite an apparent increase in violent media and calls for more regulation over gun ownership, youth violence, school violence, and gun violence have all steadily decreased over time despite the recent increase in multi-victim school shootings (Kimmel and Mahler 2001, Bureau of Justice Statistics 2013, Chappell 2013, Langman 2016). If these are our explanatory factors for the increase in mass shootings, why is it that violence in general—and even gun violence specifically—continues to plummet? Though these might fit into the overall puzzle, we are still missing too many pieces.

Additionally, according to a recent study, only three of the multi-victim shootings that have taken place since 2014 can be attributed to or associated with radical Islam (Schwindt 2016). Lastly, even if we account for a multitude of psychological variables in our search to place blame—variables such as an individual's history of child abuse or a turbulent family environment—many shooters come from "relatively stable families" with "no history of child abuse", according to the research of Kimmel and Mahler. They also stress that these variables would apply equally to both boys and girls—and thus these explanations fail to explain the gender gap between male and female violence.

Even bullying, an explanation that has ostensibly gained traction in recent years, cannot fully explain the actions of these adolescent perpetrators. Klein (2006) reveals that it is not just bullying that is an antecedent for school rampages, but relentless, homophobic bullying, and she uses this as a point of departure for an analysis of school shootings in general; an analysis that examines boys who believe that "on some level, they warrant privilege" and are instead tormented and "feel driven to avenge the 'wrong' and re-assert a more dominant, powerful, and victorious masculinity" (39).

Historically, government-supported investigations into the issue focus on many of the issues outlined here—primarily psychological (and sometimes cultural) antecedents to school violence: media influence, drug influence, internet usage, father absence, and child abuse have often been studied in terms of their relationship to school shootings and other rampage violence (Kimmel and Mahler 2001). These investigations (and the public opinions that spur them) are examining the individual, the *who*—who they are, what drugs they do, what video games they play, what their mothers were like. However, scholars, politicians, and public opinions alike are overlooking the broader cultural and systematic factors that engender the sorts of attitudes that link these events together. When it comes to the subject of school shootings or mass violence in general, factors such as gender culture, adolescent masculinity socialization, heterosexism are criminally under-examined. Race is examined only when the perpetrator is non-white—when it comes to white perpetrators (who inhabit the clear majority of cases) the media focus is all too often placed individual, psychological factors (Park, Holody, and Zhang 2012). We fail to examine the *how* and the *why*—how is the shooter fitting into the broader culture around him and why does that culture tell him that mass violence is an acceptable recourse. These questions were originally and thoroughly explored in a piece of groundbreaking sociology conducted by Kimmel and Mahler in 2001, and this paper seeks to expand upon those ideas.

The link between gender, homophobia, race, adolescence, and mass violence is egregiously under-researched, even within the realm of sociology. Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) work *Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence: Random school shootings, 1982-2001* is perhaps the first to so fully explore the interplay between these factors. Some amount of research has emerged exploring a similar links (Klein 2006; Newman et. al 2008; Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Evans 2016; etc.). In their research, Kimmel and Mahler argue that most boys

who open fire in schools resort to violence as an expression against "retaliatory threats to manhood" and that these gendered threats are expressed in the form of merciless homophobic teasing (2001:1439). Additionally, they also argue that "white boys are more likely than African American boys to open fire" in their schools. To do this, Kimmel and Mahler qualitatively examined several school shootings occurring within the period of 1982-2001, analyzing infamous incidents such as the Columbine high school shooting of 1999. In their research, they unearth a pattern of homophobic bullying and merciless torment—not against gay boys, but against boys who are pelted with homophobic insults, and as a result over-conform to a narrative of hegemonic masculinity that tells them that violence is an acceptable answer to personal slights.

The primary research question this paper seeks to examine concerns whether or not Kimmel and Mahler's qualitative analysis of multi-victim school shootings holds up in the years since their paper's original publication in 2001. Can their theoretical framework be reapplied years later? What contemporary literature is relevant to their analysis? Can some of the most infamous school shootings of the past 16 years be examined to reveal the same background of highly-gendered and homophobic bullying that these scholars unearthed in their original analysis? What other considerations might need to be made that Kimmel and Mahler did not account for?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The link between gender, homophobia, race, adolescence, and mass violence is egregiously under-researched, even within the realm of sociology. Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) work *Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence: Random school shootings, 1982-2001* is perhaps the first to so fully explore the interplay between these factors. Some amount of

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In C.J. Pascoe's (2007) groundbreaking ethnographic work *Dude You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, she delves into the gender culture and environment of a California high school to understand how adolescent boys define masculinity and how the heteronormativity of a high school environment enforces a rigid system of gendered behavior. In her analysis, she borrows from Judith Butler's concept of the constitutive outside, a realm outside of traditional, socially acceptable and recognizable gender categories—abject identities are the "unrecognizably and unacceptable selves" that reside within in this constitutive outside (14). In this way, the abject identity is somewhat similar to Killian and Johnson's (2006) concept of the not-me identity, in which identity is negotiated not through an examination of what an individual is, but what they are not. Pascoe (2007) argues that, in high school, boys constantly repudiate the abject identity of the fag in order to maintain that they, themselves, are not fags through "ritualized interactions constituting masculinity" that ward off its threatening specter.

(2007:14). Through this lens, Pascoe views adolescent homophobia as a "disciplinary

mechanism" more so than simply something directed primarily at gay boys and that homophobia

is a "central mechanism in the making of contemporary American adolescent masculinity" (53).

She stresses that the label of fag is something that adheres to heterosexual boys just as much as it

does for gay boys. In both this and the Kimmel and Mahler text, the "Eminem exception" is

discussed—when a boy is called a faggot, it is not an insult directed at his sexuality but at his

masculinity, though the two are of course linked (59).

Through Pascoe's analysis of the fag discourse, we can see how seamlessly it fits into the

narratives that describe the experiences of these perpetrators and we can why these homophobic

insults are so easily, casually, and relentlessly tossed around. Homophobic interactions lie at the

heart of many actions undertaken by adolescent boys—to prove one's self as a man, perhaps the

easiest way to do so is to apply the label of fag to other boys, thus temporarily making yourself

immune to the label and solidifying your own masculine identity. The label of fag as something

that bolsters the masculinity of the boy who inflicts it and damages the masculinity of the boy it

is applied to. Through this lens, we can see how the actions undertaken by these adolescent

perpetrators are not just the result of "general" bullying—these rampages occur against a

backdrop of toxic gender culture in which the boys that enact them in order to reclaim their

damaged masculine image.

Haider (2016) defines toxic masculinity as something "constituted through violence in a

patriarchal culture". In our society, masculinity is defined as something that can be demonstrated

and proved through physicality and violence. According to Kimmel (2000), half of all teenage

boys get into a physical fight each year, and four times more teenage boys than girls think

fighting is appropriate when someone cuts to the front of a line. If, as Pascoe (2007) claims,

adolescent boys are framing their masculinities in comparison to the abject identity of the fag—a label which they fight against so strongly that it defines an ostensible majority of their interactions with one another, and a label that they toss at each other like a hot potato—then it only makes sense that boys can use violence as a tool to fight against this label. If the fag discourse is operating under the societal umbrella of hegemonic, toxic masculinity, then it is only logical that violence be used as a tool in order to deflect the fag discourse away from oneself. My diagram below gives a visual explanation of this framework.

Diagram 1. Visual summary of Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) theoretical framework.

Violence	→	Masculinity	→	Homophobic Bullying

Compromised Masculinity	→	Violence
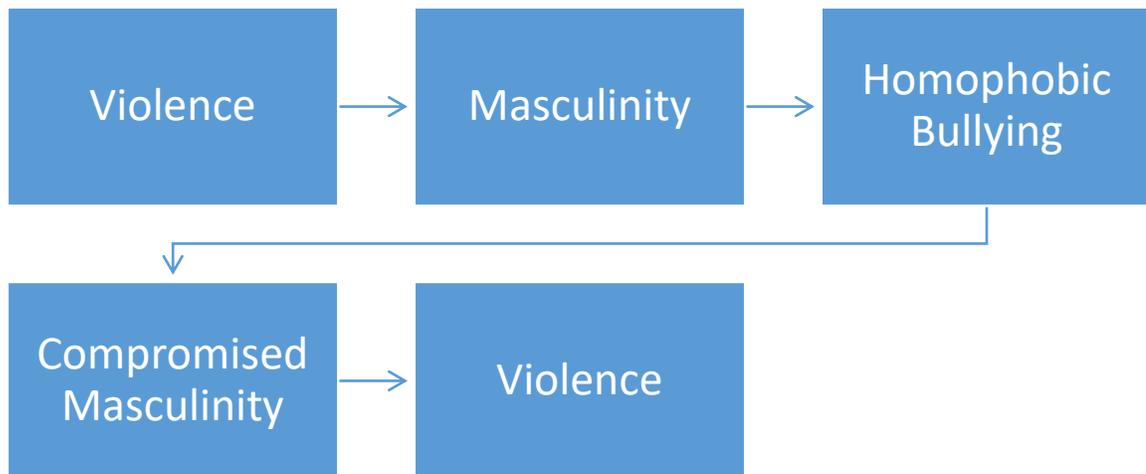
This fairly easily explains the overwhelming male dominance of the act of school shooting. Girls are not required to take part in normative displays of masculinity, and, as Kimmel (2000) demonstrates, they are not socialized into thinking that violence is an acceptable means of conflict resolution. Kimmel and Mahler (2001) site Rotundo (1993) in their study of shootings

from 1982-2001, who states that "no industrial society other than the United States has

developed such a violent boy culture", which could explain why the United States holds such a

monopoly on school shooters. The US holds the highest number of school-related shootings in

the world (Foxman 2012). If school shootings can be understood as the acts of over-conformists

to gender culture, then girls have no place in them as perpetrators since, by enacting violence,

they would not be conforming to gendered expectations—in fact, by committing an act of

violence, a girl is defying feminine expectations rather than conforming to a social narrative

already laid out for her to claim.

Demographically, school shootings are not just the domain of boys—they are the domain

of white boys in particular. Almost 4 in 5 school shootings are perpetrated by a white shooter

(Xie 2014). Despite this, race as it relates to mass violence is almost never discussed when an

incident is perpetrated by a white shooter. Park, Holody, and Zhang (2012) investigated news

coverage of the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings, perpetrated by Asian student Seung-Hui Cho, and

compared it specifically to the Columbine shootings (perpetrated by white boys). They found

that one-third of newspaper articles covering the Virginia Tech shootings contained racial

information, whereas racial information in the news media coverage of the Columbine shootings

was "virtually absent" (475), even despite the shooters' obsession with Hitler and their targeted

killing of a black individual. Mingus and Zopf (2010) reveal similar findings and suggest that

"the prominence given to the race of the perpetrator when the shooter is of any race but white

and the deliberate omissions of race in discussions of white shooters suggests a racial project that

results in both white privilege and an opposing "forever foreigner" status for non-whites" (57).

Kimmel and Mahler (2001) stressed that there are a variety of masculinities—that,

though there is certainly a single "boy code" (1451) there are also many ways that boys can

relate to it, and there are certainly racial differences when it comes to how a boy performs and

relates to masculinity. In Pascoe's (2007) analysis, she saw that the abject identity of the fag was

consistently white, and that African American boys did not use the fag moniker as a disciplinary

mechanism in the same way that white boys did—in fact, they were "much more likely to tease

one another for being white than for being a fag" (71). Additionally, the specific behaviors coded

as masculine or feminine differed between the races—dancing skill and fashion sense enhanced a

black boy's masculinity whereas the same behaviors would harm the social standing of a white

boy. In Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) analysis, they claimed that, despite these sorts of

differences, there still exists a "singular hegemonic vision of masculinity, a particular definition

that is held up as the model against which we all measure ourselves" (1451). It is out of these

comparisons—any individual boy's failure to live up to that standard or role—that a boy will try

to prove themselves as a man. And it is out of that desire to prove themselves that violence arises

as well—violence is something that compensates a compromised masculine identity. As Kimmel

and Mahler analyzed race as it relates to school violence and school shootings, they stressed the

many structural, institutional, and interpersonal challenges that black boys face in their schools,

but they also stressed that something that they do not do in response to those challenges is

commit rampage violence. In their analysis, they claim that any culturally marginalized group of

individuals possesses the capacity to tap into a narrative of resistance, and "collectivize their

anguish" (1453) and place or frame it within a political context.

    Lankford (2016) also analyzed race as it relates to mass murder and revealed that there

were significant differences across race and ethnicity when it comes to the type of attack, the

victims killed, and attack resolution. Lankford claims that these racial and ethnic differences, and

the involvement of whites in mass shootings as a whole, can be explained by the "structural

advantages and aggrieved entitlement experienced" (470) by white men in response to their feelings of cultural marginalization.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this paper, I borrow Kimmel and Mahler's theoretical framework in order to examine eight shootings that have occurred in the years since their paper's original publication—any of the US school shootings occurring within the period of 2001-2018 was fair game for analysis. Of those shootings analyzed, all but one were perpetrated by adolescents. Using the location of the shooting as search terms, I gathered 20 articles from multiple reputable media news sources, including the New York Times, ABC News, CNN, the Guardian, and USA Today. To do this, I scanned the content of these articles for instances of homophobic bullying and compromised masculinity. I searched for information in the background narratives of these perpetrators that demonstrated these phenomena.

The shootings analyzed in this paper were chosen because of the availability of information. An analysis by random selection would not be as effective because of the consistent lack of information in less infamous cases. Speculative information was not taken into account in this analysis. Cases were only included if enough information was present to make a definitive judgment on the presence of homophobic bullying or otherwise compromised masculinity in the backgrounds of the perpetrators. Perpetrator names were omitted, even when widely available, to avoid making a further spectacle out of these events.

THE SHOOTINGS / FINDINGS

Table 1. School Shooting Examined

Location	Date	Perpetrator Age	Victims*	Homophobic Bullying?	Compromised Masculinity?	Articles Examined

Santana High School	3/5/2001	15	5	Yes	Yes	2
North Forest High School	1/10/2012	18	3	Yes	Yes	2
Taft Union High School	1/10/2013	16	2	Yes	Yes	2
Sparks Middle School	10/21/2013	12	4	Yes	Yes	2
Marysville Pilchuck	10/24/2014	15	5	No	Yes	3
Umpqua Community College	10/1/2015	26	10	No	Yes	3
Marshall County High School	1/24/2018	15	16	No	No	3
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School	2/14/2018	19	34	No	No	3

*Both fatalities and non-lethal injuries sustained.

In 2013, the Sparks Middle School shooting was perpetrated by a 12-year-old who shot himself dead after killing a teacher and injuring two other students. He was described by family as being "gentle", was teased for his speech impediment and was constantly called gay—though allegedly not to the extent that could be "prosecutable under Nevada law" (Reno Gazette Journal 2014). In his suicide notes, he expressed anger over his mistreatment at school and indicated that he would get his revenge (Siobhan 2014). Police never conclusively identified a motive.

The perpetrator of the Santana High School shooting who was sentenced to 50 years imprisonment for the killing two and wounding thirteen others was also subject to homophobic bullying. He was called a "queer" and was often beat up or otherwise harassed (ABC News

2001). In an interview post-incarceration, he also said that he was ashamed to admit that he had been bullied in the first place (Dickey 2013).

An 18-year-old perpetrator, having opened fire at North Forest High School, targeted three of the students that had been bullying him, claiming it was in self-defense (ABC 2016). 16-year old perpetrator of the Taft Union High School shooting, wounding two others with a shotgun, had also been a victim of relentless homophobic bullying according information released by the police (Press 2012, Goldman 2013).

Other shootings do not fit so easily into the pattern presented by Kimmel and Mahler (2001). The 15-year-old perpetrator of the 2014 Marysville Pilchuck High School shooting and who injured three and fatally shot four before killing himself, had reportedly fought with another student over a girl—and one of his victims was a girl that had turned down his offer to date (Aimasy, Conlon, and Brumfield 2014, Connor 2014, Johnson 2014). Reportedly, he was not teased—and in this format, it is homophobic teasing and bullying that we are specifically trying to key in to. This case is interesting in that it still fits into a backdrop of toxic, hegemonic masculinity despite the lack of teasing. This incident can still be viewed as a retaliatory demonstration in light of his slighted masculine identity in the face of the girl's rejection. It is not specifically homophobia that causes these boys to open fire, but their compromised masculinities. This case still fits the pattern of mass-violence perpetrated to reconstitute manhood.

Another less perfect example is the Umpqua Community College Shooting of 2015, which was the deadliest mass shooting in Oregon's modern history (Tegna 2015). The perpetrator, a student, fatally shot a professor and eight students and subsequently shot himself dead. This shooter was anti-religious and white supremacist, had studied mass killings, and

expressed his sexual frustration as a virgin and a lack of fulfillment in his isolated life. (Gray 2015; Muskal, Winston, and Gerbel 2015). The day before the killings, he had made online posts expressing sadness over his seemingly permanent, dejected isolation—and expressing interest and sympathy for infamous mass shooters, such as Vester Lee Flanagan II. Though there is no strict evidence supporting the claim that this shooter was bullied—though would it be such a shock?—the perpetrator's compromised masculinity is clear. Masculinity is often tied to successful sexual conquest and virginity can be perceived as a mark of shame. The perpetrator's sexual frustration was apparent, and his masculinity was compromised.

Not all shootings fit so easily into this pattern, as expected—though even the events that fall outside of the pattern described here still reveal important cultural information. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida is one such shooting. A high-profile, highly deadly event (17 dead, 17 injured), police have yet to declare the perpetrator's official motive (Rozsa, Berman, Merle 2018). At present, there is no substantial evidence to prove that the perpetrator was subject to homophobic bullying, nor is there evidence of compromised masculinity in his biography. However, he did leave a digital footprint full of anti-black, Islamaphobic, white supremacist language. "I whana [sic.] shoot people with my AR-15" and "I wanna die Fighting killing s**t ton of people" were just a handful of the YouTube comments he made prior to the attack. Law enforcement and Antifa activists were also groups he singled out as wanting to kill (Hanna, Karimi, Grinberg 2018). Though this is not proof that the perpetrator's masculinity played a definitive role in the mass-murder he inflicted, it does serve as a reminder of the dangers of alt-right reactionary politics and how ideology can radicalize vulnerable people into violence. Additionally, some scholarship has been presented arguing that the alt-right as a movement serves as a "digital coalition of identity politics for straight white

American men", meaning that the ideology it presents can be restitutive for fragile masculinity (Kelly 2017).

The Marshall County High School shooting in western Kentucky provides another counterexample. The perpetrator himself claims that he was not bullied, he had good relationships with his family, and that he had carried out the shooting because he was curious about life in prison and that life—his and the lives of others—have no meaning (Sayers and Wolfson 2018).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this analysis, examples are consistently found of the boys' failure to integrate seamlessly into local school or gender cultures and provide evidence for the claim that these rampages are retaliatory in nature, specifically in regards to homophobic and otherwise gendered threats against their manhood. In these cases, Kimmel and Mahler's (2001) framework fits simply and easily. Masculinity is something that can be constituted through violence. Homophobic bullying reconstitutes one's own masculinity and compromises the masculinities of others. Thus, violence is restitutive toward one's damaged masculinity, which is arguably the case for six of the shootings analyzed here.

Kimmel and Mahler's framework does not always fit perfectly, and counterexamples were found. Two examples were given of cases in which bullying or compromised masculinity did not play an apparent factor. This is proof that the theoretical framework explored in this paper cannot be haphazardly applied to all instances of mass violence in schools—and it would be inappropriate to do so.

Regardless, the link here is clear. As was the case in the shootings analyzed from 1982-2001, many of the boys analyzed who opened fire were mercilessly and routinely subjected to gendered bullying or otherwise feel threatened in their masculinity due to factors such as the rejection of the opposite sex. The content of the teasing is typically homophobic in nature. These massacres are not random, happenstance events, but the planned and executed retaliations of boys whose masculinities have been compromised and, as a result, over-conform to a system of toxic masculinity. These retaliations are occurring within the context of American, patriarchal gender culture and they mirror the broader society within which they are situated.

Though these boys are almost entirely outcast, teased, mocked, and isolated, they do not rebel against the system. On the contrary, they are gender conformists, and over-conform to a deadly degree. These perpetrators are often viewed as fringe cases, as societal outcasts, and as boys that do not fit in. It would make sense to view them as individuals that violently rebel against the system through the killing of others, as these incidents are often framed. However, having examined these events from a critical lens of gender sociology, the actions of these boys can be viewed as over-conforming to the toxic, masculine narrative as it is set out to be claimed. Because violence is something that constitutes masculinity, and these boys feel threatened in their masculine identities due to their culturally marginalized positions because of homophobic bullying or gender failures, they use violence to reassert their identities as men. Though they are outcasts, they do not reject the broader system that surrounds them; instead, they operate within it to the deadliest extent that it allows.

Perhaps there are other concessions that need to be made given the current sociopolitical context in the United States. Kimmel and Mahler (2001) in their original analysis did not place any emphasis upon political ideology. Mass violence was conceptualized purely as a response to

emasculation. In an era were Nazis and the alt-right have been empowered and granted a spot in

the limelight, it might be time to examine how these sorts of ideologies appeal to the identity

politics of white men and enable their violence. The Parkland shooting analyzed here provides a

good example of this. Bullying, allegedly, did not play a role in the massacre. The most

concerning element of the shooting was the perpetrator's staunch white nationalism, for which he

professed allegiance across a variety of social media platforms. Additionally, though this

theoretical framework adequately explains why school shootings occur, it does not adequately

explain why these shootings are increasing in frequency. Research should be done to examine

how the rise of the alt-right in the United States might be contributing to the increase in mass

violence in schools.

Despite this, even for the staunchest deniers of the social basis of gender, the male

dominance of mass violence could not be more apparent. This paper does not set out to fully

generalize each incidence of rampage violence as the result of adolescent gender socialization or

even masculinity as a whole—it does, however, emphasize the need for gender to be taken

seriously as it relates to the subject. The link between gender and violence is undeniable, and the

pattern is startling. America's problem with school shooters lies not with the psyches of the

individuals that perpetrate them, but with the systematic and cultural factors that foster such

violent minds in the first place. Research emphasis must continue to be placed upon these factors

rather than the biographical and psychological information of the perpetrators themselves if any

headway is to be made into preventing the further, needless deaths of innocent children.

To do this, we need to understand what it is that prevents the transformation of an

isolated, emasculated white boy into a rampage killer—the boys described here were the

minority of a very large group of culturally marginalized individuals, most of whom were able to

resist the temptation to open fire. When we fully understand the disparity between those two types of boys, we will understand more wholly how to prevent further tragedy from occurring in the future. What systems or structures were in place that caught them before they hit rock bottom? If a boy cannot collectivize his anguish, what does he tap into to stave off the desire to open fire? Additionally, what steps can be made in order to prevent the normalization of violent action in boys? Even if we cannot prevent the cultural marginalization or emasculation of adolescent males, how can we fight against the enactment of narratives of toxic masculinity?

Much of Pascoe's (2007) research focuses on how schools themselves serve as one of the primary institutions of gender socialization. Not only do children pick up on gendered expectations through their interactions with each other at school, but the school itself can send messages. There can be no simple, clear-cut solution to toxic masculinity, but there are efforts that can be made. If boys enact violence partly because of their perceived inability to inhabit a "proper" masculine role, then it should be made clear by educators that no such thing exists. School can be a de-gendered institution. As Dr. Finn Mackay phrases it in his article Combatting Toxic Masculinity In Our Schools (2017), "It is not a matter of doing more in this instance, it is in fact a call to do less – less gendering." When educators refrain from needlessly gendering an activity or a lesson plan, they help avoid further strengthening the firmament of gender inequality. Militaristic toys, toy guns, and other objects that serve as glorifications of violence can be removed from schools altogether. Drops in the bucket perhaps, considering how much of gender socialization occurs outside of a school setting, but there are steps that can be taken.

The chronic underfunding of American public schools is also something to be considered. Though it should be made clear that the link between mental illness and violence is mostly exacerbated—the mentally ill are much more likely to be the victims of violence then to

perpetrate it (Canadian Mental Health Association 2018)—better school-based mental health

centers could have caught some of these boys before they fell through the cracks. According to

the National Education Association (2017), there is a dramatic shortage of mental health care

workers in schools. School counselors, social workers, and psychologists can serve as valuable

resources for students insecure in their own identities. They also serve as safety nets that can

identify potentially violent students before they act out. Additionally, professional development

can be administered to educators that emphasize cultural competence with respect to gender,

sexism, bullying, and toxic masculinity. If teachers can be made aware of how their unconscious

biases might entrench harmful gender stereotypes in their own classrooms, the forces that

underpin this issue are further combatted. Unfortunately, these initiatives require resources, and

public education spending remains "well below historic levels" (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson

2017). Unless changes are made to how resources are allocated to public schools at the state and

federal levels, issues of mental health and educator professional development are likely to be

underserved.

At the same time, efforts to combat mass violence in schools must also be inclusive and

sensitive to the issues of the mentally ill and for people of color. At the time of writing, the

March For Our Lives—a student-led march on Washington in the aftermath of the Parkland

shooting, organized in support of tighter gun-control regulations—concluded just weeks ago.

Though the movement gained significant traction, the specific demands of the students have

come under criticism. One recommendation called for the amendment of privacy laws to give

police more access to mental health records, which some mental health professionals and

activists claim would only further stigmatize the mentally ill and to empower an already too

powerful, too well-armed police force—in addition to doing nothing about stopping these mass

shootings (Jaffe 2018). Black Lives Matter activists have also noted that an increased police presence in schools—something already implemented and which has done nothing to stem the tide of mass violence—would only further entrench the school to prison pipeline that targets African American students (Williams 2018).

There are systematic and structural forces at work that forge these young boys into killers, even if they are not always visible. If we can bring those forces into the light, we might better mold our youth away from violence and allow for the creation of new type of authentic, stable, and non-violent masculinity.

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