

Mass Shootings and Mass Media: The discrepancies between workplace and school shootings.

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By

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Abstract:

Workplace shootings and school shootings have a variety of differences and similarities. However, each are unique to other mass shooting types. This study analyzes 42 workplace shootings and 50 school shootings that were highly publicized and occurred between 1965 and 2015. Through my analysis, I was able to uncover the similarities and differences between the two sub-types of mass shootings. 100 school articles and 72 workplace articles from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* were utilized and coded to uncover the differences in adjectives used in reports. Because workplace shootings receive much less media coverage and research, I sought to explain these discrepancies.

Table of Contents:

Title Page.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Data and Methods.....	12
Results.....	14
Similarities between workplace and school shootings.....	14
Differences between workplace and school shootings.....	18
Media coverage on workplace shootings.....	21
Media coverage on school shootings.....	23
Conclusion.....	25
Appendix I.....	27
Appendix II.....	32
Bibliography.....	36

Introduction:

There has been an abundance of research conducted on school shootings, and mass shootings more generally throughout the past twenty years. Workplace shootings, however, occur at relatively similar rates, yet they receive very little academic research. It is important to study the differences and similarities of these many types of shootings because they are unique in interesting ways. Workplace shootings have higher suicide rates, are older in age, use more semi-automatic weapons, and have higher victim fatality rates. Through these differences and similarities researchers can analyze and create effective policy or more broadly it is important to understand how and why something so tragic occurs.

For this study, I analyzed 42 workplace shootings and 50 school shootings. Because they have comparable grievances, I chose the two types. School shooters are often motivated by frustration with their peers or authority. Often this originates with bullying of some form or receiving a failing grade or punishment from authority. Like the school shooters, workplace shooters are frustrated with co-workers (peers) and employers (authority). The workplace shooters were often facing termination or were under intense pressure by their employers. In interviews with living shooters, they often cited being angry or distressed. Because they had similar targets of peers and authority, they are more comparable than a workplace shooter and more “random” shooter in a public place who has no connection to his or her victims.

The literature is lacking in focus on workplace shootings. The research primarily focuses on school shootings, and less so on the workplace setting. Workplace shootings are comparable in a number of ways, and it requires more in-depth analysis that has not been done previously. I found an array of similarities and differences between the two types through a content analysis of national newspapers. I sought to find the ways that workplace shootings differ from the more

heavily researched school shootings. A final goal of my research was to test my hypothesis that workplace shooters are scrutinized differently by the media more than school shooters are.

Literature Review:

There has been a variety of research conducted on mass shootings since the first widely publicized shooting that occurred in 1966 by Charles Whitman. A large portion of the literature has focused on school shootings, and there has been little published research on workplace shootings. The research on mass shootings has emphasized gun control policy and reform, the social isolation and masculinity of shooters, the general profile of shooters in several scenarios, and the media's profound effect on the portrayal of mass shootings.

Gun Control Policies:

After one of the most widely publicized mass shootings at Columbine High School, gun control debates have been at the forefront of the nation. Some researchers such as Chapman, Alpers, Agho, & Jones (2006) advocate for more strict regulations, and some even support the total abandonment of the Second Amendment. Other researchers such as Bonanno and Levensen (2014), or Fox and Delaunter (2014) argue that it would not have a profound effect on gun violence to create more or less gun regulations. Because of this divide, research on gun violence and mass shootings are important because they contribute to existing public policy debates.

Researchers argued that gun control measures were not going to change the prevalence of mass shootings (Bonanno & Levensen, 2014). "Gun control measures proposed in their aftermath were largely irrelevant and almost certainly could not have prevented the incidents or reduced their death tolls" (Bonanno & Levensen, 2014). The gun control policies that Bonanno

and Levensen (2014) examined had no effects on the prevalence of shootings. According to Fox and DeLauter (2014) without eliminating unemployment, restoring community or eliminating the 2nd Amendment, mass shootings simply cannot be eliminated (Fox and DeLauter, 2014). This research, then, attributes high rates of gun violence not to gun ownership per se, but to other social factors.

However, Australia's reform policies after a string of mass shootings, while much smaller in occurrence than those that have occurred in the United States, offers evidence that bans on assault weapons effectively eliminated all mass shootings and reduced all other related gun deaths including suicide, and homicide (Chapman, Alpers, Agho, & Jones, 2006). Other countries have had similar outcomes from gun reformation policies that resulted in a reduction in gun related deaths (Lewiecki & Miller, 2013). Legislation that limited gun ownership had effectively reduced suicide rates in countries such as Austria, Brazil, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (Lewiecki & Miller, 2013). Austria's gun reform policies resulted in a twenty year low of .016 homicides per 100,000 in 2005 (Kapusta, Etzersdorfer, Krall, & Sonneck, 2007).

Bonanno and Levensen (2014) offered similar proposals to reduce mass shootings, and like the debate among individuals within our nation, they disagree about the most effective means of diminishing gun violence and mass shootings. Proposals such as preventing access to lethal weapons by children, limitations on gun shows and restrictions on assault weapons have been cited as faulty solutions and the "irrelevant" measures would actually inhibit effective gun control measures that would reduce gun violence (Bonanno & Levensen, 2014). Others assert that despite this fact, gun control measures are still worthwhile (Fox & DeLauter, 2014). They

may not reduce mass shootings, but they will bring comfort and are an effective precaution (Fox & DeLauter, 2014).

Borum, Cornell, Modzelski and Jimerson (2010) propose alternative implementations to reduce mass shootings, particularly those in schools. Threat assessment and the development of crisis response plans are measures that have been suggested to mitigate and prevent such occurrences without furthering gun regulations (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). The assessment is a viable alternative to profiling and is effective for situations in which the student voices their threat or is otherwise showing their aggression and frustration visibly. It is ineffective in instances that the student is routinely bullied in unsupervised settings, however, as administrators cannot routinely analyze the student (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski & Jimmerson, 2010).

In this paper, I do not seek to propose a gun control policy, but rather to elucidate the existing debates surrounding mass shootings in America. Mass shootings are a controversial, highly debated, and sensitive topic. Thus, it is vital to understand the intricacies and political debates currently surrounding guns.

Profiles of Mass Shootings:

Sociologists, psychologists, and criminal justice scholars alike have been interested in the types of people who commit mass shootings. The theoretical profile of a workplace shooter is a white, middle-aged male facing termination or recently fired (Fox & Levin, 1994). Suicide terrorists, school shooters, and rampage shooters have much in common aside from the differences in their actions. Lankford (2013) found that social marginalization, work and/or school problems, precipitating events, and family problems are high risk characteristics of the three types of shooters. Workplace shooters tend to have more fundamental differences, such as

having higher suicide rates and fewer fatalities in their shootings than the three other categories of shooters (Lankford. 2013).

It has made clear that there are many violent interests of shooters. Aside from physical characteristics, there is often an intense interest in weapons, a fascination with Satanism and/or death, or psychological issues such as depression, a lack of impulse control, and sadistic tendencies (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, Phillips, 2003). In elaboration of that, research has emphasized that mass shooters, while certainly violent, do not gain their violent tendencies from videogames (Ferguson, 2006). The idea that mass shooters are violent because of their recreational activities, particularly video game playing, is faulty (Ferguson, 2006).

Race in Shootings:

Race has been described as an important characteristic in mass shootings. Those who identify as a race other than white, like the shooters at Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University, Columbine, and Fort Hood, leave innocent individuals of the same race at a disadvantage. Anyone of a race or ethnicity other than Caucasian are expected to explain and apologize for the actions of the shooter (Mingus, 2010). White individuals do not need to explain or be held accountable for the actions of a white shooter, but a black shooter or middle-eastern shooter leaves individuals of the same racial category to apologize for actions that were not their own (Mingus, 2010).

The media has routinely emphasized the racial composition of shooters that aren't white. Park, Holody and Zhang (2012) examined the importance of race as it is presented in the media. While virtually all newspaper publications of mass shootings mention or emphasize the race of ethnic shooters, they did not discuss the race of the Columbine shooters. (Park, Holody & Zhang,

2012). The coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting used the shooters race of Asian-decent to frame and “generalize criminal culpability to his ethnic group” (Park, Holody & Zhang, 2012).

Gender and Social Isolation in Shootings:

The United States has a culture of hegemonic masculinity that leads to aggrieved entitlement that leads to violence. Kalish and Kimmel (2010) explain this phenomenon as a gendered sense of entitlement in which shooters believe they are expected to exact their revenge on those who have hurt them. Suicide and mass shootings are framed by the shooters as an appropriate way to “underscore their violent enactment of masculinity” according to Kalish and Kimmel (2010). The shooters believe that they need to re-assert their masculinity to the individuals who they were threatened by through either constant bullying, or homophobic remarks (Leary, Kowalski, Smith & Phillips, 2003). In a study conducted on 15 school shootings, the reoccurring commonality included rejection in the form of ostracism, romantic rejection or simple bullying (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003).

Homophobia is a prominent factor in mass shootings as well. Boys that have been routinely teased and bullied about their masculinity without the intervention of a charismatic adult to have a positive influential impact were the common issues of shooters who opened fire on classmates in 28 random school shootings since 1982 (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). The Columbine shootings also reflected the idea that threatened masculinity could have led to the decision to commit a mass murder. “Columbine redefined such acts not merely as revenge but as a means of protest of bullying, intimidation, social isolation, and public rituals of humiliation” (Larkin, 2009).

A study that examined school shootings from 1996-2000 reinforces Larkin’s (2009) theory on Columbine. The young men who committed shooting rampages within their schools

were often teased or had their sexuality questioned by other students who were of a “higher status” than themselves (Klein, 2006). Often they would be teased and tormented about being “gay” and in retaliation to these accusations, the young male school shooters would then commit the shooting as a means to reassert their masculinity through violent measures. This type of phenomena is defined as “normalized masculinity” (Klein, 2006).

The profile of a shooter remains an important aspect of study, as it gives insight as to the characteristics of individuals who commit violent mass murders. A deeper understanding can be obtained through further examination. How do national newspapers describe the shooters? How does this compare to the actual profile of shooters? Are differently raced, gendered, classed shooters described differently? Are terms that refer to social isolation or rejection emphasized by major newspapers, and are they valid or over exaggerated? These are all questions that I will answer in this study.

Media Portrayal of Mass Shootings:

Lindgren (2011) investigated Youtube comments on mass school shooting videos such as Cho Seung-Hui’s manifesto for reactions. Some of the comments on the Youtube videos remarked upon the effects or lack of bullying on the shooters, some contained emotional language that attempted to understand the situation, and involve gun control debates. Throughout the gun control debates on the online forum, race was often discussed. Despite some of the derogatory comments, the functioning behind the online forums appeared to be a useful tool for people to discuss and understand an event as tragic as a school shooting. The forums are not the same as reports or narratives, but are an emotional and social landscape for commenters to further develop and understand the events (Lindgren, 2011).

The way big news sources such as the *New York Times* frames mass shootings, such as Columbine have been examined as well (Chyi & McCombs, 2004) (Muschert, 2007). Chyi and McCombs (2004) argue that the *New York Times* changed their frame throughout the development of Columbine as more information was provided. Jackson (2005) defines frame analysis as a “way of conceiving people’s shared understandings as critical, dynamic links between social causes and effects in a class of path-dependent models.” Frames can be explicit in reflecting the social world or on the other end, abstract (Jackson, 2005). In this case, it is how mass media or newspapers “frames” mass shootings. The framing of a mass shooting as widely publicized as Columbine underwent multiple changes in several different news sources, and developed from being a simple guide to what occurred, to a much more in depth analysis (McCombs, 2004).

Muschert (2007)—using multiple news sources—records similar findings, “Analysis indicates that the initial focus of the coverage was what happened at Columbine, but over time the news increasingly highlighted Columbine's national salience” (Muschert, 2007). This indicates that many news sources underwent a frame changing process post-Columbine, not only the *New York Times* (Muschert, 2007).

The issue of mental illness is exacerbated by mass media in mass shootings by individuals who appear to have a serious mental illness because they receive extensive news coverage. The publicity organizes itself around the issue of mental illness and has serious ramifications and can elicit negative attitudes—or create a stigma- about people who suffer from mental illness (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski & Barry, 2014). Mass media has had ease emphasizing the mentally ill, “dangerous people” rather than “dangerous weapons” as causes of gun violence (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski & Barry, 2014). In reality, the connection between

gun violence and mental illness is more complicated and less causal than the media portrays it to be (Metzl & MacLeish, 2015). Metzl and MacLeish explain, “Beneath seemingly straightforward questions of whether particular assailants meet criteria for particular mental illnesses lay ever-changing categories of race, gender, violence, and, indeed, of diagnosis itself” (Metzl & MacLeish, 2015). In sum, what is considered sane or mentally unfit is driven by society, which is continuously shifting. The idea that mental illness is black-and-white is not as simple as it appears.

The media has become obsessed with mass shootings, and the high publicity of the acts has result in an exaggerated moral panic among parents, students and the general public about school safety (Burns & Crawford, 1999). However, the evidence concludes that schools are quite safe, even more so then than they were several years prior (Burns & Crawford, 1999). The media has an effect on how individuals perceive the safety of their schools and workplaces, and makes researching the phenomenon and educating the public about the realities vitally important.

Data and Methods:

For this study, I examined highly publicized mass shootings from 1966 to July 2015 from a data set provided by *Mother Jones*. There were 42 highly publicized U.S. workplace shootings, and 50 highly publicized U.S. school shootings that I separated from the dataset. A mass shooting is defined as an incident in which a firearm is used in a public setting and injures three or more people by gunfire for the purposes of this study. What does not constitute a mass shooting under this definition would be gang related activity or domestic incidents (i.e. killing or injuring entire family, but no one else). Appendix I contains all the school shootings used in the

dataset including the location and date. Appendix II contains all the workplace shootings used in the dataset as well.

The workplace shootings involved either current or former employees or employers at the workplace setting. School shootings included both elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges where the alleged shooters were students. Narrowing the definition of what constitutes each type of shooting allows them to be more comparable, as shooters often have a grievance involving subordination, their peers or authority figures.

For the data on regional voting patterns, I used *Dave Leip's Election Atlas*. It breaks down voting patterns by a number of variables: election year, states, and individual counties. I utilized both the county and state data to determine if the district had voted Republican or Democratic in the last presidential election where the shooting had occurred.

I also conducted a content analysis of news reports of each event from major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. Occasionally, a local newspaper would provide background information that the large newspapers did not include, but were important. Information such as the weapons used or where the assailant was from, provided important information. I obtained these sources through Brockport's library newspaper database.

I then used data found within the articles to analyze several variables in my data. The variables included types of weapons used, deaths, injuries, suicide rates, race, history of mental illness, shootings by state, and general election data. I would numerically compound the data for each variable if possible, and then compared how the workplace shootings fared to school shootings in the dataset. The content analysis portion included analyzing the terms used to

describe shooters and noted the difference between school shooting descriptions and the workplace shooting descriptions for discrepancies.

School shootings have been heavily researched, and my goal is not to dig deeper into that arena. However, workplace shootings lack the same depth of research that school shootings have been given. This research will shed light on the observed similarities and differences of the two types, and analyzes the media coverage of the two sub-types of shootings for comparative purposes.

Results:

Similarities between Workplace and School Shootings:

School shootings and workplace shootings share a number of similarities despite the way they are reported on differently by large newspapers. These include the grievances of the shooters, weapons used, victim death rates, recent voting patterns, and the ethnicities of the shooters.

Grievances:

Both workplace and school mass shootings have commonalities. The two types of shootings are motivated by some sort of grievance. The workplace shooters are often angry because they are facing termination, or have high stress levels at their workplace. For school shooters, the shootings seem motivated by slipping grades or stress elicited by their peers and authority. In several articles for both types of shootings, they would mention how the shooters were in distress because of their environment at work or school. Workplace shooters had often been fired or were anticipating to be terminated, and there were also cases of school shooters who were motivated by a teacher or professor who gave them a failing grade, or were removed from the school temporarily.

Workplace and school shooters have the commonality that they attacked the sources of their frustration, whether it were because of stress from authority or their peers, or bullying. It was a similar source of frustration that lead each shooter to commit the mass shootings.

Weapons:

There were 50 school shootings and 42 workplace shootings in the dataset. Of each type, there was similar use of firearms. The rates of total firearms used was almost the same for both types of shooting, with an average of 1.9 used per workplace shooting and 2 weapons used per school shooting (see table 1 below). Automatic weapons were unlikely to be used by both types of shooters as well, and shotguns, rifles and handguns were all used at similar rates. Handguns however, appeared to be the primary weapon of choice for the shooters in the dataset. This indicates that workplace shooters and school shooters in the dataset used a similar type and number of weapons for the most part.

Type:	Shotgun	Rifles	Handguns	Total Automatic	Total Semi-Automatic	Total Firearms:
School Sum:	12	22	64	0	37	98
School Average:	.244	.448	1.306	0	.75	2.0
Workplace Sum:	10	15	57	2	56	82

Workplace	.238	.357	1.357	.0476	1.33	1.9
Average:						

Table 1.

Deaths:

The total number of combined victims both injured and killed, was relatively similar for both types of shootings. Workplace shooters averaged at 9.285 victims per event, and school shooters averaged at about 9.58. The workplace and school shooters were killed by police at similar rates as well. Both types has four shooter fatalities by police, each.

States:

California overwhelmingly held the most mass shootings for both types than any other state. There were eight school shootings and six workplace shootings that occurred in this state. Table 2 below lists all the states and the number of shootings in the dataset that occurred in each state, by type. The next highest number of shootings in a state behind California was three, and those occurred in Texas, Georgia, Washington, Michigan, Nevada, and Ohio. The only states to share the same number of shootings for both types were: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, and Oklahoma.

State	Work	School	State	Work	School	State	Work	School
AL	1	1	IA	0	1	NC	0	1
AK	0	1	KS	0	1	OH	0	3
AZ	1	1	KY	1	1	OK	1	1

AR	0	2	LA	1	0	OR	0	2
CA	8	6	MA	1	1	PA	0	2
CO	1	1	MI	3	1	SC	2	1
CT	2	1	MN	1	1	TN	0	1
DC	1	0	MS	1	1	TX	3	2
FL	2	2	MT	0	1	UT	0	1
GA	3	1	NV	0	3	VA	0	2
ID	1	0	NJ	2	0	WA	1	3
IL	2	2	NY	1	2	WI	1	0

Table 2.

Race:

Whites committed mass shootings at similar rates in the dataset for both school and workplace shootings. Whites encompassed about 54% of the workplace shootings (23 out of 42), and 56% of the school shootings (28 out of 50). However, I was unable to identify the ethnicity or race of seven school shooters and eight workplace shooters, so the numbers may be distorted in this category.

Voting Trends:

I examined the voting trends of the local county and state population from the previous election year prior to each shooting. For school shootings, half in which they occurred had voted Republican, and the other half voted Democratic at the state level. This is not that far off from the 47% Republican and 53% Democratic votes at the state level for workplace shootings. The state level remained relatively similar, but the local level had some notable differences that will be discussed later.

Differences between Workplace and School Shootings:

While the workplace and school shootings examined are similar in a number of ways, there are some notable differences that emphasize the importance of investigating further into workplace shootings, because they are unique in a number of ways. The ages, weapons used, suicide rates, states, race and voting trends all have significant differences that are interesting to further analyze.

Ages:

The average age of school shooters in the dataset were different than workplace shooters. The average age of the school shooters were 21 years old. This is somewhat to be expected as the individuals who attend elementary, secondary or post-secondary school are often younger. The average age of a workplace shooter is at mid-life, 39 years old, but can occur in a wide range of ages. There are millions of employees all throughout the United States and they are a wide variety of ages, starting at 16 and into the ending stages of life. Though, mid-life appears to be the average age in which workplace shootings most often occur in the dataset.

Weapons:

Workplace shooters were more likely to use semi-automatic firearms than school shooters. Workplace shooters used about 55 semi-automatic weapons, while school shooters used only 37. Workplace shooters in the dataset used 18 more semi-automatic weapons than school shooters. The average for workplace shooters was 1.33 semi-automatic guns per event versus the school shooters who averaged at less than one per shooting, about .75.

Illegal possession of a firearm is of course more likely with the younger population of school shooters. Many were younger than 18 when they committed the shooting. Most states prohibit anyone under the age of 18 to own a firearm, although Vermont, New York, Alaska and Minnesota all have exceptions for 16 year olds. Some states raise the bar higher than 18, making anyone under the age of 21 incapable of owning a firearm. This discrepancy in number of semi-automatic weapons used may be because it is harder for people under 18 to obtain a firearm, and for older workplace shooters, the weapons used may be legal.

Deaths:

While the total average number of victims per shooting is similar for both school and workplace shootings, there is a clear difference in the number of victim fatalities, total fatalities, and victim injuries. Workplace shooters averaged 4.97 victim deaths per shooting, and 5.52 total deaths including the assailant. A whopping 232 total deaths over the course of 42 shootings, is much higher than the 196 total deaths over the course of 50 school shootings. This indicates that the workplace shootings in this dataset were more deadly.

While the workplace shootings are more deadly, the school shootings injured more individuals on average. The 50 school shootings injured about 292 individuals, and the 42

workplace shootings injured about 181 individuals. An average of 5.9 individuals were injured per school shooting versus an average of 4.3 injured during each workplace shooting.

There are differences between school and workplace shooter deaths as well. While the death by police officer rates were similar, the suicide rates were not. Only ten (20%) school shooters committed suicide, but twenty two (52%) workplace shooters committed suicide. Over half of the total shooters ended their lives at the event.

This information goes against prior research that indicates school shootings are more deadly and workplace shootings are not. A possible explanation for this discrepancy includes that the events in this dataset came from elite newspapers. A possible explanation that could be further researched is that only the deadliest workplace shootings are reported on, while school shootings are reported on more proactively because they affect us more emotionally.

States:

While the shootings in the dataset occurred many different states, workplace shootings have occurred in only 23 states, and school shootings covered about 30 different states. Some states were more likely than others to have a mass shooting of a particular type than others, for this dataset. California was a hub for both types of shootings, but Georgia and Michigan were big states that had more workplace shootings, and Nevada, Ohio, and Washington had many school shootings. Table 2 on page 18 illustrates these differences.

Race:

About 12% of the 50 school shooters were Asian, and only 2% of the 42 workplace shooters were Asian. Native Americans were not shooters in any workplace shootings in the

dataset, but were in two of the school shootings (about 4%). African Americans accounted for 23% of workplace shootings and 14% of school shootings.

Again, because I was unable to identify the race of seven school shooters, and eight workplace shooters, this information may be skewed.

Voting Trends:

While the states were very similar in their voting trends for both types of shootings, they varied at the local level. In about 62% of the shootings local districts had voted Democrat in the prior election, and only 38% Republican. However, the workplace shooters were at a more equal level, with 53% Democrat and 47% Republican. On a larger scale, the shootings occurred in largely democratic areas.

Mental Illness:

Mental illness is not confined to one type of shooting. While about half of both workplace and school shooters suffered from mental illness, there were 9% more school shooters with a known mental illness than workplace shooters. 47% of workplace shooters had a known mental illness, but 56% of school shooters in the dataset had suffered from a known mental illness.

Media Coverage of School Shootings:

For an abundance of reasons, school shootings receive plenty of media attention. A plausible reason is because they strike at our emotions. It is devastating to many to hear that young lives have just been ruined. For both the victims and even the shooter, we feel heartbroken.

With the dataset of 51 school shootings, I analyzed the reports of prestigious newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, or *Los Angeles Times* for the adjectives used to describe shooters.

Some articles contained what can be considered positive terms that highlight the humanity of the shooter. Others contained negative or neutral terms that put a negative or neutral spotlight on the shooter. Some of the articles also included broad language that is used to describe the mental health of the shooter. There were approximately 54 negative terms identified, 22 positive terms identified (including reference to the shooters being honor roll students in four separate event articles), 11 remarks on their age, and 6 neutral adjectives used in the articles.

Some of the positive terms included highlights of the shooters lives by describing them as honor students, brilliant, calm, intelligent, mild mannered, funny, church-going, etcetera. Positive language was used in 10 articles. While I do not think it is smart to dehumanize the shooters and talk about them entirely negatively, this kind of language may normalize the behaviors and actions of the individuals who commit these heinous acts. It could be argued that future shooters may honor and aspire to be like the shooters that are talked about in such a way.

In the same breath, negative terms like loner, abrasive, troubled, disturbed, outcast, satanistic, over-reactive, may not have any benefit either. The same is true when demonizing them by using their mental health as an indicator of their actions. Newspapers have called them insane or mentally unfit. For one, it demonizes and hurts people who suffer from mental illness, and it also strays away from the problem of trying to figure out how to make positive change or understand why these events occur. Mental health was mentioned about fifteen times in the school shooting articles, it was under-representative of the actual percentage of school shooters with a known mental illness as indicated earlier.

The articles also mentioned the school shooters age by calling them “boys”, “young” or “teenaged”. These terms make the shooters sound like victims, almost harmless. Possibly because school shooters tend to be young men in the dataset, it is mentioned by the newspaper to emphasize that these young people just demolished their whole lives in a single event.

There were approximately 97 newspaper articles on the school shootings I researched that were found through the Brockport library newspaper database. This is an average of 2 articles per school shooting. The articles on school shooters contained about two articles per shooting, but some shootings that captured nation-wide attention, like Columbine or Virginia Tech, received more articles.

Media Coverage of Workplace Shootings:

The media coverage of workplace shootings were less abundant than school shootings. While it is frightening to think about such an event occurring in our everyday workplaces, it may not spark the same emotional reaction from the audience as a school shooting involving children. This is a possible explanation for why school shootings receive more attention and research.

Like the school shootings, there were a variety of negative and neutral terms used to describe shooters. Interestingly enough, there were less positive terms used in the articles used to describe the workplace shooters than there were for school shooters, and more emphasis on negative terms. There were 50 negative terms used to describe workplace shooters. 10 positive terms, 8 neutral and no reference to their age. Only four articles contained positive language like mellow, friendly, model employee, likeable or cheerful.

The overwhelming majority of articles covering workplace shootings included negative and violent language like killer, delusional, tempered, detached, coldblooded, bitter, estranged,

radicalized, or dangerous. Articles for workplace shootings used similar language as the school shooting articles did to describe the mental illness of some shooters. They used terms like “mentally ill”, “sick”, and “paranoid”. Mental health was used as a description about 5 times for workplace shooters. Considering that 20 workplace shooters in the dataset had a history of mental illness, the description was under-representative of the population.

There was zero reference to any of the workplace shooters ages in any of the articles used for the dataset. Unlike the eleven times that school shooters ages were referenced, it was non-existent for articles on workplace shooters. A possible explanation could be that the workplace shooters can be a wide variety of ages while the school shooters tend to be on the younger end. However, we do know that workplace shooters more often commit the shootings during mid-life, than other ages. The newspapers may be grappling with the young ages of school shooters more often than that of workplace shooters. Also, descriptions of school shooters may sell newspapers better.

Upon an initial search of school shootings through Brockport’s newspaper database, it was difficult to find articles on early workplace shootings. Often no more than one article could be found for the earliest shootings in the 60’s and 70’s. There were approximately 71 workplace shooting articles that were examined, an average of 1.69 articles per shooting. Most shootings had just one or two articles, however a postal worker shooting that had sparked media attention had a total of six articles and the most publicized school shooting had about eight articles. As far as research that specifically investigates workplace shootings as the main focus, there were only two that I could find through Google Scholar and the library database.

Conclusion:

There are a variety of differences between workplace shootings and school shootings. The way large newspapers overuse positive terms to identify shooters, overuse negative terms to describe workplace shooters, and reference the age of school shooters more often than they do for workplace shooters. The newspapers use terms to describe the mental state of shooters less often than the number shooters who actually suffered from a known illness, which varies from previous research that says media over-emphasizes mental health.

Overall, there are many similarities and differences between the two types of shootings, whether it be age, weapons, states, suicides, and more. The newspapers have many discrepancies between how they report on each type of shooting. The two types of mass shootings, while sharing the common ground of shooters asserting a grievance, are different entities. Newspapers and other media should reflect these differences in their reports on the issues, as they may have importance in why and how individuals are carrying out their actions. The elite newspapers underrepresent mental health, and emphasized positive terms for school shooters. Newspapers used terms that would sell, and they made the school shooters appear angelic, more so than the workplace shooters. Instead of focusing on important aspects of what may have caused the shooting, they were more inclined to discuss the personal attributes of the shooters in ways that shape how the public perceives shootings.

Future research should investigate whether there is a difference between how prestigious newspaper's such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* frame and describe these events when compared to how news stations and online sources describe them. There may be some more discrepancies to be found there. Furthermore,

shrinking the definition of a school shooting to just secondary schools or just colleges may have an impact on data and may reveal more interesting information.

Appendix I: School Shootings

School:	Location	Date
University of Texas at Austin	Austin, Texas	8/1/1966
Clara Barton Elementary School	Chicago, Illinois	1/17/1974
Olean High School	Olean, New York	12/30/1974
Los Angeles Computer Learning Center	Los Angeles, California	2/19/1976
Valley High School	Las Vegas, Nevada	3/19/1982
Goddard Junior High School	Goddard, Kansas	1/21/1985
New York Technical College	Brooklyn, New York	8/12/1986
Fergus County High School	Lewistown, Montana	12/4/1986
Pinellas Park High School	Pinellas Park, Florida	2/11/1988
Oakland Elementary School	Greenwood, South Carolina	9/26/1988

University of Iowa	Iowa City, Iowa	11/1/1991
Lindhurst High School	Olivehurst, California	5/1/1992
Palo Duro High School	Amarillo, Texas	9/11/1992
Simon's Rock College of Bard	Great Barrington, Massachusetts	12/14/1992
Weber State University	Ogden, Utah	7/8/1993
Richland High School	Lynnville, Tennessee	11/15/1995
Frontier Junior High School	Moses Lake, Washington	2/2/1996
San Diego State University	San Diego, California	8/15/1996
Bethel Regional High School	Bethel, Alaska	2/19/1997
Pearl High School	Pearl, Mississippi	10/1/1997
Heath High School	West Paducah, Kentucky	12/1/1997
Westside Middle School	Jonesboro, Arkansas	3/24/1998

Parker Middle School Dance	Edinboro, Pennsylvania	4/24/1998
Thurston High School	Springfield, Oregon	5/21/1998
Columbine High School	Littleton, Colorado	4/20/1999
Heritage High School	Conyers, Georgia	5/20/1999
Fort Gibson Middle School	Fort Gibson, Oklahoma	12/6/1999
Santana High School	Santee, San Diego, California	3/5/2001
Appalachian School of Law	Grundy, Virginia	1/16/2002
University of Arizona College of Nursing	Tucson, Arizona	10/28/2002
Case Western Reserve University	Cleveland, Ohio	5/9/2003
Red Lake High School	Red Lake, Minnesota	3/21/2005
Orange High School	Hillsborough, North Carolina	8/30/2006

Duquesne University	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	9/17/2006
Springwater Trail High School	Gresham, Oregon	4/10/2007
Virginia Tech Campus	Blacksburg, Virginia	4/16/2007
SuccessTech Academy	Cleveland, Ohio	10/11/2007
South Middle School Football Game	Saginaw, Michigan	10/25/2007
Mojave High School Bus	Las Vegas, Nevada	12/11/2007
Northern Illinois University	DeKalb, Illinois	2/14/2008
University of Central Arkansas	Conway, Arkansas	10/26/2008
Southern Union State Community College	Opelika, Alabama	4/6/2011
Chardon High School	Chardon, Ohio	2/27/2012
Oikos University	Oakland, California	4/2/2012
Sandy Hook Elementary School	Newtown, Connecticut	12/14/2012

Santa Monica College	Santa Monica, California	6/7/2013
Sparks Middle School	Sparks, Nevada	10/21/2013
Seattle Pacific University	Seattle, Washington	6/5/2014
Marysville-Pilchuck High School	Marysville, Washington	10/24/2014
Florida State University	Tallahassee, Florida	11/19/2014

APPENDIX II: Workplace Shootings

Workplace:	Location	Date
Cal State Fullerton	Fullerton, California	7/12/1976
Johnston Post Office	Johnston, South Carolina	8/19/1983
Atlanta Post Office	Atlanta, Georgia	3/6/1985
Post office in Edmond, Oklahoma	Edmond, Oklahoma	8/20/1986
Electromagnetic Systems Laboratory (ESL)	Sunnyvale, California	2/16/1988
New Orleans Downtown Post Office	New Orleans, Louisiana	12/14/1988
Orange Glenn Post Office	Escondido, California	8/10/1989
Standard Gravure Corporation	Louisville, Kentucky	9/14/1989
Ridgewood Post Office	Ridgewood, New Jersey	10/10/1991
Royal Oak Post Office	Royal Oak, Michigan	11/14/1991

Schuyler County Office Building	Watkins Glen, New York	10/15/1992
Dearborn Post Office	Dearborn, Michigan	5/6/1993
Dana Point Post Office	Dana Point, California	5/6/1993
Offices of Pettit & Martin in San Francisco	San Francisco, California	7/1/1993
Chuck E. Cheese in Aurora	Aurora, Colorado	12/14/1993
Chelsea High School	Chelsea, Michigan	12/16/1993
Fairchild Air Force Base Hospital	Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington	6/20/1994
Montclair Post Office	Montclair, New Jersey	3/21/1995
Walter Rossler Company	Corpus Christi, Texas	4/3/1995
Fort Lauderdale City Parks Office	Fort Lauderdale, Florida	2/9/1996
R.E. Phelon Company	Aiken, South Carolina	9/15/1997

Caltrans Maintenance Yard	Orange, California	12/18/1997
Milwaukee Post Office	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	12/19/1997
Connecticut State Lottery Headquarters	Newington, Connecticut	3/6/1998
Offices of All-Tech Investment Group and Momentum Securities	Atlanta, Georgia	7/29/1999
Xerox Office Building	Honolulu, Hawaii	11/2/1999
Radisson Bay Harbor Inn	Tampa, Florida	12/30/1999
Edgewater Technology	Wakefield, Boston, Massachusetts	12/26/2000
Navistar International	Melrose Park, Illinois	2/5/2001
Lockheed Martin	Meridian, Mississippi	7/8/2003
Windy City Core Supply Warehouse	Chicago, Illinois	8/27/2003
Goleta Post Office	Goleta, California	1/30/2006

Atlantis Plastics	Henderson, Kentucky	6/25/2008
Fort Hood Army Base	Fort Hood, Texas	11/5/2009
University of Alabama in Huntsville	Huntsville, Alabama	2/12/2010
Hartford Beer Distributors	Manchester, Connecticut	8/3/2010
Accent Signage Systems in Minneapolis	Minneapolis, Minnesota	9/27/2012
Phoenix Law Firm	Phoenix, Arizona	1/30/2013
Los Angeles Police Department	Irvine, California	2/3/2013
Washington Navy Yard	Washington D.C.	9/16/2013
Fort Hood	Killeen, Texas	4/2/2014
Kennesaw FedEx	Kennesaw, Georgia	4/29/2014

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