CULTURE AND MASCULINITY IN AMERICAN SCHOOL SHOOTINGS
REVIEWING EVIDENCE FROM MULTI-VICTIM SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

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American school shootings have received a lot of media, public and academic attention within the last two decades. Still, reasons behind the shocking events lie undiscovered. Although individual factors have been widely examined, researchers are yet to find commonalities. This thesis reviewed evidence of macro-sociological explanations for American school shootings and attempted to identify the roles of culture, cultural marginalisation and masculinity in American multi-victim school shootings using seven case studies from 1999-2018. Results identified cultural marginalisation as a key factor in all of the cases, whereas hegemonic and violent masculinities received some support. In addition, interconnectedness and relationships between anomie, culture, cultural marginalisation, masculinity and school shootings were discussed in more detail. Finally, future suggestions were made, and conclusions were drawn.

Keywords: Anomie, Case studies, Culture, Cultural marginalisation, Masculinity, School shootings, United States.
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INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, gun violence in schools has increased (Bonanno & Levenson, 2014) with American news channel CNN estimating 1.25 shootings a week in the first four months of 2018 alone (Ahmed & Walker, 2018). Although school shootings are rare in nature, cases where there have been multiple victims have received a large amount of media attention (Wike & Fraser, 2009) both nationally and internationally. Since 20th April 1999, when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 15 people in what was later called Columbine massacre, both printed and televised media have speculated stories how Columbine was an example of youth alienation gone wrong (Frymer, 2009). In addition to the media boost, many school shooters have shared their stories, opinions and manifestos with the public in their journals, online or through media (e.g. Langman, 2014; 2016; 2018). These stories have not only created fear in the public and the policy makers (e.g. Verlinden, Hersen, Thomas, 2000), but also given an opportunity for some people to identify themselves with the school shooters through experiences of bullying (Raitanen, et al. 2017).

Although not everyone who has been a victim of bullying commits an act of mass violence, Raitanen, et al. (2017) suggested that recreating and spreading stories of bullied school shooters online might reinforce the perceived link between school shootings and bullying. This idea is supported by Katz’s (2016) argument about culture in crime and culture about crime. He argued that the criminal culture and the scripts that criminals follow are highly influenced by stories from other offenders, entertainment and media. Similarly, the stories distributed by media and entertainment are influenced by criminals acting in those stories. Therefore, creating stories about alienated youth may backfire with more alienated, culturally marginalised youth following the widely publicised scripts of school shootings. To fully understand the extent of media and culture influence on school shooters, both culture and media’s role in school shootings need to be investigated.

BACKGROUND

Previous research on school shootings has mainly focused on their perpetrators, narrowing down the individual psychological and social factors leading to the acts. Factors such as depression, bad social conditions at home, romantic rejection, and being a victim of school bullying as well as the increased amount of violence in the media, Internet, video games and films have each gotten their fair share of blame for the school shootings (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Verlinden, Hersen, Thomas, 2000). Some school shooters have even been diagnosed with mental health problems post mortem by journalists trying to explain their behaviour (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). These attempts to create generic profiles of school shooters have, however, been unsuccessful up to date (e.g. Bonanno & Levenson, 2014), creating a large number of false positives to the pool of potential school shooters.

After a thorough analysis of American school shootings between 1982-2001, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) concluded that the single individual factor that connected all the school shootings was the gender of the shooter, male. Although female school shooters have since then appeared (Newman & Fox, 2009, Levin & Madfis, 2018), young men and boys continue to dominate the statistics of school
shooters. Noticeably, these young men also tend to be White. Since White boys started appearing more often as the school shooters during the 1980-1990 in the United States, the blame has shifted towards more individual problems and the public has become concerned for the children’s safety (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). As Volpp (2000) described in her article the phenomenon: if a white boy commits a crime, he must be ill. But if a black boy would commit the same act, the question would be,” What is wrong with them?” However, the increasing number of White boys shooting at schools has begun to shift the blame from individuals to thinking "What is wrong with us?” (Volpp, 2000).

Almost as if as a response, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) argued that researchers should focus their attention on the content and not the form of the school shootings. Some researchers have taken up on this quest, looking at the events in relation to local, dominating culture. For instance, Kalish and Kimmel (2010) argued that culture of hegemonic masculinity pushes young men to achieve manly identities by committing mass murder, and with it, suicide. Similarly to anomie theories, the authors believed that these young men had decided to commit suicide as they could not see themselves obtaining a masculine identity in a conventional way and committing a school shooting would mask the otherwise seen as cowardly suicide, giving the perpetrator sense of power, fame and masculinity before he ends his life. Kalish and Kimmel (2010) described these school shooters in the following way:

“They are a group of boys, deeply aggrieved by a system that they may feel is cruel or demeaning. Feeling aggrieved, wronged by the world – these are typical adolescent feelings, common to many boys and girls. What transforms the aggrieved into mass murders is also a sense of entitlement, a sense of using violence against others, making others hurt as you, yourself, might hurt. Aggrieved entitlement inspires revenge against those who have wronged you; it is the compensation for humiliation. Humiliation is emasculation: humiliate someone and you take away his manhood. For many men, humiliation must be avenged, or you cease to be a man. Aggrieved entitlement is a gendered emotion, a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and the moral obligation and entitlement to get it back. And its gender is masculine.” (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010, page 454)

Although not all school shooters commit suicide, Kalish and Kimmel reached very similar conclusions with many others: masculinity plays a key role in these events. Similarly, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) noted that whereas nearly all shooters they examined had experienced constant bullying, it was not the bullying that was the issue behind school shootings. They insisted instead that poor performance in enacting the code of masculinity drove these boys into humiliation and cultural marginalisation that forced them to act in a violent way to gain back their lost masculinities. According to Kimmel and Mahler (2003), these actions were reactions to homophobia; heterosexual boys fearing that they will be perceived as gays unless they do something extremely masculine to restore their reputation.

Tonso (2009) and Frymer (2009) also discussed the possibility of culture and masculinity as major factors in school shootings. Using perspectives from cultural anthropology and critical theory, Tonso (2009) argued that American culture is based on ideas of men’s supremacy, and hierarchy that places masculine, violent men on the top. Using two examples of school shootings, she pointed out that boys
and young men are still creating their sociocultural identities, and humiliation or even a sense of it may trigger them to act in a certain way. She further theorised that within each culture there are cultural tropes – portrays of how to act in different ways, either interpreted or given meaning that rarely match people’s actual actions in life, and for these young men and boys their cultural tropes are reflections of violent masculinities. Frymer (2009) supported the notion of violent masculinities by stating that these masculinities are deeply rooted within the culture’s sense of being and acting and reinforced daily by institutions such as school.

However, if masculinity would be the only key factor in school shootings, that would make every male a potential shooter. Masculinity within the literature has been divided to different types of masculinities. Masculinities such as hegemonic masculinity and violent masculinities are based on behaviour patterns that enforce men’s dominance over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Tonso, 2009). Although rarely acted, hegemonic masculinity is reflective of the society’s ideas and perceptions of the perfect man, whether that man exists or not (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Donaldson (1993) noted that hegemonic masculinity is deeply embedded in many institutions, and even if men do not practice it, most of them support it, because they benefit from it. Although argued to have excluded working class and black men, hegemonic masculinity may not portray the usual forms of masculinity in a society at all but create only an “culturally idealised form of masculinity” (Donaldson, 1993, page 646).

Thus, hegemonic masculinity itself is as if a piece of play-dough that can be formed into different forms using the ideals of the society. This, however, also means that it is vulnerable to undesired actions, such as violence. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) noted that violence has been an acceptable and almost as if expected way for boys to solve problems for over a century in the United States. Furthermore, both Tonso (2009) and Frymer (2009) noted that violence is present in the American culture and enforced as an acceptable behaviour daily through institutions and media.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Criminological theories generally tend to focus on the general offender type that differs from school shooters in many ways. However, as noted before, the notions of culture and restoring masculinity, can be applied to anomie theories. For instance, Merton (1938) argued that some individuals who cannot achieve their goals in legitimate ways are willing to go through illegitimate ways to achieve them. Though in his ideas this referred to working class men trying to achieve wealth by stealing, the same principle has been later applied also to other types of offenders, such as rampage shooters in search of fame (Lankford, 2016). Merton (1938) suggested that offending is caused by unequal opportunities to reach culturally set values that everyone in the society is aiming to reach. Thus, those who were culturally marginalised from achieving those values were more likely to also be criminals.

AIM

The aforementioned notions of culture, cultural values and violent masculinities as key factors in school shootings create a new gap in the literature that has not yet been thoroughly investigated, apart from Tonso’s (2009) two exemplary cases of cultural violent masculinities. This also raises questions such as whether culture
could mitigate the role of individual factors in school shootings, and whether all individual factors could be gathered under a wider concept, culture. Using seven selected cases of multi-victim school shootings that occurred in the United States between 1999 - 2018, this thesis aimed to investigate the role of culture and violent masculinities in American multi-victim school shootings and examine whether Merton’s (1938) theory could be applied to these cases. The research questions were as follows:

1. What role do culture, cultural marginalisation and violent masculinities play in American school shootings?
2. Does cultural marginalisation create loss of opportunities to achieve the cultural goals?

METHODOLOGY

In this section the data collection, selection of cases and analysis are explained in detail. For the purpose of this study seven cases were selected from American multi-victim school shootings committed between 1999-2018. Using these cases as an example, this study aimed to investigate the role of culture, cultural marginalisation and violent masculinities in American school shootings. As multi-victim school shootings are rare events that do not always share many similarities with one another, using qualitative methods were deemed a better fit for this study for their stronger focus on individual phenomena. Furthermore, using case studies as a basis allows more in-depth view of the examined phenomenon and facilitates explaining complex real-life situations (Denscombe, 2010).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

As school shooters are often not accessible due to incarceration or suicide, many studies have used secondary data collected from sources such as manifestos and interviews with the media and the police. This thesis used secondary and tertiary data collected from previous journal articles, news articles and documents written by the school shooters themselves that were accessible online (provided by Langman, 2014; 2016; 2018). After initial selection of cases, web search engines Google, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect were used to find journal and news articles with the school and shooter names as search words.

CASE SELECTION

Although majority of firearm-related homicide cases within schools have only had one victim (Madfis, 2016), multi-victim rampage shootings create more publicity and interest around from both the public and the researchers. In order to get clearer understanding of school shootings, the focus of the study was narrowed down to multi-victim or rampage shootings. In rampage school shootings, shooters need to be current or former student of the institution, the event needs to happen on school or school-related grounds, and there needs to be multiple victims to the event (Newman & Fox, 2009). Using these criteria allows exclusion of cases that are gang, drug, love or revenge related (Newman & Fox, 2009). In total, six cases were selected using Langman’s (2016) list of multi-victim school shootings in the United States, and one case was selected from 2018, as it fit the criteria and was contemporary. Thus, using convenience sampling, seven (7) cases of multi-victim school shootings were selected based on their high publicity, number of victims (three or more), and data availability. The generic offender and case descriptions of the selected cases can be found from Table 1 below.
Table 1. Displaying generic offender and case descriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Age)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Victims</th>
<th>Suicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eric Harris (18) &amp; Dylan Klebold (17)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Columbine High School; Littleton, CO</td>
<td>13 dead, 24 injured</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Weise (16)</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Red Lake High School; Red Lake Indian Reservation, MN</td>
<td>10 dead, 7 injured</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seung-Hui Cho (23)</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Virginia Tech University; Blacksburg, VA</td>
<td>33 dead, 17 injured</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Kazmierczak (27)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Northern Illinois university, DeKalb, IL</td>
<td>6 dead, 18 injured</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Lanza (20)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, CT</td>
<td>27 dead, 2 injured</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Harper Mercer (26)</td>
<td>Mixed race</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Umpqua Community College, Roseburg, OR</td>
<td>9 dead, 7 injured</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikolas Cruz (19)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, FL</td>
<td>17 dead, 14 injured</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some cases, the information on the number of victims varied depending on the source.
CASE EXCLUSION
Although relevant to the topic, this study excluded cases where available data was insufficient, or the number of victims was less than three. The reasoning behind excluding cases with less than three victims was to exclude cases that might have different motives behind them, for instance, gang related homicides. These exclusion criteria often overlapped in cases and resulted for instance in excluding cases where offender was over 30 years old or female.

DATA ANALYSIS
After the data was collected, it was carefully analysed looking for signs of cultural marginalisation, humiliation, exhibition of violent tendencies and need to prove masculinity. This study used teasing, physical bullying and gaybaiting as signs of cultural marginalisation, as argued by Kalish and Kimmel (2010), bullying, rejection and expulsion as signs of humiliation, and previous violence or threats as exhibition of violent tendencies. Need to prove masculinity was analysed based on the shooters’ “own words” found in the published documents.

RESEARCH ETHICS
Ethical review was not needed for this study as this research did not employ any sensitive data and all the data used in this study is publicly available online in the referred sources. This however, did not limit the study as there were no other data sources available.

RESULTS
The current study looked at seven cases of multi-victim school shootings in the United States in order to identify whether culture, cultural marginalisation and violent masculinities played important roles in these events. This was done by looking at four factors: cultural marginalisation, humiliation, previous violence, and need to prove masculinity. In this section the results were reported, and the cases were explained in more detail. Results of cultural marginalisation, humiliation and previous violence or threats are reported in Table 2 below. Overall, all of the shooters showed signs of cultural marginalisation with evidence of teasing in all cases, physical bullying in three out of seven cases and gaybaiting in two cases, as well as being called a paedophile in one case. All shooters had experienced some sort of humiliations from being teased to expulsion, being fired and broken up with. Only in two of the cases there was no previous indication of violence or threats, although only one of the shooters had a history of physical and gun violence. These cases along with the results of need to prove masculinity are discussed in more detail below.

CASES
Many of the chosen cases have gathered a lot of media and academic attention and have been described to detail elsewhere. For the purpose of this thesis, the following case descriptions included only the information needed and used for the analyses.
Table 2. Showing results of cultural marginalisation (teased, physically bullied and gaybaited), humiliation and previous violence/threats, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Shooter</th>
<th>Teased</th>
<th>Physically bullied</th>
<th>Gaybaited</th>
<th>Humiliation</th>
<th>Previous violence/threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eric Harris (18) &amp; Dylan Klebold (17)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both bullied continuously both psychologically and physically, Eric rejected from Marines</td>
<td>Spoken and written threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Weise (16)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>Teased, was home-schooled unlike others</td>
<td>Violent writings online and drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seung-Hui Cho (23)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>Continuously teased about his appearances and mutism</td>
<td>Vague threatening writings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Kazmierczak (27)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Kept losing jobs and friends, had messy relationships</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Lanza (20)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>Called paedophile</td>
<td>Labelled as paedophile in his online community</td>
<td>No clear evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Harper Mercer (26)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>No friends, no job, no girlfriend</td>
<td>Wrote a manifesto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikolas Cruz (19)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>Bullied, expelled from schools, broke up with his girlfriend</td>
<td>Violent behaviour, expelled and kicked out from home because of violence, pointed guns at people, threats online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ERIC HARRIS AND DYLAN KLEBOLD, COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL

Eric Harris, 18 and Dylan Klebold, 17, had been planning on their attack for approximately a year (Langman, 2014). Their behaviour leading to the shooting included verbal threats and videos of violence. Although they both came from loving good homes, they were bullied, teased and gaybaited at school continuously for years (Verlinden, Hersen & Thomas, 2000; Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). In addition, Eric had experienced a serious loss during the week prior to the shooting as the Marines rejected his application (Verlinden, Hersen & Thomas, 2000). On 8th November 1998 Harris wrote the following in his journal:

"Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, how fucking weak I am and shit, well I will get you all back, ultimate fucking revenge here. You people could have shown more respect, treated me better, asked for my knowledge or guidance more, treated me more like a senior, and maybe I wouldn’t have been so ready to tear your fucking heads off. Then again, I have always hated how I looked, I make fun of people who look like me, sometimes without even thinking sometimes just because I want to rip on myself. That’s where a lot of my hate grows from. The fact that I have practically no self-esteem, especially concerning girls and looks and such. Therefore people make fun of me ... constantly ... therefore I get no respect and therefore I get fucking PISSED.” (Eric Harris’s Journal, 11/8/98, retrieved from Langman, 2014)

Based on Harris’s and Klebold’s journals both boys had suffered from continuous humiliation at school (Langman, 2014). As Klebold wrote in his journal “I see jocks having fun, friends, women, LIVEZ.” (Dylan Klebold’s Journal, 3/31/97, retrieved from Langman, 2014). Though there is no direct evidence of their motives apart from revenge, both boys expressed their desire to be successful with women as well their inability to do so (Langman, 2014). Thus, it could be assumed that they both were looking to gain some ‘masculinity’ and to ‘man up’ so they could attract some female attention, especially Harris who had also dreamed of joining the Marines.

JEFFREY WEISE, RED LAKE HIGH SCHOOL

Jeffrey Weise, 16, was characterised as a loner who was teased at school. His criminal father committed suicide when he was younger, and his mother had experienced an injury that put her in a nursing home. Weise published his own violent texts online and showed his drawings to his peers at school (Newman & Fox, 2009). He was home-schooled after being banned from school five weeks prior to the shooting (Hanners, 2005 in Newman & Fox, 2009). Less than three months before the shooting he wrote online the following:

“Right about now I feel as low as I ever have. I don’t think it’s a big secret why, really. My biggest disappointment and downfall came from what was supposed to be the one thing to lift me from the grave I’m continually digging for myself.” (Thoughts of a Dreamer, 4th January 2005, from Langman, 2016)

Although based on his writings there is no indication of wanting to gain back masculinity, Weise was clearly culturally marginalised and distant from his peer
group. He had also suffered a humiliation recently by having to be home-schooled after he had a fight with a teacher in school (Hanners, 2005 in Newman & Fox, 2009).

SEUNG-HUI CHO, VIRGINIA TECH UNIVERSITY
Seung-Hui Cho, 23, was characterised as a loner who suffered from selective mutism and social anxiety. He was teased by his peers about his Korean family and as a response he wrote vague threatening writings in his English papers (Newman & Fox, 2009). In his 23-page multimedia manifesto that he sent to media on the day of the shooting he wrote:

"Congratulations. You have succeeded in extinguishing my life. Vandalizing my heart wasn’t enough for you. Raping my soul wasn’t enough for you. Committing emotional sodomy on me wasn’t enough for you. Every single second wasted on your wanton hedonism and menacing sadism could have been used to prevent today. Ask yourselves, What was I doing all this time? All these months, hours, seconds. Only if you could have been the victim of your crimes. Only if you could have been the victim ...” (Seung-Hui Cho’s Manifesto, page 6, from Langman, 2014)

From Cho’s writing it can be assumed that he was teased to a point he could no longer stand. Although no direct links to masculinity can be identified, cultural marginalisation is evident from the evidence.

STEVEN KAZMIERCZAK, NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
Steven Kazmierczak’s, 27, story has created a mystery. Unlike many others, he did not leave a suicide note or manifesto to clear his motives. According to McKinney et al. (2008, in Fox & Newman 2009) Kazmierczak even emptied his hard drive and phone memory card before the shooting. In 2009, American news channel CNN claimed that Kazmierczak had enlisted in the army but discharged after his mental health history was discovered (Boudreau & Zamost, 2009). Although Kazmierczak reportedly had friends, he was seen as strange and he kept losing jobs and friends. Kazmierczak was also a victim of different forms of bullying and gaybaiting (Newman & Fox, 2009). These factors create plenty of reasons to feel culturally marginalised, humiliation and need to prove one’s manliness, however his motives can only be guessed.

ADAM LANZA, SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Adam Lanza, 20, had strong opinions of many things that he published online and expressed by calling the radio shows. From his writings it became evident he did not support men’s dominance, leaving the assumption of violent masculinity without proof in his case. In one of his writings, Lanza criticised the treatment of paedophiles within the society, and was labelled as a paedophile as a result. He became agitated from this and deleted at least parts of his online activities (Langman, 2014). It can be, however, speculated whether the accusations of being a paedophile led Lanza to choose shooting at an elementary school consisting of young children as a proof of not being a paedophile. Nevertheless, signs of cultural marginalisation, questioned sexuality and humiliation were evident from his profile.
CHRIS HARPER MERCER, UMPQUA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

"My whole life has been one lonely enterprise. One loss after another. And here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People who are elite, people who stand with the gods. People like Elliot Rodger, Vester Flanagan, The Columbine kids, Adam Lanza and Seung Cho.” (Chris Harper Mercer’s Manifesto, page 1, from Langman, 2016)

Chris Harper Mercer, 26, identified himself strongly with the previous school shooters. He idolised school shooters and murderers like Ted Bundy and did not see anything worth living for in his life. In his manifesto Harper Mercer identified himself as culturally marginalised, who saw women choose black men over him. Although he noted himself as bi-racial, Harper Mercer expressed a strong hate towards black men in his manifesto, rooting for female dominance (Langman, 2016). Thus, based on Harper Mercer’s self-reported evaluation he was culturally marginalised, humiliated by the lack of job, friends and girlfriend, and felt the need to prove his masculinity to show that he was superior to black men whom he despised for taking all the women.

NIKOLAS CRUZ, MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL

Nikolas Cruz, 19, had an eventful life leading to the shooting. Coming from a loving family, he lost his adoptive father at the age of 5 years. Growing up he was reported bullied and socially awkward. In his teenage years he became violent towards his adoptive mother and took a strong interest in guns. Although his grades were good, he did not come along with other students and was expelled from schools. Following his mother’s death three months before the shooting, he was banned from his temporary home due violence (Wallman, et al., 2018). From the factors above, it can be argued that Cruz was culturally marginalised and humiliated from expulsions, inability to complete high school, and being kicked out from home. He had a long record of previous violence and threats before the shooting, as well as need to prove masculinity, as he wanted a new girlfriend after his previous break up (Wallman, et al., 2018). However, unlike in the other cases, Cruz did not commit suicide at the end of his shooting spree, instead he went to McDonald’s (Michael & Mullin, 2018). Therefore, his motives may differ from those who commit suicide at the end of their shooting spree.

DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to identify whether the key factors on macro-sociological level in American school shootings are culture, cultural marginalisation and violent masculinities. Following the results from seven exemplary cases, it can be argued that the results were mixed. The role of culture varied from case to another, from ideas of male dominance to female dominance. Although sexuality acted as an indirect theme in four of the seven cases, there is no strong evidence pointing that hegemonic masculinity could be behind all of their actions. Similarly, the motives behind the school shootings were left for interpretation, but in most cases the shooters mentioned in their writings the suffering and teasing they had been through after being culturally marginalised, i.e. different from their peers. One factor, however, united all the shootings. In all of the cases there were signs of cultural marginalisation. These results are discussed in further detail below.
CULTURAL MARGINALISATION
Kalish and Kimmel (2010) noted that boys who had undergone teasing, bullying and gaybaiting for years were examples of cultural marginalisation of those who failed to enact the code of masculinity. These boys were not marginalised because they were gay, but because their interests, looks or natures differed from the other boys. In each one of the cases the shooters were identified as different, marginalised. For Harris and Klebold it was their looks and fascination for guns and violence, for Weise it was his interest in classic literature and death (Newman & Fox, 2009), Cho was marginalised based on his family roots and his psychological conditions, Kazmierczak was seen as weird, Lanza was marginalised because of his strong interests to discuss perceived inequalities, for Harper Mercer unemployment, lack of friends and girlfriend made him marginalised, and Cruz had for instance an extensive record of violent tendencies pushing him to the culturally marginalised group.

As all of the above school shooters fit the category alienated youth gone wrong, as Frymer (2009) noted originally about Harris and Klebold, it seems that cultural marginalisation is a key factor in American multi-victim school shootings. Applying Merton’s (1938) theory, these marginalised youth could be victims of the society, trying to each reach cultural values but not having the opportunities for that as a result of cultural marginalisation. Although the exemplary cases range between a 19-year time frame, there still seems to be lack of consistency in the motives for shootings, making it rather difficult to identify what cultural value could the marginalised youth be aiming for. Lankford (2016) argued it to be fame, and surely fame was what all of these shooters received, but not necessarily what they wanted.

VIOLENT AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES
Similarly, one could argue that Harris, Klebold, Kazmierczak and Harper Mercer were all looking to gain culturally valuable sense of masculinity. Both Harris and Kazmierczak had been rejected from serving their country due to mental health history (Verlinden, Hersen & Thomas, 2000; Boudreau & Zamost, 2009), and could have felt their masculinities challenged. For Harris, Klebold and Harper Mercer the lack of female companionship seemed to be a concern. These factors could have driven these individuals to act in a what they saw as ‘manly way’, to prove their masculinities. Furthermore, although one size does not fit all in terms of violent masculinities and men’s supremacy, it does not exclude the possibility of violent, hegemonic masculinities influencing the school shootings. It is possible that they have an indirect impact on the school shootings through culturally acceptable behaviour that itself is not linked to ideals of female inferiority.

Tonso (2009) for instance noted that the demographic information of the shooter does not play a role, but rather the patriarchy in the American society that allows men’s supremacy and creates this notion of some people imagining having special rights in the world. Following Tonso’s (2009) line of thought many of these shooters showed high intellectuality in their writings and could have perceived themselves superior to their peers. Based on the shooters’ own writings, however, only three of the school shootings can be directly matched with the profile of perceived privilege. Whereas Harris and Klebold perceived themselves better than their peers, Cho compared himself to Jesus Christ in his manifesto, and Harper Mercer was following in their footsteps.
ROLE OF CULTURE
When looking at the so-called culture of violence, it points out that only one of the shooters from the selected cases had a clear history of physical violence towards other people. Thus, arguing for a culture where boys are taught to solve problems with violence does not seem fit to these cases. Although one could always argue that as these shooters were all culturally marginalised, they need not to have exhibited previous violent acts, but over-conformed to the society’s cultural gender expectations by committing extreme violence as a response to marginalisation. The role of gun culture has also received a fair amount of attention with researchers such as Kalish and Kimmel (2010) arguing that without the American gun culture, these school shooters would not have such an easy access to guns and would more likely commit only suicide rather than mass murder and suicide.

Furthermore, culture may not always influence school shooters decision-making directly. For instance, cultural ideas of not accepting diversity within a community may encourage peers to tease culturally marginalised individuals to a point where they backfire with extreme violence. These notions of alienated youth gone wrong are then spread across the nation through media, creating fear of alienated, marginalised youth (Frymer, 2009), and alienating them from the society even further. Following the media spectacles around alienated youth committing school shootings, these ideas become culture about crime, that in return influence culture in crime (Katz, 2016) and maybe even encourage alienated youth to act in a way they are expected.

CAUSALITY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS
Kimmel and Mahler (2003) argued that searching for causality would be pointless, as it would fail to explain gender differences in school shootings. Although their argument was directed towards those looking at causality at micro-sociological level, the argument could easily be applied to other levels as well. Although challenging to investigate, it could be, however, beneficial to investigate whether the individual factors found in school shooters could be caused by causal relationships between cultural marginalisation and the individual factors such as depression and being a victim of bullying. Similarly, investigating the causal link between cultural marginalisation and school shootings could shed some light into understanding the phenomena, and solve an issue Kimmel and Mahler (2003) wanted to avoid by staying away from causality. For instance, it may be the case that at first cultural marginalisation caused school shootings, causing fear of the marginalised youth in the public, which itself created a self-fulfilling prophecy after which school shootings create more cultural marginalisation, while cultural marginalisation creates school shootings. And the resulting greater cultural marginalisation could also explain the sudden emergence of female school shooters (Newman & Fox, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2018). Therefore, there is a clear need for researching causal links in school shootings to identify the very points where the ingredients for these lethal cocktails are mixed.

LIMITATIONS
Although case studies have been criticised for poor credibility and not being generalisable (Denscombe, 2010), given the rarity of the events, it can be argued that these results are somewhat representative of the American school shooter population, even if excluding females and all cases where there were less than three victims. Another limitation of the study is the data that was used. Although
demographic information is easily verifiable from different sources, Lankford (2016) noted that motives, however, can be very difficult to identify without shooters voicing them through for instance manifestos. Similarly, using secondary and tertiary data risks treating interpretations of others as valid and credible data. Thus, Lankford (2016) pointed out that using the shooters’ personal writings facilitates the use of high standard evidence, as the information has come directly from the subject. Not only was this study subject to methodological limitations, it was also limited to a certain set of cases. These seven cases were selected of convenience after matching them with the criteria. The study limited its focus to multi-victim school shootings in the United States between 1999-2018, excluding many cases from abroad. Nevertheless, when investigating culture choosing to narrow down the scope might be useful. However, future research should focus on larger samples to get more comprehensive picture of American school shootings and expand to include school shootings from other nations alike.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis reviewed evidence from seven selected cases of multi-victim school shootings in the United States between 1999-2018, and attempted to identify the roles of culture, cultural marginalisation and violent masculinity within American rampage school shootings. Results indicated that cultural marginalisation was a key factor in all of the reviewed cases of school shooting, whereas hints of violent and hegemonic masculinities were found from some cases. The results from role of culture were inconclusive. Thus, rather than looking at what is the role of culture in school shootings, should it be asked instead, what is the role of culture in cultural marginalisation? According to Kalish and Kimmel (2010) cultural marginalisation of the school shooters was result of not acting according to the cultural gender expectations, which itself brings the third variable, masculinity back into the field. Following the intertwined circle of factors, it would seem logical to ask the following questions: how does masculinity influence culture? What is the role of culture in cultural marginalisation? And finally ask, what is the role of cultural marginalisation in school shootings.
REFERENCES


