RAMPAGE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA AND SCHOLARLY ACCOUNTS OF PERPETRATION FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PHENOMENON

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RAMPAGE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS
OF MEDIA AND SCHOLARLY ACCOUNTS OF
PERPETRATION FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PHENOMENON

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Social Work
at the University of Kentucky

By
Philip C. Mongan
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Melanie D. Otis, Associate Professor of Social Work
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2013

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

RAMPAGE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA AND SCHOLARLY ACCOUNTS OF PERPETRATION FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PHENOMENON

When school shootings occur in primary or secondary schools they draw a massive amount of media attention. Frequently, after the shooting stops, the media begins to prognosticate about the factors that led to the occurrence of the tragedy. However, there is a dearth of research examining those factors that are perpetuated by the media, as well as the factors that are most discussed in scholarly publications. Therefore, the aim of this research project was to explore the perpetration factors that have been perpetuated by the media, and compare those to the perpetration factors that are most frequently discussed by researchers.

The study posed three research questions, which explored the factors that were most discussed, the differences between print news sources and journal articles in regard to the factors they discussed, and the possible changes of factors through time. The exploration of these research questions was based in social constructionist thought, as the theory provided a framework for exploring how the findings may impact subsequent prevention of the phenomenon.

The study found that there were numerous factors discussed by the media and researchers, which broke down into school factors, cultural factors, individual factors, biological facts, and family factors. Through triangulation of available data the study also found that there were differences between the perpetration factors as they are discussed by the print news and scholars, as well as differences in discussion of factors through time. These differences indicate that prevention efforts may be hindered due to a faulty understanding of rampage school shootings, which is being perpetuated by the media. The findings also indicate several areas for future research to focus on, such as: exploration of other media formats, examining the constructs proposed by the research project, and exploring the methods that individuals involved with prevention determine the threat level of individuals who are viewed as posing a risk.
KEYWORDS: school shooting, content analysis, social construction, school violence, rampage school shooting

Philip C. Mongan
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April 24, 2013
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RAMPAGE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA AND SCHOLARLY ACCOUNTS OF PERPETRATION FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PHENOMENON

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank for helping me get to this point. First and foremost, I
have to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Melanie Otis. Her guidance, constructive
criticism, and encouragement helped me through the dissertation writing process. I have
had the pleasure of taking many of her courses throughout my time at the University of
Kentucky, and my growth as a researcher and scholar would simply not have been
possible without her. Also, I am greatly appreciative of the rest of my dissertation
committee: Dr. Andy Frey, Dr. Carrie Oser, Dr. Patty Cook-Craig, and Dr. Alexander
Vazsoni. Their questions and feedback helped me to create a product that would not have
been possible without them. Their encouragement with my topic was energizing,
especially when energy was in short supply.

Also, I must thank Dr. David Royse and the rest of the social work department
that accepted me into the Ph.D. program. They took a chance on accepting me into the
program, and I am sure that there was at least some doubts that a person would commute
weekly from Alabama for four years. However, 87,000 miles later I could not be more
grateful for the opportunity and support that they provided to me.

In addition to the professors that have helped me grow at the University of
Kentucky, there are also others that have helped me get to this point. First, Dr. James
Mastro from Bemidji State University for showing me what determination and hard work
actually was. Also, I must thank Dr. Dada Maglajlic, who was the first professor to push
me to seek a Ph.D. Even from the first years of my undergraduate program, Dr. Dada
challenged me and pushed me to accomplish more.
Last but certainly not least, I must also thank my cohort and my family. The other students that have been on this journey with me have provided me with the friendship that is often void when immersed in a doctoral program. They all welcomed me to the University of Kentucky, and helped lighten the mood when I was stressed. I must also thank my family. They provided support and encouragement for me when I needed it the most. The combination of working full time, the Ph.D. program, and commuting from Alabama to Kentucky on a weekly basis, essentially made me a ghost for the last few years. Without their understanding, the process would have been much more difficult.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

When a mass shooting occurs in the United States, one of the most frequent initial questions people ask is “why” or how could the perpetrator have committed such a crime. It is understandably difficult for most people to comprehend how an individual could pick up a gun and kill multiple people, especially when the perpetrator is a child and they target individuals in their school. Due to their extreme nature, almost as soon as one of these events is over, the media will quickly respond and attempt to answer the public’s questions by speculating on various motives. Subsequently, those speculations are broadcast to the general public, who then must digest the information in order to arrive at their own opinion for how these types of tragedies can occur and what should be done to prevent them. This intersection between the producers of media and the consumers of media provides an important focal point of inquiry for researchers seeking to understand the relationship between the reporting of news and the public’s perceptions of, and opinions about, events such as multiple victim shootings. The relevance of this relationship is particularly critical when one considers the potential impact that public opinion may have on prevention, subsequent social policy, and legal decisions.

A subgroup of school shootings that has proven to be particularly difficult to understand has been the rampage school shootings that were typified by several incidents that occurred in the 1990s, and became nationally recognized by the general public with the tragedy at Columbine High School on April, 20, 1999 – a day on which 15 people died (including the perpetrators) and 23 were wounded by two assailants (Stuckey, 2007).
From 1974 to 2008, 29 rampage school shootings occurred in the United States (Newman, Fox, Roth, Mehta, & Harding, 2004; Newman & Fox, 2009) (See Table 1).

**Conceptualization of Rampage School Shootings**

According to Muschert (2007a), there are five categories of school shootings: targeted shootings, government shootings, terroristic shootings, mass shootings, and rampage school shootings. The only characteristic that is shared by all of the categories of school shootings is that the incident must take place at the school or a school sponsored event. Since this research project focuses on only one of the categories of school shootings (i.e. rampage school shootings) it is imperative that the definition for the five categories be briefly explored, so that they can be shown to be mutually exclusive. Without mutually exclusive categories, research is unable to postulate valid hypotheses, or report on findings in a way that actually explains the phenomenon due to the likely inclusion of incidents in rampage school shooting research that may actually be from different categories of shootings.

There has been conceptual confusion about different types of school shootings from the beginning of school shooting research, in addition to confusion in regards to which incidents should be included in the different categories. That confusion has led to the appearance that much of the research into the phenomenon is fragmented, which presents one of the greatest challenges to researchers working in this area (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). As previously noted, the category of school shooting that is the focus of this study was rampage school shootings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shooter(s)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Shooter(s)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Lawler</td>
<td>Manchester, MO</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Andrew Wurst</td>
<td>Edinboro, PA</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristofer Hans</td>
<td>Lewiston, MT</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Shawn Cooper</td>
<td>Notus, ID</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Elliot</td>
<td>Virginia Beach, VA</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Eric Harris</td>
<td>Dylan Klebold</td>
<td>Littleton, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Houston</td>
<td>Olivehurst, CA</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>T.J. Solomon</td>
<td>Conyers, GA</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Lo</td>
<td>Great Barrington, MA</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Seth Trickey</td>
<td>Ft Gibson, OK</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Pennington</td>
<td>Grayson, KY</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Charles Williams</td>
<td>Santee, CA</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby Sincino</td>
<td>Blackville, SC</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Jason Hoffman</td>
<td>El Cajon, CA</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie Rouse</td>
<td>Lynnville, TN</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Jeff Weise</td>
<td>Red Lake, MN</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan Ramsey</td>
<td>Bethel, AK</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Alvaro Castillo</td>
<td>Hillsborough, NC</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Woodham</td>
<td>Pearl, MS</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Asa Coon</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Carneal</td>
<td>Paducah, KY</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Cases listed in Newman et al., (2004); Newman & Fox (2009)*
Rampage school shootings are defined as school shootings that:

…take place on a school-related public stage before an audience; involve multiple
victims, some of whom are shot simply for their symbolic significance or at
random; and involve one or more shooters who are students or former students of
the school. (Newman et al., 2004, p. 50)

This category of school shooting differs from the other four categories (i.e. mass,
targeted, government, terroristic) discussed by Muschert (2007a) due to a few
characteristics. Those differentiating characteristics consist of: (a) The symbolic level of
the selected target, (b) the selection of targets, and (c) the relationship between the
shooter(s) and the school (see Figure 3).

Targeted school shootings are inherently not random, and are generally not
symbolic at the societal or world level. This differs from terrorist school shootings,
which are generally random and symbolic at the highest levels. However, terrorist
school shootings differ from rampage school shootings due to the perpetrators having no
previous connection with the school (i.e. former student). Government shootings are also
random, but the purpose is almost exclusively to restore peace.

The final type of school shooting, mass school shootings, is also the most similar
to rampage school shootings. The main difference between those two types of shootings
is that rampage school shooters have previously attended the school and are staging a
symbolic attack on that school (Newman et al., 2004), while mass school shootings
simply do not involve this connection. See Muschert (2007a) for a thorough breakdown
of the various categories of school shootings.
Statement of Problem

School shootings have occurred throughout the history of the United States, and in at least one incident, even prior to the founding of the country (i.e. the Enoch Brown Incident)\(^1\). Notably, while such events can be documented over a long period of time, historically, school shootings have been extremely rare occurrences (Muschert, 2007a; Swezey & Thorp, 2010). However, due to an increase in national attention after a number of highly publicized incidents such as Columbine, CO, Jonesboro, AR, Paducah, KY, Pearl, MS, and Springfield, OR,\(^2\) and the extreme nature of the events, rampage school shootings are a phenomenon that have commanded public interest. As will be discussed in greater depth later, beyond this fascination, the phenomenon continues to be a relevant social issue due to the real world impact these incidents have on the development of national policy, levels of fear within school, efforts to ensure school safety, and the potential for spawning copycat crimes.

Scholarly articles addressing the phenomenon of any category of school shooting other than targeted school shootings did not begin to appear in the literature until the late 1980s (for example, see Collison, Bowden, Patterson, & Snyder, 1987), despite the first rampage school shooting occurring in 1974 (Newman et al., 2004). As mentioned earlier, targeted school shootings can be understood as shootings that target a specific person in the school due to some perceived conflict between the perpetrator and the targeted victim. Since that initial research on school shootings, the scholarly literature on the phenomenon has been fragmented for various reasons (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Muschert, 2007a). This is especially true in regards to rampage school shootings. Most research into the phenomenon has focused on using case studies to examine a small number of
incidents in an attempt to draw conclusions about the full range of the phenomenon of school shootings. Until recently researchers were utilizing several inconsistent, and often conflicting, definitions for what is now classified as rampage school shootings (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). For example, McGee and Debernardo (1999), Newman et al. (2004), and Vossekul et al. (2001) all used slightly different definitions of rampage school shootings in each of their studies. McGee and Debernardo (1999) elected to create a definition that focused on the individual who committed the crime; whereas Newman et al. (2004) created a definition based on the incidents instead of the perpetrators. Thus far, there has been no published literature reviews pulling together research on this category of school shooting, and only Muschert (2007a) has published a state of knowledge article. While his article was the first substantial review of scholarly literature, it cannot quite be classified as a literature review since it did not cover all the relevant literature on the phenomenon. This appeared to be intentional as Muschert’s (2007a) purpose with his state of knowledge article seemed to focus on defining the different categories of school shootings, and making a statement about how research needed to proceed from that point in time. The inability to have an agreed upon definition and the various different incidents included in different studies illustrates fragmentation of the bulk of published material on school shootings. In light of this reality, any future efforts to develop a fuller understanding of the phenomenon would greatly benefit from additional research aimed at developing a consistent definition of rampage school shootings, and examining and clarifying information found in available data. One specific area that is in need of clarification is the perpetration factors that have been associated with the phenomenon.
In order for a phenomenon such as rampage school shootings to be understood, the factors that are believed to impact their occurrence and prevalence must be explored. For the purpose of the proposed study, these factors will be referred to as perpetration factors. A thorough examination of published reports is important because of the possible influence such reports may have on public perception, especially when the reports are from the mainstream print news. The mainstream print news and its ability to impact public perception has been widely studied (see chapter 4 and chapter 5), and as McQuail (1994) wrote, “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” (p. 327). Therefore, understanding what perpetration factors mainstream print news are connecting with rampage school shootings will help uncover the information that is being presented to the general public, which in turn will provide insight regarding the kinds of information the general public is likely to draw upon as they form their perceptions of these events.

Rampage school shootings are unique and rare examples of extreme school violence and, as a result of these characteristics, have been open to many different interpretations (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). These various interpretations serve to construct factors that are associated with the phenomenon. The term “construction” is used due to the theoretical underpinnings of this study, which are based on social constructionist thought. What this means is that peoples understanding of the world and social issues in the world are based not on identifiable facts, but on the social construction of information that becomes confused with “fact”. Evidence for developing that construction can be based on information gleaned from a variety of sources, including mainstream print news and/or scholarly literature.
To date, social scientific research into this phenomenon is still in its infancy and little theoretically-driven work has been done. The majority of the scholarship has focused on providing descriptions of events, or has attempted to explain the impact of individual perpetration factors on the phenomenon (i.e. impact of bullying or violent media consumption on school shootings). For the purpose of this study perpetration factors are defined as individual, family, group, community, and national/cultural factors that have been thought to contribute to the perpetration of rampage school shootings. Due to the rarity of rampage school shootings, there has not been empirical social scientific work completed which has specifically focused on this type of mass murder in school settings. Instead, a large number of studies have relied upon examining media accounts of the events. According to Muschert's (2007a) statement of knowledge article, the use of media accounts in studying this type of school shooting continues to be a valid and valuable medium for understanding public reactions to the phenomenon.

The purpose of the current study was to examine both media reports and scholarly research on perpetration factors that are believed to be associated with the phenomenon of rampage school shootings in order to gain a more complete understanding of exactly what factors each source is postulating impact rampage school shootings. The subsequent sections in this chapter will provide an introduction to the problem underlying the purpose of this study, the impact that reports of perpetration factors can have on perception and prevention, the research questions that guided the study, and the methodology that was used to answer these questions.

To date there has not been any definitive research focused on identified perpetration factors; thus, our understanding of potential causes of rampage school
shootings is still in the exploratory stage. Therefore, sources ranging from journalists to social scientists can only report on the factors they believe, or can logical argue, are associated with the phenomenon. It is this exploratory information that is available for general public consumption, and it is this exploratory information that aides in the construction of their perceptions of rampage school shootings.

Beyond the realm of public curiosity, perpetration factors that are associated with rampage school shootings are important to the study for several reasons. Disseminated information regarding perpetration factors can impact individuals and communities, as well as national policies and prevention efforts. For example, the enforcement of zero tolerance weapons policies in schools became more pronounced after high profile rampage school shootings such as the Columbine High School Shooting (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Another example that will be discussed in greater depth in chapter two involves how clinical judgment may be based on some of these perceived perpetration factors, which then impacts how schools respond to threats if they do not use an evidenced based threat assessment (Reddy et al., 2001). Despite this possible wide ranging impact, there has only been one previous study examining media factors, and that was a pilot study (Mongan & Otis, 2010).

As previously noted, the dissemination of information reporting on factors associated with rampage school shootings is an important avenue to study because of the impact that information can have at the different levels in society. At an individual level the real world impact of media reports can be seen in a variety of areas. For example, after a rampage school shooting occurs and the media begins to speculate on what may have caused the incident, fear levels increase at school (Addington, 2003: Stretsky &
Hogan, 2001), and increases in student absences have been found to occur (Brener, Simon, Anderson, Barrios, & Small, 2002). The reports may also impact school districts. For example, despite there being no information regarding the likelihood of a trench coat wearing student committing a rampage school shooting, dress codes have changed and were enforced more strictly after certain school shootings where media reported that perpetrators wore such coats (Ogle & Eckman, 2002). This can be viewed as the construction of a moral panic, whereby certain characteristics are associated with the phenomenon through media reporting. Moral panics will be discussed in greater depth in the theory chapter, but they can essentially be understood as the construction of fear surrounding specific elements associated with a phenomenon.

The reporting of perpetration factors can also impact the nation as a whole, which has been seen through the creation and amendment of social policy (Mongan & Walker, 2012; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Stanner, 2006), the outcome of judicial decisions (Stanner, 2006), the perpetration of copycat crimes (Kostinsky, Bixler, & Kettle, 2001), and the development of cultural scripts that may impact future rampage school shootings. While all of these are covered more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, some explication at this point will provide justification for the problem girding this research project.

After some of the more intensely covered rampage school shootings (i.e. Columbine), a common impulsive policy reaction was the strict enforcement or adoption of policies such as zero tolerance (Mongan & Walker, 2012). This enforcement was done despite the many flaws of zero tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Stanner, 2006), and was likely due to the elevated public fear associated with the phenomenon after the events began to be more nationally covered. For example, rampage school
shootings had occurred 19 times before 1999, which was the deadliest year for the phenomenon to date, yet the policies were not enforced in the same manner as they have been since 1999 (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Ample research since 1999 has illuminated the flaws with zero-tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Stanner, 2006), and how such policies may actually increase the risk of rampage school shootings by providing a critical stressor that may serve as a catalyst to move the plan of attack into action (Mongan & Walker, 2012).

Reports about rampage school shootings may also impact judicial decisions (Stanner, 2006), or could impact clinical judgment during threat assessments. Reddy et al. (2001) discussed the dearth of empirical research on risk factors associated with rampage school shootings, and noted that clinical judgment was dangerous for that reason. Professionals would not choose to purposefully make bad decisions, yet there simply has not been enough information available for professionals to accurately judge risk factors without a standard threat assessment tool. In the absence of evidence-based assessment tools, clinicians may consciously or unconsciously draw upon perceptions of relevant factors that have been constructed from the most readily available and accessible information sources (i.e. media). And finally, perpetration factors may also impact copycat crimes due to the possibility of future perpetrators attaching to the perpetration factors as they were constructed by the media.

Due to the impact that the dissemination of perpetration factors may have on the various levels of society, it is important to understand exactly what perpetration factors are being reported to the general public, and how those reports may impact public perception. Once the mainstream print news’s perspective on factors associated with
rampage school shootings is clearly established, and the potential impact of that perspective on public perception is considered, a clearer understanding of how these things work together can be developed. Armed with this information, researchers can more effectively study the phenomenon, while also identifying potential discrepancies between mainstream print news framings and social scientific research findings. By illuminating and questioning any divergent information provided by these two distinct sources, the potential for the development of evidence-based policies and prevention efforts can be enhanced. However, that important step cannot be taken until studies attempt to understand the factors that are currently being disseminated about rampage school shootings.

**Purpose of the Study**

The research questions this project aimed to answer will help shed light on exactly what factors are being attributed to rampage school shootings by the print media compared to academic sources. Identifying factors being disseminated about rampage school shootings will help to clarify how the phenomenon is being defined by scholarly sources and mainstream print media, and how those definitions converge and diverge.

**Research Questions.** The three guiding research questions for the study are:

1. What perpetration factors do mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines) and scholarly journal articles attribute to the phenomenon of rampage school shootings?

2. Are there significant differences between perpetration factors the mainstream print news (i.e. national print newspapers, news magazines) and scholarly journal articles attribute to rampage school shootings?
3. How does the discussion of perpetration factors change over time with either or both the mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines), and scholarly journal articles?

The proposed study seeks to contribute to the scholarly literature by addressing the lack of rampage school shooting studies which examine perpetration factors from both mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles. Some work has been done in examining media-constructed frames, but other than a recent pilot study (Mongan & Otis, 2010), there has not been sufficient substantive empirical research upon which to formulate hypotheses.

After the conceptualization of rampage school shootings and the review of the relevant literature (chapter 2), the theoretical framework for the study will be explored (chapter 3). Social construction will be the predominant theoretical framework used for this study, and in chapter three the theory will be discussed and related back to the research questions. This step will not only set the stage for how the results will be interpreted, but will also show the relevance of the methods selected for use in the study. After discussion of the theoretical framework, the process of news production and the impact of media effects will be explored in order to explicate how news is constructed and disseminated (chapter 4). Then the application of content analysis will be explored in relation to the study (chapter 5), and the methodology will be explained in greater depth using the framework proposed by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998). Those steps provide the foundation for the study, and will help with the interpretation and application of the results after study completion. Finally, the results will be discussed (chapter 6), and the impact of the findings will be explored (chapter 7).
Significance

Research into rampage school shootings is critical for many reasons. First, the current state of knowledge about the phenomenon is fragmented (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Muschert, 2007a). Many different disciplines have examined the phenomenon from so many different angles that research in the area lacks a unifying foundation upon which subsequent research can build. This is not only detrimental for conducting future research, but also poses a problem for attempts to utilize the available information to guide prevention efforts. Due to the fragmentation previously mentioned and the examination of the phenomenon from various disciplinary positions (i.e. sociology, criminology, psychology, social work, media studies), Muschert (2007a) has called for the condensing and synthesizing of extant school shooting research in order to provide a useful spring-board for future research. In the absence of such a process, subsequent research will continue to add to the fragmentation and contribute to ongoing confusion about what is and is not known about the phenomenon. In response to this identified need, an examination of both the scholarly literature, as well as media reporting, is justified. Examining journal articles will provide the scholarly base from which to compare perpetration factors as they are discussed by the media, and will also serve as a way to condense the current state of knowledge regarding perpetration factors.

Methods

Since this project aimed to explore the perpetration factors associated with rampage school shootings from both mainstream print media and scholarly literature, content analysis was the methodological tool utilized. Content analysis provides a useful analytic tool for increasing our understanding of rampage school shootings (Muschert,
2007a). For example, rampage school shootings are an incredibly rare event with no accepted way to currently predict perpetrators. Some studies even go far enough to suggest that it would be dangerous to even attempt to predict perpetrators (Reddy, Borum, Berglund, Vossekul, Fein, & Modzeleski, 2001; Vossekull, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2001). Consequently, with such limited data, traditional empirical methods are unable to be employed in rampage school shooting research, which is precisely the type of situation in which content analysis as a methodological tool is appropriate (Krippendorff, 2004). The sample of incidents (N=29) or shooters (N=31), the relatively few perpetrators who survive the incidents, and other issues noted by Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) make empirical study of the phenomenon extremely daunting. For those endeavoring to study rampage school shootings, Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) noted that five issues arise: the case definition problem, the comparison case problem, the degree of freedom problem, the combined causes problem, and the different causes problem (for further examination of these issues see chapter 2). One of the exceptions to this empirical struggle is the use of content analysis to study artifacts (i.e. media accounts) related to the incidents. While the events and number of perpetrators may be too limited for in-depth empirical examination, the number of associated artifacts may approach a large enough sample size to facilitate some hypotheses testing regarding the phenomenon (i.e. mainstream print news being more likely to discuss gun availability as a perpetration factor than mainstream print news).

Another justification for the use of content analysis is the limited availability of any factual reports on rampage school shootings. To date, the only rampage school shooting where all of the police reports and evidence have been released to the public
was the Columbine High School shooting (for example, see Mongan & Otis, 2012). Outside of special access awarded to federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Secret Service, specific factual information associated with incidents of rampage school shootings is simply unavailable to researchers or even media sources. Therefore, one of the next logical avenues to pursue for information is other reports of the events, which include news sources, books, and scholarly sources. It can be argued that if researchers are unable to find factual information, the general public is also unable to access that information. As a result, the information available for the public to form opinions would be those very same mediums previously mentioned (i.e. mainstream print news and scholarly sources).

**Implications of Study**

Along with the significance of this research project, it is also important to discuss the implications of this study in order to concisely describe why the research of rampage school shootings is relevant to social science, especially social work. As has been previously discussed, and will be discussed in greater depth later, the importance of this study relies on the interrelationship between the media, public perception, and reactions to that public perception. These reactions can take the form of policy changes, legal decisions, and school disciplinary procedures.

Essentially, as was described in Tuchman’s work (1978), the media has the ability to impact the formation of public perception (see chapter four for a more in-depth discussion). In regards to rampage school shootings, public perception can then impact policy (e.g. zero tolerance) (Mongan & Walker, 2012), legal decisions (e.g. charging a minor as an adult) (Stanner, 2006), or school disciplinary procedures (e.g. dress codes,
expulsion) (Ogle & Eckman, 2002). Despite this potential impact that public perception can have on policy, the legal system, and school disciplinary procedures, the question may still be posed for why this research is relevant to the social work profession.

The ways that this research impacts the social work profession hinge on two facets: Social workers are a member of the public, and social workers are impacted by the consequences of the reactions to public perception that were previously mentioned. First, social workers are a member of the public. Therefore, it can be argued that they are as susceptible to mainstream print news as the rest of the general public is. An example of how this may impact social work practice can be seen in Reddy et al.’s (2001) research. Reddy et al. (2001) found that clinical judgment is not an effective method for determining the validity of threats leveled at school, due to their currently being no empirical support that those clinicians would be able to base their clinical decisions upon. Consequently, there would then be the possibility that social workers would base their decision upon information that is not empirically supported, and may be based in public perception about the phenomenon. As social workers assume clinical roles within a school system it is possible that they may be increasingly tasked with assessing threats leveled at their school. Therefore, understanding how the media may have impacted their perception and subsequent clinical judgment would be an important consideration.

The second way that this research impacts the social work profession is through the consequences of reactions to public perception regarding rampage school shootings. Social workers may have to work with students expelled from their school due to a threat that may not have posed any real risk. Social workers may also have to work with a court system in assessing whether an adolescent should be charged as an adult for posing a
threat. Both of these consequences have been seen to occur due to reactions to rampage school shootings, which led certain solutions being attempted without actually examining the problem. This tendency to pursue a solution without examining the problem could impact social work practice (Mongan & Walker, 2012; Stanner, 2006). While the situations are hypothetical, it is possible that social workers can be impacted by the various consequences that can occur due to reactions from public perception regarding rampage school shootings. Therefore, understanding the perpetration factors posited by the mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles is an important step to understanding how the social work profession may be impacted by that information.

**Conclusion**

Despite the scholarly literature being somewhat fragmented and consisting of studies from various disciplines and conceptual perspectives (Muschert, 2007a), a foundational understanding of the phenomenon is beginning to appear. As will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, while various gaps in the literature on rampage school shootings persist, scholarly attention has increased in recent years in an attempt to move our understanding of the phenomenon to the next level. One identified gap in the literature on rampage school shootings that is ripe for future exploration, and a primary focus of the proposed study, is analysis of perpetration factors associated with the phenomenon.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the definition for rampage school shootings that will be used in this study started from Newman et al.'s (2004) definition proposed during their case studies of the rampage school shootings in Jonesboro, AR, and Paducah, KY. They proposed that in order for a school shooting to be defined as a rampage school shooting, the incident must: (a) take place at school or at a school sponsored event, (b) involve multiple targets, (c) the targets must be random or have symbolic importance to the shooter, and (d) the perpetrator must be currently enrolled or have been enrolled in the school. This project further clarifies the definition of the categories by including Larkin's (2009) inclusion of intent and by introducing the importance of target selection and symbolic importance of the target.

Since the first rampage school shooting in 1974 (i.e. Olean, NY), there have been 28 other incidents (See Table 1). As can be seen from the table, the incidents of rampage school shootings occur in waves and were fairly spread out until the 1990s. That decade saw a sudden increase in the number of rampage school shootings, and was the first time that this phenomenon became recognized on a national level. However, as shown by Muschert and Carr's (2006) research, the vast majority of national media attention did not occur until towards the end of the 1990s.

Scholarly literature on rampage school shootings roughly breaks down into four types. There are articles that describe the phenomenon, those that discuss precipitating factors associated with the incidents, articles that discuss systemic responses to school shootings (either while it is occurring or after the event), and articles that examine ways
the phenomenon may be prevented in the future. These categories are not intended to be mutually exclusive, but rather, they serve as a heuristic tool for categorizing and exploring the relevant literature on rampage school shootings.

**Literature Review**

**Descriptive studies.** A portion of the literature on rampage school shootings focuses on descriptions of the phenomenon and its subsequent impact on schools, communities, and the nation. Thus far, there have been 29 incidents of primary or secondary-school rampage school shootings in United States history, involving 31 perpetrators. Although rampage school shootings are typically the act of a single perpetrator, both the Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Columbine, Colorado events consisted of two shooters. The shootings have spanned from 1974 to 2007 (Newman, et al., 2004; Newman & Fox, 2009), and have occurred in 24 out of 50 states in the nation. All 31 perpetrators of rampage school shootings have been male, and 24 (approximately 77%) have been Caucasian.

Prior to research attempting to describe the phenomenon, some scholarly work attempted to define rampage school shootings. Prior the publication of *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings* (Newman, et al., 2004) there were various competing definitions for this type of school shooting. McGee and DeBernardo (1999) were among the first to attempt a definition of such shootings, and wrote that the perpetrators’ were “classroom avengers”. They defined the classroom avenger as a student who:

Is a depressed and suicidal, usually Caucasian, adolescent male from a rural, suburban or small community who perpetrates a non-traditional multi-victim homicide in a school or classroom setting. Unlike more conventional adolescent
shooting incidents, the Classroom Avenger’s motive is personal vengeance and achievement of notoriety rather than being drug, inner city, or juvenile gang related (p. 1).

Overall, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) took the approach of defining the phenomenon by defining the perpetrators, instead of defining the incident itself. However, their attempt to define the phenomenon occurred while there was still a dearth of scholarly research, and before the more publicized incidents that became known as the defining events of the phenomenon (i.e. Columbine). Notably, their attempt to define the attacks based primarily on characteristics of the perpetrator illustrates one of the problems of researching rampage school shootings.

When a phenomenon is extremely rare, as well as exceptionally violent, there are several issues that arise when attempting to conduct meaningful, scientifically sound research. In regards to this type of school shooting, Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002)\(^1\) identified five key research issues that arise when undertaking research into the phenomenon: the case definition problem, the comparison case problem, the degree of freedom problem, the combined causes problem, and the different causes problem.

The first problem, and arguably the most important concern, is the case definition problem. As previously noted, in regards to rampage school shootings, there have been various competing definitions forwarded. Use of competing definitions has led researchers to make different decisions about the inclusion or exclusion of particular events in their samples of rampage school shootings, thus making it difficult (and in many ways inappropriate) to compare early research into school shootings with later research. Early in the definition period of the phenomenon discussion of school
shootings frequently included both rampage school shootings and other types of schools shootings in the same pool of incidents (Logue, 2008; Mossman, 2009). As discussed in the conceptualization section at the beginning of this chapter, there are important differences between the various categories of school shootings. It was not until the completion of Newman et al.’s (2004) work that the defining characteristics of the phenomenon emerged, and shifted from characteristics of the perpetrator to characteristics of the incident. Since that time the Newman et al. (2004) definition has served as the accepted definition of the phenomenon.

The second and third research problems identified by Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) were the comparison case problem and the degrees of freedom problem. The comparison case issue revolves around not having incidents or students that can be compared with the perpetrators of rampage school shootings. In other words, research that attempts to empirically test hypotheses regarding causal or correlated factors (i.e. violent media consumption causes rampage school shootings) would need a comparison “nonevent” in which to compare rampage school shooting incidents (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002, p. 178). The authors describe the impact of this problem on rampage school shooting research when they wrote:

…given that the cause(s) may exist at different theoretical levels of analysis—individual, school, community, and even nation—a wide variety of comparative nonevents might seem appropriate. We might imagine comparing the shooter with nonshooters at the same school or comparing a school where a shooting occurred to another school in the same community, or different communities in the same nation, or compare the United States with a similar nation that has not had school
shootings. That school shootings are extremely rare events suggests that cases in which they do occur may be somehow extreme on many causal variables, making selection of comparison cases even more difficult. We call this the comparison case problem. (p. 179)

Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) go on to state that identifying “necessary but not sufficient factors” may be the better approach in which to examine this phenomenon since, “negative cases do not provide relevant information” (p. 179). Newman et al. (2004) agreed and utilized this approach with their work, as they chose to identify five necessary but not sufficient characteristics of rampage school shootings. See the theoretical examination sub-section of this chapter for a more thorough review of those conditions.

The degrees of freedom problem involves not having a large enough sample of incidents within which to statistically examine the large number of causes that could be attributed to the phenomenon. In other words, the problem, “arises when there are a relatively small number of cases as well as large number of potential causes” (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002, p. 179). For this reason, it becomes extremely difficult to tease apart the different factors associated with rampage school shootings and test relationships between individual independent variables and the occurrence of the phenomenon. These two research problems coalesce to limit the methodologies that can be used when attempting to conduct research on school shootings. However, these challenges support the use of other qualitative methodologies, such as case studies (Hagan, Hirschfield, & Shedd, 2002; Sullivan, 2002) and media studies (for overview see Muschert, 2007a).
The fourth and fifth research problems are due to the myriad of causal factors that might impact rampage school shootings. The combined-causes problem (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002) involves the likelihood that causal mechanisms may be the result of combinations of factors. This does not mean that research is suggesting that the phenomenon consists of idiosyncratic events. From the initial theoretical work in the phenomenon (for example McGee & Debernardo, 1999) to the latest theoretical work (Langman, 2009; Mongan & Otis, 2012), there is an unspoken belief that there does exist underlying causes that have yet to be discovered, which would help explain why rampage school shootings occur.

The combined-causes problem was further explicated by Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) when they wrote:

Millions of children in thousands of communities have access to weapons and are exposed to violence on television, the Internet, movies, and video games, but only a few commit, attempt, or plan mass murder in their schools. In this situation, we would like to allow for the possibility that the explanation involves the combination of multiple causal factors, perhaps even arrayed in a specific sequence. How to identify such a theoretical combination of factors is a major challenge for any research of this kind. We refer to this as the combined causes problem. (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002, p. 183)

This problem does not mean that it is, or will forever be, impossible to arrive at a formula for understanding rampage school shootings. However, with the rare occurrence of the phenomenon, causal modeling and the exploration of potential interaction effects is simply not feasible at this time.
The final problem, which also reinforces the importance of defining the phenomenon primarily by the incident instead of the perpetrator, is the different-causes problem (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). As discussed by those authors, the individual characteristics and stressors for perpetrators may differ significantly. Therefore, a definition based on the perpetrator might exclude cases that should be included with research into rampage school shootings. It also confounds the ability to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue, due to there being numerous differences between the shooters. In addition to the difference between shooters, the incidents themselves are also somewhat unique. For example, the perpetrators of rampage school shootings generally do not have a history of violence, and the incidents generally occur in schools that do not have a history of extreme violence and in communities that have low crime rates (Sullivan, 2002). As Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) wrote:

Rampage school shootings occur in seemingly otherwise safe schools and communities, rural and suburban areas where students are predominantly white and working or middle class, communities that have previously escaped the youth violence associated with inner-city minority neighborhoods. (p. 175)

The identification and exploration of these five research problems have allowed subsequent research into the phenomenon to move forward and begin to address those concerns. However, the problems have also been used to illustrate one of the largest issues with rampage school shooting research, which is that the limited understanding about the phenomenon is gleaned from a small number of the actual incidents (Toby, 2005). Also, due to the unique and rare nature of rampage school shootings, there are some arguments that the incidents should not be used as the basis for general violence
prevention efforts in school (Kleck, 1999). Kleck (1999) argued that in general violence was decreasing in American society, despite the increased reporting of incidents of school shootings. He believed that it was a folly to tailor prevention efforts around events that could be an anomaly (i.e. “freakish events”, p. 63), when there were larger social issues that needed to be addressed in schools. Essentially, he argued that, “The more narrowly a preventative measure is tailored to the specifics of such events, the less likely it is to save lives” (p. 61).

Despite the looming difficulties in studying unique and rare events like rampage school shootings, as well as the currently fragmented state of research (Muschert, 2007a), media studies have emerged as a primary gateway for increasing our general understanding of the phenomenon, or at least the public’s perception and reaction to the phenomenon. In regards to school shootings, media studies have been used to understand how incidents of a large magnitude are portrayed in the media, and what practical impact they have on people’s perception of the phenomenon.

After the Columbine school shooting, there have been few social issues that have garnered the massive amount of media attention that rampage school shootings have commanded. For example, Columbine was one of the most covered news stories of the 1990s (Muschert, 2009). The incident also served as a “defining event” for scholarly research focused on examining rampage school shootings (Larkin, 2009; Muschert, 2007b; Muschert, 2009, p. 165), as well as a catalyst that brought adolescent delinquency back to the forefront of national discussion (Furlong, Morrison, Cornell, & Skiba, 2004; Menifield, rose, Homa, & Cunningham, 2001).
Before the Columbine school shooting, news coverage of rampage school shootings was comparatively small (Maguire, Weatherby, & Mathers, 2002), despite 19 of the 29 incidents occurring prior to 1999 (the year of the Columbine school shooting). The exceptions to this general lack of media attention were the incidents in Jonesboro, AR, Padukah, KY, and Pearl, MS. However, these shootings still only garnered a fraction of the media attention of Columbine (Mongan & Otis, 2010).

The media is an important medium for understanding rampage school shootings (Consalvo, 2003; Muschert & Spencer, 2009a), since it essentially serves as our collective memory (Leavy & Maloney, 2009). The media allows us to define and categorize issues with which we may be unfamiliar (Altheide, 2000), even if media reports about the phenomenon, “are frequently different than those reported in social science research” (Muschert, 2007a, p.61). Also, as will be discussed in the theory chapter, media can impact public perception about a social issue (Muschert, 2007a), which can have real-world consequences (i.e. policy). Therefore, it is important to discuss how the media makes and disseminates news (see chapter 4 for a more in-depth discussion).

The news-making process is based on the concept of there being a sender and a receiver (McQuail, 1994). According to McQuail (1994) news-making, “is often calculative or manipulative on the part of the sender, who takes a distanced and undifferentiating view of the public, which cannot be known in any real sense” (p. 37). In other words, the media acts as the sender, and constructs stories to be transmitted to the public, who act as the receiver. This process of news-making construction, transmission, and reception can be broken down into encoding and decoding (Decon, Fenton, &
Bryman, 1999). Agenda setting, framing, and priming are three parts of these two processes (Scheufele, 2000).

Those three parts will be discussed in great depth during chapter four, but a brief explication is warranted for understanding the news making process. Agenda setting is the process by which a media source assigns importance to an event and/or possible factors related to an event (Winter & Eyal, 1981). For example, it would be unreasonable for the media to list every possible factor that may impact rampage school shootings when they begin to report on an incident. Therefore, the media source must prioritize the importance of what could potentially be reported. Once media sources determine that which is deemed most relevant, a media frame is constructed around the event. Framing can be described as the, “process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). Put another way, agenda setting sets the stage for what is to be reported on, whereas framing is the actual conceptualization of the news piece, which is then to be transmitted to an audience. The final process is priming, which makes concepts reported on by the media more easily accessible mentally, since it is fresh in the audience’s mind (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Essentially priming, “occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks” (p. 11).

Specific to the current inquiry, one of the areas on which the media has had the largest impact has been the level of fear associated with rampage school shootings. Since the majority of people will not directly experience a school shooting due to the rarity of the event, it is likely that the individual will gain information about the phenomenon directly through the consumption of media reports (Herda-Rapp, 2003; Muschert, 2007a).
For instance, despite the rarity of rampage school shootings, as well as the rarity of being killed at school by any type of school shooting (Anderson et al., 2001; Muschert, 2007a), students across the nation became more likely to miss school after Columbine occurred (Brener, Simon, Anderson, Barrios, & Small, 2002). As mentioned previously, 19 out of the 31 incidents occurred prior to 1999. However, those incidents did not have the impact on fear or school attendance that the Columbine High School shooting had, as evidenced by the impact the event had on policy (Mongan & Walker, 2012; Skiba & Peterson, 1999), school dress codes (Ogle & Eckman, 2002), and fear of attending school (Addington, 2003; Stretsky & Hogan, 2001). It would not be unrealistic to argue that the extensive media coverage that occurred during the actual incident acted as a catalyst for planting the seed of fear within students throughout the United States. Vulnerability is connected to fear associated with crimes (Koomen, Visser, & Stapel, 2006; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981), and the media can aide in the construction of that fear by bringing the phenomenon closer to individuals who would not directly experience rampage school shootings. This can also be seen by the increase in fear (Addington, 2003; Stretsky & Hogan, 2001) after a rampage school shooting despite the extremely rare occurrence of the phenomenon (Muschert, 2007a).

The Columbine school shooting has been described as a symbol of fear in today’s primary and secondary schools (Altheide, 2009; Burns & Crawford, 1999). It incurred the highest number of causalities of any primary or secondary-school rampage school shooting, which has previously been identified as a reason for the extensive coverage it received (Muschert & Carr, 2006). The degree of violence in an incident impacts decisions about the amount and type of news coverage that will occur (Maguire,
Weatherby, & Mathers, 2002); or put another way, “if it bleeds, it leads” (Cooper & Rotor, 2000). It has been argued that this intense coverage and the necessity of boiling down a phenomenon into sound bites due to time and space constraints has also led to a general misunderstanding of the phenomenon (McIntyre, 2003).

Media accounts on social issues like rampage school shootings can be misleading due to the various confounding perpetration factors that they discuss (Hagan, Hirschfield, & Shedd, 2002), which is troubling since, “Journalism [is] frequently described as the first draft of history” (p. 221). The framing of those causal factors associated with school shootings can impact public perception (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Herda-Rapp, 2003), which in turn can lead to public policy changes. As Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) wrote, “we often gauge the quality of democratic government by the responsiveness of public policymakers to the preferences of the mass public” (p. 1). Therefore, if public perception shifts in regards to a specific social issue, policymakers are not far behind with the drafting of additional policies and laws designed to address that social issue. A prime example of this can be seen with rampage school shooting research. After 1999, which was the worst year for rampage school shooting fatalities, several studies were ordered by Congress, and included Vossekull et al.’s (2001) research. Vossekull et al. (2001) focused on understanding the phenomenon of school shootings in order to provide schools with the tools necessary to prevent them from occurring (i.e. Safe School Initiative).

As previously noted, media framing is a way an issue is constructed and transmitted for public consumption. With rampage school shootings the average life expectancy of a newsworthy item has been shown to be about one month (Chyi &
McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006), with the media changing frames frequently to maintain its newsworthiness (Consalvo, 2003; Leavy & Maloney, 2009; Muschert, 2009). For example, Muschert (2009) noted that initially the media coverage of Columbine focused on the event itself, but over time changed to discussion about, “the future societal import of Columbine” (p. 169). He goes on to note that it is likely due to the desire to maintain the event’s salience. Although, with a high profile incident such as Columbine, it is likely that the salience of the event will continue until another newsworthy event draws attention away from it.

The sensationalized focus on the incidents and the perpetrators has led to a greater amount of coverage being dedicated to the shooters, and less coverage for the memorials of the victims (Spencer & Muschert, 2009). This continual and intense focus on the perpetrators, especially Harris and Klebold (the Columbine shooters), turned them “into the celebrities they ostensibly hoped to become and turned America’s suburban youth into an exotic new species to be observed, feared, hated, and controlled” (Frymer, 2009, p. 1389). Since this type of school shooting is perpetrated by an individual attempting to make some symbolic statement (Mongan & Otis, 2012), the historical tendency to transform school shooters such as those from Columbine into “celebrities” may serve to increase the possibility that potential future school shooters may seek to typify this type of behavior (Frymer, 2009, p. 1389). This phenomenon undergirds Newman et al.’s (2004) discussion of cultural scripts, which are typified responses for certain situations (i.e. rampage school shooting for powerless, marginalized youth). In other words, the potential for media to provide school shooters with a platform from which to make their
statement, and subsequently become notorious for that statement, has the capacity to lead to copycat shootings.

There were punitive policies in place to address weapons in school prior to the Columbine school shooting (i.e. The Gun Free Schools Act, 1994). According to Mongan and Walker (2012) the original intent of the Gun Free Schools Act (1994) was to help create a safe environment at school so students would not have to be exposed to violence in every environment in their lives. However, this policy was not originally aimed to prevent rampage school shootings, but was directed towards the inner-city (i.e. urban) school violence that was prevalent during that time (Mongan & Walker, 2012). It was not until after the rampage school shootings of the 1990s, especially the Columbine High School shooting, that the policy resurged and began to be more strictly enforced in rural schools as well (Mongan & Walker, 2012). The rampage school shootings of the 1990s shifted national attention away from inner city schools and towards rural and suburban schools, which previously had not been associated with extreme school violence (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). This shift in national attention due to these high profile incidents, “led to the widespread adoption of so-called zero tolerance discipline policies” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 372), and other punitive policies aimed at thwarting future attacks (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Lawrence & Birkland, 2004; Muschert, 2007b; Redding & Shalf, 2001). A major issue with this punitive approach is that it may paradoxically promote violence in schools (Noguera, 1995). As Mongan and Walker (2012) noted in their theoretical examination of zero tolerance policies:

…as can be seen from the school shooting in Springfield, Oregon, an expulsion may actually serve as a stressor which can result in a more extreme form of
violence. The perpetrator of the school shooting in Springfield, Oregon had been expelled before the shooting, and his expulsion has been connected to the shooting as a possible stressor preceding the event. (p. 238)

In addition to impacting broad national policy, rampage school shootings have also shifted judicial decisions towards the direction of punishing nearly every threat without assessing the validity of the threat (Stanner, 2006). Stanner (2006) notes in his analysis of judicial responses to school threats that the overly punitive response without the use of threat assessment tools (for example see Cornell et al., 2004; Reddy et al., 2001) may actually increase the risk of a rampage school shooting (Mongan & Walker, 2012). For example, the shooters from the Red Lake, MN, and Springfield, OR shootings were both expelled prior to their attacks on the school. Kip Kinkel’s (shooter from Springfield, OR) expulsion prior to his attack has even been attributed as a trigger for his rampage on May 21, 1998 (Sanchez, 1998).

Several solutions to these problems have been proposed in the literature. First, the current state of court opinions and policy is that mens rea (i.e. intent to commit a crime) is not required to remove a child permanently or temporarily from the school environment. Instead, all that is currently needed to exclude a student from school (i.e. expulsion) is strict liability, which amounts to the student being found in possession of the contraband. Therefore, the requirement of this foundational piece of American law, mens rea, would encourage school districts and judges to follow through in determining validity of the threat (Mongan & Walker, 2012; Stanner, 2006).

Another solution is the universal adoption of the threat assessment tool that was developed by Reddy et al. (2001). The idea behind the development of the tool was that
every threat needs to be taken seriously, but that every threat is not created equal. Some threats are simply more severe than others. Stanner (2006) noted that the use of a threat assessment tool would provide a judge with a means for assessing intention, as well as having a standard by which to judge a threat. Mongan and Walker (2012) also noted that the use of a threat assessment tool would essentially increase the effectiveness of school safety and disciplinary measures. It would provide disciplinary decision makers with a tool for supporting the decision they make regarding punishing a student, which is critical due to the long-term consequences for expulsion.

**Precipitating Factors.** The scholarly literature on rampage school shootings also includes articles that primarily discuss precipitating factors. These articles can take the form of case studies, correlation discussion (i.e. media violence with the attack), or theoretical discussion that attempts to explain the perpetrator(s) actions. However, the common thread is that they all attempt to add a piece to the puzzle of understanding exactly what causes students to go on a rampage in their own school, and can roughly be broken down into discussion surrounding personal or family factors, community factors, and national or cultural factors. To date, the vast majority of social scientific literature has focused on national or cultural factors, with very little scholarly attention being given to the role of the perpetrator or their family in the events.

Researchers from various disciplines have attempted to piece together a coherent picture of the phenomenon with numerous and often confounding factors contributing to the discussion. Roth and Mehta (2002) noted that this discussion of confounding factors is likely due to three issues that arise when attempting to gather information about perpetrators of rampage school shootings. They note that “memory”, “vested interest”,
and “mistaken judgments” often confound the ability to gather meaningful information about rampage school shooters (p. 143). Memory was described as the difficulty for people to actually remember specific things, especially about the perpetrator, before the tragedy occurred. Roth and Mehta (2002) described “vested interest” as the tendency for some people to, “protect the professional status or personal reputation of themselves or others, or were attempting to sway the outcome of the research” (p. 143), whereas they describe “mistaken judgments” as reports that occur when, “respondents honestly think that they know something but are mistaken” (p. 143).

For those reasons previously mentioned, the discussion of perpetration factors appears to seldom do more than describe the incidents, further supporting the degree of freedom problem as pointed out by Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002). Kleck (1999) summarized the issue of numerous conflicting factors well when he described the factors associated with the phenomenon, as well as how it is possible for these events to occur, and what general deterrence strategies have been connected with rampage school shootings:

A partial list of the problems that have been blamed for the recent mass killings in schools would include: guns, "assault weapons," large-capacity ammunition magazines, lax regulation of gun shows; the failure of parents to secure guns, school cliques, and the exclusion of "outsiders"; bullying and taunting in schools, especially by high school athletes; inadequate school security, especially a lack of metal detectors, armed guards, locker searches, and so forth; excessively large high schools; inadequate monitoring of potentially violent students by schools; lazy, uninvolved Baby Boomer parents and correspondingly inadequate
supervision of their children; young killers not being eligible for the death penalty; a lack of religion, especially in schools; violent movies and television; violent video games; violent material and communications on the World Wide Web/Internet (including bomb-making instructions); anti-Semitism, neo-Nazi sentiments, and Hitler worship; "Industrial" music, Marilyn Manson's music, and other "dark" variants of rock music; Satanism; "Goth" culture among adolescents; and Southern culture. (p. 60)

As can be seen from this partial list, numerous factors have been connected to the phenomenon of rampage school shootings, each with various degrees of empirical or logical support. While the list goes past discussing factors into identifying accounts for how the incidents can occur and general deterrence for the phenomenon, it illustrates well the point that rampage school shootings have been connected to numerous perpetration factors. However, as Kleck’s (1999) list suggests, one aspect that is well established in research on this type of school shooting is that there does not appear to be a single cause for the incidents (Muschert, 2007a; Newman et al., 2004).

Although there does not appear to be a single factor that can be attributed as the main causal mechanism for rampage school shootings, there are a few factors or descriptive pieces of information that have been a part of every incident. For example, every rampage school shooter has been male (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Watson, 2007), and there has always been leakage prior to the incidents (Lester, 2006; Newman et al., 2004). The impact of masculinity on the phenomenon will be discussed in a subsequent section, but leakage is essentially the passing on of information about the attack by the perpetrator to peers, adults, or other individuals in their life before the attack occurs.
Newman et al. (2004) noticed this trend and postulated that the individuals who found out about the attacks did not intervene prior to the attacks for three main reasons: (1) code of silence, (2) inability to determine reality of threat, (3) the students’ thought that they would not be believed if they told. Newman et al. (2004) also discovered that most of the serious threats that had been averted were due to the leakage being exposed before the events could occur. Although not directly discussed in scholarly literature, it can be argued that the increased tendency of students to now expose the leakage is directly connected to the previously discussed level of fear now associated with the phenomenon, as well as the increased education on the importance of reporting threats.

**Cultural factors.** Despite some researchers calling for increased research in this area (Arcus, 2002), a large group of scholarly articles has focused on the national or cultural factors believed to be associated with rampage school shootings (e.g. gun availability, bullying, masculinity). Cultural factors associated with rampage school shootings are arguably the most divisive and controversial explanations among the general public and researchers, due to the emotions that national and political discussion about the phenomenon elicits. Therefore, many of the subsequent factors that are discussed will be constructed to include scholarly literature representing both sides of the factor. The first factor in this category that is frequently discussed is the role that violent media consumption, especially violent video games, has in the lives of rampage school shooters.

**Violent media consumption and violence.** One side of the literature addressing the impact of violent media consumption on the phenomenon of rampage school shootings argues that violent media consumption is unhealthy, has negative effects on youth, and is
possibly a causal precipitating factor for these incidents (Anderson, 2004; Cantor, 2000; Dietz & Strasburger, 1991; Paik & Comstock, 1994; Villani, 2001; Wood, Wong, & Chachere, 1991). Additionally, it has been suggested that increased media attention leads to the achievement of celebrity-status of the perpetrators, which subsequently increases the risk for copycat incidents (Sumiala & Tikka, 2011). Cantor (2000) summarizes this view succinctly when he wrote:

Research on the effects of media violence is not well understood by the general public. Despite this fact, there is an overwhelming consensus in the scientific literature about the unhealthy effects of media violence...media-violence viewing consistently is associated with higher levels of antisocial behavior, ranging from the trivial (imitative violence directed against toys) to the serious (criminal violence), with many consequential outcomes in between (acceptance of violence as a solution to problems, increased feelings of hostility, and the apparent delivery of painful stimulation to another person). Desensitization is another well-documented effect of viewing violence, which is observable in reduced arousal and emotional disturbance while witnessing violence, the reduced tendency to intervene in a fight, and less sympathy for the victims of violence. (p. 30)

Anderson (2004), who is one of the foremost researchers on the impact of violent media consumption on subsequent violence, further solidifies Cantor’s (2000) statement by saying that, “Basically, the scientific debate over whether media violence has an effect is over, and should have been over by 1975” (p. 114). He goes on to make a definitive statement that the link between violent media and violent behavior is “causal” (p. 113). Although the link most commonly addressed is the connection between playing violent
video games and perpetrating acts of violence, Kirsh (2006) postulates that even cartoon violence can lead to aggression in children. With the negative impact of violent media consumption on youth being as severe as outlined by Cantor (2000), and a possible causal mechanism for rampage school shootings, the question may be posed of why individuals continually engage in this form of entertainment despite the risks. Samuels (2000) addressed this question and suggests that the continued consumption might be because, “We are able to live through these people and have them act out our most violent desires and fantasies without even getting out of our Lazy Boy recliner” (p. 4). Essentially, the games are fun and fulfill our violent fantasies without any perceived, immediate consequences.

The theoretical arguments for how violent media consumption makes youth violent is tied to social learning theory, and the concepts of arousal, priming, and cathartic release (Bensley & van Eenwyk, 2001). Essentially, the theoretical arguments are that violent media teaches children to be violent, primes their brain to think more violently, and allows children a visceral release that they may mimic in reality in hopes of replicating the feeling of the virtual release. Grossman (1995) also touches on this topic by stating that violent media, especially violent video games, act like “training programs” (p. 315) which teach and reinforce violent behavior. Bensley and van Eenwyk’s (2001) review of the scholarly literature on violent media producing violence concluded that young children were the most likely age group to be impacted by violent media, with research involving teenage and college age individuals producing insufficient empirical support for suggesting a connection between the consumption of violent media and violent behavior.
The other side of the argument concerning violent media consumption and rampage school shootings argues that there is no causal relationship between the two variables. As discussed with the comparison case problem (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002), there is currently no way to study and compare school shooters to other boys regarding violent media consumption (Ferguson, 2008). As a result, researchers are unable to definitively state whether there is any connection between the perpetrators of rampage school shootings and violent media consumption. The Secret Service (Vossekull et al., 2001) agreed with this sentiment and noted that only 59% of the school shooters in their sample expressed an interest in violent media, with only 12% showing any substantial interest in violent video games.

In Ferguson’s (2008) argument against the connection between violent media consumption and violent behavior he goes on to state that the two most common methodologies for studying the phenomenon of media violence causing violent behavior are correlational studies and experimental studies, each of which he believes are replete with methodological errors. For example, he states that researchers have been:

Ignoring the youth-violence studies, even ignoring contradictory data from multiple studies, even ignoring contradictory data from their own studies, some social scientist have presented the research on violent games as strong, consistent, and unequivocal. In truth, it is none of those things. There is a huge gap between the effects of violent video games as presented by some social scientists and the actual scientific data on the effects of violent video games. (p. 39) Ferguson also believes that there is a publication bias (2007) and a “citation bias” (2009), which essentially means that researchers into the impact of violent media on violent
behavior have ignored studies (i.e. citations) that contradict their own hypotheses. He further postulates that the connection between the two variables is spurious and goes on to write:

Concluding that a school shooter likely played violent video games may seem prescient, but it is not. It is about as predictive as suggesting that they have probably worn sneakers at some time in the past, are able to grow facial hair, have testicles, or anything else that is fairly ubiquitous among males. (p. 41)

His argument centers around the point that nearly every male in American society plays or consumes violent media, so researchers will obviously find that male rampage school shooters entertained themselves with violent media at some time. However, since it is a characteristic of the gender, he argues that there is absolutely no research or predictive value in the connection between violent media and rampage school shootings. Glock and Kneer (2009) agree with this sentiment as their research found that the empirical connections between violent video games and aggressive behavior are confounded with there being no clear linkage.

Since research citing positive results connecting violent media consumption to violent thoughts are mostly unable to say whether violent media actually causes violent behavior, Savage (2004) attempted to answer that question and discovered that violent media did not cause or increase actual criminal behavior. Savage (2004) conducted a methodological examination of previous studies that found significant findings supporting a connection between violent media consumption and violent behavior. She noted that:
Although there are numerous positive effects evident in the table, they are concentrated among studies of least methodological relevance for studying the effect of television violence on criminally violent behavior... These include the correlational studies (which, for the most part, do not establish temporal order and have inadequate controls for spurious factors) and the prospective longitudinal studies that have, for the most part, relied on peer nominated aggression as the outcome and that have not reported consistent significant effects based on the statistical model implied by the original design of those studies. (p. 120)

Essentially, Savage (2004) was able to state that there was not substantial empirical evidence to support the assertion there was a causal mechanism at play between violent media consumption and criminal behavior. Ferguson (2007) attempted to further discount the argument when he completed a meta-analysis in an attempt to discover the effect sizes related to publications citing a connection between violent media consumption and violence. He noticed there was a lack of reporting of this statistic in the original research projects. He found that the effect size of experimental studies often “approaches zero” (p. 472) and that the confidence interval actually “crosses zero” with many of the studies (p. 472).10

As can be seen from the literature on the impact of violent media consumption on violence, there is not agreement across researchers or studies. In regards to extremely rare and violent events such as rampage school shootings, there is even less agreement on exactly what role violent media plays on the phenomenon. However, it can be argued that part of the reason for the confusion on what role individual factors actually play in
regards to rampage school shooting may be due to the dearth of theoretical research into the phenomenon (Arcus, 2002).

*Theoretical Examination.* It could be argued that theoretical research into the phenomenon of rampage school shootings is lacking (Levin & Madfis, 2009), likely due to the issues previously discussed by Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002). However, as Arcus (2002) pointed out, there is a glaring gap in the literature addressing this critical component to understanding the phenomenon. There have been few attempts at theoretical research to date (For example, see Langman, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2009; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999, Mongan, Hatcher, & Maschi, 2009; Palermo, 1997), and most of the attempts have been vague, do not explain all of the incidents, end up just being new ways to describe the incidents without any additional theoretical insight being gained, or are unable to differentiate between the general population and perpetrators of rampage school shootings.

One of the first theoretical attempts to understand the phenomenon of rampage school shootings was completed by Palermo (1997). He believed that the phenomenon could be understood as, “the outcome of deep frustration and perceived rejection in a highly narcissistic person, wounded in his ego, hostile towards society, and in search of identity and notoriety through a cathartic self assertion” (p. 1). The entirety of Palermo’s (1997) theoretical argument is based on individual factors, with no description or accounting for the impact of community or cultural factors. The theoretical findings are further complicated due to inability of being able to differentiate shooters from non-violent citizens, and due to being unable to explain several incidents that occurred after the publication of the theory. For example, the theory is unable to explain the rampage
school shootings in Paducah, KY, Edinboro, PA, and Red Lake, MN, due to neither shooter appearing to be a “narcissistic perpetrator”.

Palermo’s (1997) theory also did not attempt to differentiate different types of mass killings, which forced him to postulate a broad theory that could encompass different phenomenon. In his research he examined a total of 49 incidents of mass murder from 1949-1995, but did not specifically discuss the idea of rampage school shootings at high school despite 11 incidents occurring from 1974 through 1995. However, he did include incidents of rampage shootings at the collegiate level. The problem with that approach is that he ended up with a product that was unable to explain the different individual phenomenon that made up his sample, and instead explained a subset of examples of each category.

The next major theoretical attempt to explain rampage school shootings was completed by McGee and DeBernardo (1999). They postulated that there was a profile for these types of shooters that would aide in increasing understanding of the phenomenon. The strongest critique of this approach is that it has been subsequently established in scholarly research that there is not a profile for rampage school shooters, and that any use of a profile may be dangerous to students who are already on the fringe of school culture (O’Toole, 2000; Reddy et al., 2001; Vossekull et al., 2001). However, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) wrote that family factors provide a wealth of information about the profile they were postulating, and can be compared to incidents as a form of a test for the profile. They wrote that:

Family background and relationships are often quite dysfunctional…Parents are at risk for becoming the Classroom Avenger’s first victims. Explicit or covert anger
and hostility are prevailing emotions in the family…Discipline is overly harsh and applied inconsistently…relatives may be mentally ill, personality disorder, or a substance abuser…the weapon used in the shooting spree almost always comes from home. (p. 1)

There are several problems with this theoretical approach to understanding rampage school shootings. First, the profile is unable to explain several of even the high profile incidents of the phenomenon. For example, the shooters in Columbine, CO, Paducah, KY, Jonesboro, AR, and many others did not kill or injure their family members, and many of them had home lives that were void of what McGee and DeBernardo (1999) postulated (i.e. Columbine, CO, and Paducah, KY). The theory also suffers due to not providing the reader with a way to differentiate the population they are describing from the general public since the characteristics they discussed are not unique to only rampage school shooters. However, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) were the first researchers to separate these types of shootings and attempt to understand the phenomenon from a more theoretical level. They also undertook their research before many of the higher profile incidents occurred, thus leaving them with a smaller sample from which to derive their theory.

The next group of studies was completed after the Columbine school shooting due to political pressure to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. The Secret Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as the Department of Education jointly undertook the charge of pulling together their resources to study how this type of school shooting could occur. Although a threat assessment tool and better understanding of the social issue arose out of these government studies (Reddy et al., 2001), the studies
did not proceed far enough to be classified as an attempt to theoretically understand the phenomenon. However, those studies did provide a tool for assessing threats that have been leveled towards a school, which has been examined for validity as well as field tested (for example see Cornell et al., 2004; Wetterneck, Sass, & Davies, 2005).

Schiele (2001) also attempted a theoretical examination of rampage school shootings from an Afrocentric perspective, and postulated that the phenomenon could be understood through three factors: masculinity, “spiritual alienation”, and “concerns over maintaining white privilege” (p. 254). Although he touched on at least two factors which have been associated with the phenomenon (i.e. gender and race), rampage school shootings have also been perpetrated by non-whites as well (i.e. Red Lake, MN; Bethel, AK). His theoretical attempt also lacked in its ability to describe the process that leads an individual to resort to a rampage shooting, as well as how to differentiate between students who may experience all three of the factors he discussed.

Newman et al. (2004) were the next researchers to take a leap forward in regards to proposing a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. However, they did not attempt to follow in either McGee and DeBernardo (1999) or Palermo’s (1997) footsteps, and instead postulated a set of variables that were “necessary but not sufficient” for the phenomenon to occur. They stated that in order for a rampage school shooting to occur an individual must: be marginalized and unable to alter their social position, have psychosocial issues, have cultural scripts present, not have drawn attention to himself, and have access to a gun.

The next outcrop of studies attempting to understand the phenomenon from a more theoretical perspective were published a decade after McGee and DeBernardo’s
(1999) work. These included two attempts at understanding the etiology of the attacks, and were based on the idea of cumulative strain (Levin & Madfis, 2009) and the stages of change model as proposed by DiClemente (2003) (Mongan, Hatcher, & Maschi, 2009). Both of the theoretical analyses of the phenomenon attempted to understand the processes that lead to a rampage school shooting occurring. However, neither of the attempts is able to fully specify how an individual can move from a student to a murderer, or how to differentiate between a typical student and the budding rampage school shooter.

While not a theoretical attempt at understanding rampage school shootings, Langman (2009) proposed that the phenomenon could be better understood by classifying the perpetrators into typologies. He postulated that there were three typologies of rampage school shooters: Traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic. A flaw in Langman’s (2009) argument is that he describes the three types of school shooters and proposes that those categories provide a meaningful addition to understanding the phenomenon. However, he does not provide a method for differentiating shooters from the general public that fit his typologies (i.e. traumatized). This problem with Langman’s assertion about rampage school shootings is further compounded by Langman himself, when he makes an argument supporting the need to differentiate a sample population from the general population. For example, he wrote:

Media coverage often focuses on social factors such as peer harassment and the influence of media violence. These factors, however, cannot explain school shootings. It is probably safe to say that students are picked on every day in virtually every school in the country. Thus, peer harassment is common, but school shootings are rare. Similarly, millions of adolescents play violent video
games and watch violent movies without becoming murderers. Trying to explain aberrant events by commonplace behaviors is not a productive approach. (p. 80) Langman appears to understand this problem as he also wrote that, “Many people fit these categories without committing murder” (p. 84). He goes on to note that additional factors must be examined, despite his categorization scheme being, “an important step forward in understanding them” (p. 84). Therefore, he adopts a purely descriptive characterization of the incidents, which do not provide any additional information about what makes those perpetrators unique. For example, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 1.1% of adults in the United States have schizophrenia, which was one of Langman’s (2009) categories. This amounts to over three million adult schizophrenics, yet according to the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence there is only an average of 20 rampage shootings of any type (school, workplace, etc.) per year. Therefore, Langman’s (2009) typologies may help describe specific events, but they do not move our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon forward.

Since 2009, the only theoretical attempt has been a further examination of the etiological process of rampage school shootings through a social constructionist framework based on the police evidence from the Columbine High School shooting (Mongan & Otis, 2012). While providing a conceptually clearer argument than Mongan, Hatcher, and Maschi’s (2009) etiological examination of rampage school shooting, the former relies heavily on the information from only one of the rampage school shooting incidents. For it to continue to build support, it would need to be tested against the rest of the phenomenon as well.
Masculinity. Another factor that has received a large amount of scholarly attention is the role of masculinity in rampage school shootings. The attention to this factor is likely due to all of the perpetrators of rampage school shootings being male (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Watson, 2007), with many scholars arguing that boys socialization in masculinity could be a major contributing factor in the occurrence of the phenomenon (Danner & Carmody, 2001; Klein, 2006c; Mai & Alpert, 2000; Neroni, 2000). Neroni (2000) as well as Kimmel and Mahler (2003) went so far as to write that the desire to reclaim their manhood was a major reason for the Columbine attack, and wrote about masculinity that:

It is no surprise then that boys in their adolescence – the transition between boyhood and manhood – might see violence as a way to leave their mark on the world…First, and most basically, violence acts as a signifier of masculinity; second, violence is a reaction to a loss of masculinity; and third, violence serves as the object of an economic exchange between men. (p. 256)

Due to that perceived connection between rampage school shootings and masculinity, Watson (2007) believed that there is something inherently critical in examining that connection, and wrote:

We are blaming the violent acts of these boys on ‘the easy accessibility of guns, the lack of parental supervision, the culture of peer-group exclusion and teasing, or the prevalence of media violence’…Girls have the same accessibility to guns, are exposed to the same media violence, undergo their own form of peer-group exclusion and teasing and also experience a lack of parental supervision, but are they bringing guns to school and gunning down teachers and classmates? Not
that I can see. Could it truly be that this trend among boys is emerging because they are boys? (p. 731)

With this quote, Watson (2007) is essentially reiterating the differentiation issue that has been brought up throughout this literature review. When discussing factors that may impact the phenomenon it is imperative that researchers have the ability to answer how their stated factor can differentiate between the general population and rampage school shooters.

When discussing the role of masculinity in rampage school shootings other researchers have postulated that masculinity impacts the culture of environments such as rural locations (Seaton, 2007), or may lead to an increase in the use of corporal punishment and the development of a culture of honor, which is also connected with an increase in the rate of fatalities from school shootings (Arcus, 2002; Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009). A foundational piece on the role of masculinity in the occurrence of the phenomenon revolves around the idea that masculinity provides a cultural script for violence (Tonso, 2009). As will be discussed in greater depth during the theory chapter, masculinity is a reified social object that essentially has the ability to typify violent responses in boys or men.

Availability of Guns. This factor is arguably one of the two most controversial factors frequently mentioned in the literature surrounding rampage school shootings. On one side of the argument is the belief that the easy accessibility and power of guns (Hardy, 2006; Springhall, 1999) can increase the chances and lethality of these events (Stolinsky, 1998). The other side argues that much of the connection is not based in reality, and is instead based on statistical manipulation or faulty arguments (Kleck, 2009;
Ruddell & Decker, 2005). Despite the arguments on both sides, it has been shown that the carrying of weapons on school grounds is much more prevalent than generally acknowledged (Hemenway et al., 1996; Kingery, Pruitt, & Heuberger, 1996).

The arguments supporting the connection between the availability of guns and rampage school shootings is summed up concisely by Stolinsky et al. (1998) when he wrote that:

How can anyone accept the contorted logic that lawful arms ownership has nothing to do with this tragedy, or that this is not a gun issue? The vast array of powerful firearms available to the boys [Jonesboro, AR] is remarkable. Would the carnage have been so great if the boys had been unable to gain access to the grandfather’s private arsenal? Would so many people be dead if such lethal weapons had not been in either collection? Parenthetically, it goes without saying that even a single semiautomatic weapon left loaded, unlocked, and accessible is a dangerous arsenal in itself. (p. 1375)\(^{13}\)

Springhall (1999) agrees with this argument and noted that, “In all of the recent school shootings, acquiring guns was easier than buying beer, or even petrol” (p. 627).

Wilkinson and Fagan (1996) expand on this argument by proposing that there exists a cultural script with adolescents using firearms. In other words, they are arguing that the utilization of firearms has become a viable means for achieving desired ends for children.

The other side of the gun accessibility argument does not believe that the connection between rampage school shootings and gun availability is as conceptually clear as the other side states. Ruddell and Decker (2005) sum up this argument with the assertion that the statistics related to gun possession and its impact on various social
issues may be confounded due to the propensity for advocacy groups to, “sometimes distort statistics” (p. 52). They went on to say that the connection between adolescent children and assault weapons is a constructed moral panic because, “assault weapons are seldom used or possessed by juveniles” (p. 45). Instead, handguns are the most likely weapon to be possessed by youth (Ruddell & Decker, 2005). Kleck (2009) examined the association with rampage school shooting and the argument for gun control and noted that the majority of weapons used in those types of incidents are stolen\textsuperscript{12}, but after every event the call for gun control starts anew.

**Bullying and Harassment.** Another factor that has received an increased amount of attention due to rampage school shootings is the effects that peer bullying and harassment has on the school environment (Safran, 2007). Despite the frequency of bullying in schools (Safran, 2007) researchers have come to the realization that it, “has negative short-term and long-term consequences for all those involved” (Burgess, Garbarino, & Carlson, 2006, p. 3). In regards to rampage school shootings, researchers have noted that shooters were frequently bullied, harassed, or “socially rejected” (Harter, Low, & Whitesell, 2003; Klein, 2006a; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003, p. 210; Reuter-Rice, 2008). Another possible connection with bullying and harassment that has been discussed is the size of school and the impact that school size has on an individual’s fit within a school environment (Kaiser, 2005). Essentially, if a student does not fit within the school environment, there is a greater likelihood of harassment being directed towards that student. Even if there was no immediate evidence of bullying in specific incidents the media often quickly blames this factor, especially in the Columbine incident (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003).
Two forms of bullying that are most frequently connected with the phenomenon of rampage school shootings are social exclusion due to the school hierarchy (Klein, 2006b), and “gay baiting” (Klein, 2006a). As discussed previously with Kimmel and Mahler’s (2003) work, the type of bullying known as “gay baiting” is heavily connected to the impact of masculinity on rampage school shootings. The impact of school hierarchies and peer groups on rampage school shootings is frequently discussed (Fox & Harding, 2005; Sandler & Alpert, 2000a; Thompson & Kyle, 2005; Tonso, 2002). Newman et al. (2004) discussed this factor and even listed social marginalization as one of the components that must be present in order for a rampage school shooting to occur.

**Individual, family, and miscellaneous factors.** As previously mentioned, the vast majority of scholarly articles that discuss precipitating factors discuss national or cultural issues (Strauss, 2007). The few exceptions to this are the discussion of agency as an individual factor, and research into risk factors that explore individual or family characteristics that may increase the likelihood of an individual perpetrating a rampage school shooting. Essentially, most scholarly literature focuses on national or cultural factors, and agency is one of the only individual factors that is discussed in scholarly literature.

**Agency.** Agency has been referred to as the idea of free will (Strauss, 2007), but can be better understood as the view of, “persons as free to choose their actions with a focus on the proximate actor… rather than more distal agents” (p. 812). Cook (2000) proposed that rampage school shootings can be understood as an act of agency, and Thompson and Kyle (2005) proposed that the incidents occur because a lack of moral philosophy development within an individual. Some have also proposed that the...
shooter’s feelings of shame and rage were the driving force (Spiegol & Alpert, 2000), or an internal evil component of an individual’s mind was to blame for the shooting (Martinez, 2009). Yet others have described rampage school shootings as a shooter’s expression of, “suicidal hostile intentions” (Preti, 2008, p. 544).

**Risk Factors.** The other way that the role of the perpetrator or his family in rampage school shootings is discussed is the attempt to examine risk factors within that individual or family that predisposed the perpetrators to extreme violence (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000; Vossekull et al., 2001). These approaches provide descriptions of the shooters, but do not provide a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. Their utility is mostly in assessing a threat that has already been leveled at a school (for example see Cornell et al., 2004; Wetterneck, Sass, & Davies, 2005).

**Response Literature.** The third category of scholarly literature covering rampage school shootings deals with systemic responses to the incidents. Responses consist of how schools and communities immediately respond following a rampage school shooting. This can range from how police respond to armed intruders at schools, to how the media properly responds to a community grieving due this type of tragedy. Of the four categories covered in this literature review, this category had the least amount of articles. The articles in this category mostly focused on the need for tactical plans, the response of the media to rampage school shootings, how individuals or the community grieved with the tragedy that occurred in their community, and policies immediately instituted because of the incidents.

**Tactical Plans.** In a similar manner of schools’ adoption of crisis plans in response to the potential threat of a nuclear attack during the Cold War, rampage school
shootings illustrated the need for school districts and surrounding agencies to develop and practice tactical plans to address the rare chance that an event would occur in their district (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Collison et al., 1987; Fein & Isaacson, 2009; Jimerson, Brock, & Pletcher, 2005; Nordberg, 1999a; Rosenbarger, 2001). A key component is the need for response teams to rapidly respond to these types of incidents (Kelley, 1998). An example of the importance of this can be seen with the Columbine High School shooting that occurred on April 20, 1999.

While rampage school shootings had occurred prior to April 20, 1999, many agencies were unsure of how to proceed with a school shooting. After the event, the tactical response to the Columbine rampage school shooting was criticized and even the police noted they were unsure of how to address the situation:

The Colorado police say that because of the confusion at the scene -- fire alarms going off, water pouring down from sprinklers, gunfire, bombs, screaming students and wounded victims -- the first officers to arrive did not immediately know how to proceed. (Egan, 1999, p. A25)

Egan (1999) went on to note that the SWAT teams did operate according to their training, but also noted that they were trained more specifically for terroristic situations, and did not have much experience with this type of event. After the event it was noted that, “the Columbine shootings were likely to prompt changes in how the teams are trained” (Egan, 1999, p. A25).

Bender and McLaughlin (1997) added to the literature that indicated there was a need to improve school districts use of tactical plans by proposing a set of guidelines for school staff to respond to specific types of weapon violence that could occur at school.
Their work was unique in that it appeared early in the resurgence of rampage school shootings that occurred in the 1990s, and many of their proposals are still in use today. For example, they noted that in the case of “explosive violence”, which is described as incidents similar in nature to a rampage school shootings, several steps should be taken by school staff if possible. They wrote:

In this type of explosive situation, beyond commonsense self defense, very little can be done. You should certainly find cover and defend yourself and your students as best you can. Shut and lock the door if you hear gunfire elsewhere, and remain back from windows. Have the students hit the floor and seek whatever additional shelter the room may provide. Shut the blinds if possible, and if phone communications between your room and the office or outside are available, use them to report what you heard. (p. 214-215)

Bender and McLaughlin’s (1997) ideas about taking cover, locking the door, shutting the blinds, and maintaining communication are all fundamental aspects of the lockdown procedures that can be seen at mock drills conducted by school districts across the nation. However, one of the more controversial ideas proposed by Bender and McLaughlin (1997) was the idea that school staff, not necessarily police, may negotiate with a hostage taker. For example, they wrote, “A major issue—whether or not teachers should negotiate with hostage takers—is still an open question” (p. 214). While they acknowledge that the debate on whether school staff should proceed with hostage negotiation was not yet decided, they still provided a guideline for school staff to negotiate with hostage takers (for example see p. 213).
Another component of the tactical plan is the importance of medical teams to address the casualties of rampage school shootings. By nature, the phenomenon almost always leads to numerous victims having grievous wounds and needing immediate medical care. Moskovitz (1999) recognized this and noted the importance for communities to have a medical response team that would be able to respond rapidly. Kim et al. (2010) agreed with this sentiment, but reported that the medical response to rampage school shootings needs to continue to work on how to effectively handle mass trauma incidents.

The ability to handle these types of traumatic events can also lead to an influx of individuals, including members of the response teams, who experience psychiatric distress because of the shootings (Fein & Isaacson, 2009; Nordberg, 199b; Schwarz, Kowalski, & McNally, 19993; Sloan, Rozensky, Kaplan, & Saunders, 1994; Stein, 2006). Therefore, it has been argued that increased attention needs to focus on exactly how to effectively engage and respond to post-event mental health treatment (Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008; Hasz & Regardie, 2002; Roberts, 2006).

**Media responses to rampage school shootings.** Due to their extreme nature and the intensity involved in the incidents, reactions to rampage school shootings are frequently, “emotionally-charged” (Burns & Crawford, 1999, p. 149), especially in the media. The nature of the phenomenon provides an open canvas for the media to sensationalize the events, which likely increases ratings or sells their product. However, that propensity to sensationalize stories involving rampage school shootings has led to a backlash with many people both inside and outside of the journalism profession challenging their colleagues to engage in responsible journalism (Casey, 1999; Neuner,
Hübner-Liebermann, Hajak, & Housner, 2009; Prato, 1999; Robertson, 1999; Thomas, 1999). While not directly referring to rampage school shootings, Dan Rather (2012) released an opinion piece that called upon irresponsible journalists to examine exactly how their reporting might further exacerbate the phenomenon about which they are reporting. For example, as discussed in Mongan and Otis (2012) rampage school shooters are attempting to make a statement through their actions. If they are provided a forum in which to make their statement, it does not discourage possible rampage school shooters in the future from attempting to make their own statement. This can be clearly seen with the Columbine school shooting as the perpetrators from that shooting became “celebrities” within a subgroup of marginalized youth (Frymer, 2009, p. 1389). It can also be seen by the number of references back to that incident every time a similar rampage shooting occurs anywhere in the world.

Other researchers have even suggested that there is a possible copycat effect when a perpetrator of a rampage school shooting is allowed a stage from which to make a statement from. For example, Kostinsky, Bixler, and Kettle (2001) found that bomb threats increased in Pennsylvania, following the rampage shooting that occurred at Columbine High School in Colorado.

Another type of media response that can follow these types of events is the altering of entertainment in the nation (McConnell, 2000). For example, according to McConnell (2000), episodes from television shows such as The Promised Land and Buffy the Vampire Slayer were altered or canceled because of specific rampage school shootings. This impact has even been shown to continue into the following season of television shows (Forman, 2004).
**Grieving Process.** A portion of the scholarly literature covering the responses to rampage school shootings discussed the grieving process for individuals and the community (Bingham et al., 2009), or were case studies for how specific communities coped with the tragedies (Dunn-Kenney, 2008; Gaschen, 2004; Karaim, 2001).

The extreme nature of rampage school shootings not only impacts individuals, but also affects the entire community. Therefore, after the incident is completed and after the media leaves a community, the community still has to figure out a way to cope with the tragedy that occurred. Mears (2008) suggested that creating a narrative for the community may aide in the grieving process, whereas Bingham et al. (2009) noted that the process of memorialization may also allow a community to cope with the tragedy that occurred.

The mass school shooting in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania provides another example for the way a community can cope with the aftermath of a school shooting. Although not an instance of a rampage school shooting, the grieving strategy could also apply to any of the other categories of school shooting. The Amish community from Nickel Mines chose the act of forgiveness for the perpetrator after the shooting, which was extremely difficult for those outside the community to grasp (Kasdorf, 2007; Showalter, 2007). Kasdorf’s (2007) case study regarding the incident examined how the Amish handled the mass school shooting with forgiveness. Kasdorf described the way the community interacted with the perpetrator’s family as follows:

I think there's compassion for his wife, for his children, and great sadness that he [Roberts] did what he did, that he couldn't cope with his own life. That day it was reported that Amish leaders asked the Mennonite Disaster Service and Mennonite
Central Committee to manage unsolicited financial contributions, establishing funds for the victims and their families as well as for the gunman's widow and children. That evening, Dwight Lefever, a minister and friend of the Roberts family and their media spokesman, said he was at the home of Roberts's father when an Amish neighbor visited. He stood there for an hour, and he held that man in his arms, and he said, 'We will forgive you’… His wife [Roberts] had received invitations to the slain girls' funeral services, which were held at the homes of the deceased. That day an aunt and neighbor of Roberts's wife told USA Today that her only comfort came from the kindness shown to her by the Amish families, ‘They told us there were no hard feelings, that all was forgiven’. (p. 333)

This response by the Amish after a mass school shooting is not generally how communities who have experienced school shootings respond. However, it has been argued that the community healing process after tragedies like rampage school shootings has often brought communities closer together (Schwarz, Kowalski, & McNally, 1993).

**Policy Responses.** The final general category of response articles examines the policy responses immediately following rampage school shootings. Frequently, the popular policy responses to the phenomenon can be viewed as reactionary (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Mongan & Walker, 2012; Pride, 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Snell, Bailey, Carona, & Mebane, 2002; Stanner, 2006). These reactionary policies range from limiting the clothes students are allowed to wear at school (Ogle & Eckman, 2002) to zero tolerance policies in schools (Mongan & Walker, 2012).

Another unique policy consideration that appeared following rampage school shootings, such as the one in Jonesboro, Arkansas, was the role of the consideration of a
perpetrator’s age in subsequent legal proceedings (Foster, 2000). In other words, determining how the state will proceed with trials involving adolescents after a rampage school shooting. Will they be tried as an adult, or as a juvenile? With the perpetrators’ from the Jonesboro, AR shooting, they were tried as juveniles, and ended up being released when they turned 21. Foster (2000) was critical of a blanket approach to prosecuting these perpetrators in juvenile court, and suggested that additional research was needed. However, in his critique he warned that:

In choosing to place less responsibility on the shoulder of the juvenile offender, we are placing the leftover responsibility upon ourselves. The question is whether this allocation of blame is serving the goals of both specific and general deterrence protecting society, and whether it is effecting rehabilitation. Scenarios such as Essex Junction, Vermont, and Jonesboro, Arkansas, indicate a negative answer. (p. 559)

Prevention Literature. The final category of scholarly literature on rampage school shootings discussed the prevention of the phenomenon, and consisted of substantially fewer articles than the precipitating factors category. This area of the literature generally separates into discussion regarding the local environment of the family, school, and community, as well as national prevention.

Local Environment Prevention. The first group of scholarly literature addressing prevention of rampage school shootings discussed the importance of the local environment, but the discussion varied depending on whether the authors were discussing the family, school, or community environment. However, one of the common threads throughout this category of literature was the call for continued research, practice, and
monitoring of proven interventions and prevention strategies (Addington, 2009; Fredland, 2008; Peterson, Larson, & Skiba, 2001). This is due to the acknowledgement that there are currently no established best practices for preventing this type of school violence (Guerra, Boxer, & Cook, 2006), and that more work needs to be done to establish intervention strategies (Williams, Rivera, Neighbors, & Reznik, 2007). Despite the lack of evidence-based practices available for schools to utilize, researchers argue that prevention must be centered at the individual level as well as on creating a “safe and secure” environment (Daniels et al., 2009, p. 86; Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001; Newman et al., 2004; Perry, 1999).

Much like the discussion of causal factors, there was hardly any discussion on the importance of individuals or family members in the prevention of rampage school shootings. A few argued that family (Allen, 2008; Brantley, Barron, & Hicks, 2008; Hudson, Windham, & Hooper, 2005), moral or value development (Sanchez, 2005), and spiritual factors should not be overlooked when attempting to prevent the phenomenon from occurring again (Windham, Hooper, & Hudson, 2005). Prevention efforts would further be aided by addressing social aggression and “breaking down codes of silence” that exist in the school environment (Stone & Isaacs, 2002; Sweazy & Thorp, 2010; Wike & Fraser, 2009, p. 162), since they are seen as key prevention pieces for school shootings.

Many of the prevention articles explored prevention methods that directly related to the author(s) underlying assumption about what causes the events. For example, several authors proposed that bullying needs to be addressed if these events are to be prevented (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008; Spivak & Prothrow-Smith, 2001).
This outwardly appears to be a viable way to explore prevention. However, a criticism of these types of scholarly articles is that they use the phenomenon as a starting platform to discuss their prevention methods, but rarely focus specifically on the phenomenon or how their prevention will actually prevent their occurrence. For example, Diamanduros, Downs, and Jenkins (2008) mentioned school shootings in their abstract and wrote, “Unfortunately, the impact of bullying has also made contemporary headlines with the recent rash of school shootings and other forms of school-based violence” (p. 693). They go on to address the need for bullying prevention, but never mention the phenomenon again throughout the article. Essentially, many authors who address prevention by just discussing one perceived causal factor frequently attach their discussion to the phenomenon without providing a conceptually concise argument for how to directly address the phenomenon. The exception to this rule is a group of articles that discuss the need for curriculum and programs that could prevent rampage school shootings from occurring. This includes arguments for the improvement of social skill training (Bullis, Walker, & Sprague, 2001), curriculums for violence prevention (Chaney, Hunt, & Schulz, 2000; Hollingshead, Crump, Eddy, & Rowe, 2009; Shackford, 2003), and programs directed towards violence prevention (Aronson, 2004; Debates & Bell, 2006; Evans & Rey, 2001; Peterson & Skiba, 2000), anti-bullying training (Tomei & Piecka, 2005), and peer mediation (Rowicki & Marin, 1994). Essentially these authors are proposing that it is imperative that students and school staff work together for extreme violence prevention (Bliss, Emshoff, Buck, & Cook, 2006; Hazler, 1998).

A large part of working to make sure that students and staff work together centers around identifying who Bender, Shubert, and McLaughlin (2001) term as “invisible kids”
(p. 108). They noted that there are three areas that schools can improve upon, which will help to identify marginalized youth who may be in need of additional school support. They propose that it is these “invisible kids” who are the perpetrators of school shootings, and suggest that students and staff must: pay attention to “warning lists”, engage in “peer screening”, and utilize “teacher discussions” (p. 108-109). While there are numerous warnings about profiles and “warning lists” (for example see Reddy et al., 2001), Bender, Shubert, and McLaughlin (2001) were attempting to make the argument that schools must be attentive to their students, the student environment, and must be proactive in addressing the needs of students as they appear (Augustyniak, 2005; Osterman, 2003).

Another aspect of prevention is having disciplinary plans (Simonson, Sugai, & Negron, 2008), as well as exploring and correcting the reasons that students do not intervene in the process of extreme school violence prevention (Stueve et al., 2006; Wilson-Simmons et al., 2006). This may be done by removing beliefs by the students that a rampage school shooting could never happen in their community (Chapin & Coleman, 2006). In other words, there is a need to help students realize the importance in taking every peer threat seriously.

**National prevention.** The other level of prevention that scholarly articles address is at the national level, and frequently involves policy development and implementation. Arguably the best example of this was the development and implementation of zero tolerance policies across the United States, which politicians hoped would prevent rampage school shootings from occurring (Mongan & Walker, 2012). However, it has been argued that zero tolerance policies are likely not the best policies for preventing future occurrences of this phenomenon (Fredland, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 1999;
Stanner, 2006), and that such policies have the potential to actually increase short term risk for schools due to the possibility of a quick expulsion being a trigger for a rampage school shooting (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Possible policy alternatives were discussed by Redding and Shalf (2001) when they proposed the implementation of policies to address inter-agency communication and evidenced based disciplinary procedures in schools.

Another group of national prevention articles that bridge the gap between national prevention efforts and local environmental prevention is the push for assessing risk and threats in schools. Risk assessment may aide in identifying youth who pose the greatest risk of extreme violence (Borum, 2000; Glick, Hirshbein, Patel, & Hughes, 2004; Halikias, 2004; Wetterneck, Sass, & Davies, 2005). After a threat, the use of threat assessment may help school districts respond to threats in an appropriate manner that does not put the school in further risk (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Daniels, 2002; Mongan & Walker, 2012; Sacco & Larsen, 2003; Twemlow et al., 2002; Weisbrot, 2008), and provides the legal system with an effective measure for determining the severity of a threat by a juvenile (Stanner, 2006).

Arguably the most substantial effort in examining the possible use of risk assessment and threat assessment was completed by Reddy et al. (2001), when they explored the theoretical effectiveness of four techniques in preventing rampage school shootings: using profiles, clinical judgment, risk assessment, and threat assessment.

An initial argument of Reddy et al.’s (2001) was that rampage school shootings were substantively different than other forms of school violence, and even other adolescent homicides:
Students at risk for targeted violence may or may not possess many of the traditional risk factors associated with general violence recidivism and delinquency in youth. The etiology and intervention for targeted violence may differ substantially from more general forms of aggressive behavior in youth…compared with juveniles who were referred for evaluation after committing larceny, juveniles who were referred for evaluation after committing homicide were less likely to have prior mental histories, less likely to have a history of prior arrests or placement in a juvenile facility, and less likely to have had problems with school adjustment. Youth convicted of homicide were less likely to have histories of prior violent behavior than were juveniles convicted on assault charges…Youth who commit acts of targeted school violence may differ substantially not only from juveniles who engage in nonviolent delinquency but also from other juveniles who engage in different types of homicide. (p. 160)

As can be seen from the above quote, Reddy et al. (2001) utilized the term “targeted school violence” in place of rampage school shooting, although most of the incidents they discussed were later identified as rampage school shootings. This is in part due to the definition that is mostly currently used for this category of school shooting not being developed and published until Newman et al.’s Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings (2004). However, in their assessment, Reddy et al. (2001) realized that the difference between various categories of school shootings was substantial enough that response and prevention efforts should take that difference into account when exploring how a school should respond to a threat.
The first method for addressing rampage school shootings that was explored by Reddy et al. (2001) was the use of profiles, which they vehemently argued was not effective, and was potentially harmful and dangerous:

Finally, use of prospective profiling in schools has received extensive criticism from those the approach is designed to benefit, including parents, students, and even the Secretary of Education…This criticism has focused primarily on the risk of unfairly labeling students as dangerous and the potential for stigmatizing them and depriving them of their civil liberties… Criticism has also focused on the potential for profiling to produce bias, particularly bias against students who differ from the majority… (p. 163)

The second and third options explored by Reddy et al. (2001) were clinical judgment and risk assessment. They argued that professional judgment, “is currently inappropriate for evaluating risk of targeted school violence” (p. 169). Here again the authors utilized the term “targeted school violence” to describe instances of rampage school shootings. The risk assessment that the authors discussed in their article was an automatic threat assessment as completed by a computer, or by an assessor in an as objective manner as humanly possible, not the tools that were developed by Vossekull et al. (2001). They found that this method was also undesirable as, “there is a risk the user may discount their own knowledge of the student in question and rely primarily, if not solely, on the computer-generated decision instead” (p. 167).

Since the three previously identified options are inappropriate, and due to the dearth of empirical research into rampage school shootings, Reddy et al. (2001) argued that the best method to currently utilize was threat assessment. A few years following
their suggestions, Cornell et al. (2004) completed a field test with the threat assessment tool and found that it was not only effective in combating school shootings, but also did not expose students to unneeded extreme punishment, which may have paradoxically served to increase the risk of a rampage school shooting in the school district (Mongan & Walker, 2012).

**Conclusion**

As can be seen throughout the review of the relevant literature on rampage school shootings, there are roughly four categories of scholarly literature. However, much of the literature is fragmented (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Muschert, 2007a), and explores various and sometimes competing aspects of the phenomenon. Also, to date, there has not been any research into the perpetration factors attributed to rampage school shootings by either scholars or by the media, which is the focus of this research project. Exploring that aspect will allow a gap in the literature to be addressed, and will provide a springboard for understanding how the phenomenon has been defined and understood by the general public.
Chapter Three: Theory

Introduction to Social Construction

This research project aimed to understand the perpetration factors that are associated with perpetration of rampage school shootings, as they are reported on by mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines) and scholarly journals. Results in and of themselves do not have much value without interpretation (Kuhn, 1962), and it is in that spirit of understanding that social constructionism is the selected theoretical framework for this research project.

Social constructionist thought and its role in this study will be subsequently discussed in several sections. First, a brief history of the roots and evolution of the theoretical paradigm will be provided. Once this foundation has been laid, the key components of social constructionist theory will be articulated and the role of the theory in the project will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of how social construction aids in understanding the process of defining a social problem, as well as how those processes can lead to the development of moral panics regarding the social issue – in this case, rampage school shootings. Finally, social construction as a bridge between the theory and the chosen methodology for the study will be discussed.

History of Social Construction

Throughout the history of social constructionist thought the theoretical framework has come to be defined in many different ways by many different scholars (Danziger, 1997; Hruby, 2001; Neimeyer & Raskin, 2001; Young & Collin, 2004). Despite the myriad of approaches, when researchers write about social construction, they are generally referring to at least one of the three main avenues, or waves, of constructionist
thought (Raskin, 2002). Essentially, the evolution of the theory can be seen in the works of Kuhn (1962), Berger and Luckmann (1967), Berger (1969), Gergen (1985), and Hruby (2001).

As discussed by Hruby (2001)\(^1\) the “first wave” (p. 51) of social constructionism arose out of the phenomenological school of thought (i.e. Schutz) and was defined by the work of Kuhn (1962), Berger and Luckmann (1967), and Berger (1969). Hruby (2001) summed up the influence of Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) contribution, as well as the beginning of the theory’s seepage into the various confounded definitions when he wrote:

…insights from the sociology of knowledge (now dubbed social constructionism, thanks to Berger and Luckmann’s title) spread to inspire theoretical variants in historical, anthropological, linguistic, literary, and psychological research. With each leap of a disciplinary boundary, however, constructionism was recontextualized and thereby reconstructed. (p. 53)

This reconstruction of the theory led into what Hruby (2001) defined as the “second wave” (p. 54) of constructionist thought. According to him, nearly all of Gergen’s work on the theory belongs to this period, which was a timeframe when the discussion of social construction began to vary from the original “sociological and empirical” nature of the theory into a more “psychological and postmodern” approach (p. 49). In one of his oft cited works, Gergen (1985) defined social construction by writing that:

Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common
forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical
periods, and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed. (p. 266)

Following Gergen’s (1985) work the theory continued to be reconstructed, “towards a
revivified realism, pragmatism, or naturalism” (Hruby, 2001, p. 56). It is especially at
this point in time when the theory became more confounded. Put another way, as the
theory continued to be defined somewhat differently by various disciplines, it became
more difficult to state with certainty that the term "social construction" meant the same
thing for different scholars. For that reason, it is important to clarify that the social
constructionist theoretical framework utilized throughout this research project draws
most heavily on the first two waves of the theory, which is based on the early work of
Kuhn (1962), Berger and Luckmann (1967), Berger (1969), Gergen (1985), and Specter

Social construction theory, as it will be referred to throughout this chapter, was
born out of the phenomenological schools of thoughts (Embree, 2009; Hruby, 2001;
Overgaard & Zahavi, 2008), but became popularized with the ideas of Kuhn (1962) and
and Luckmann’s (1967) seminal work, as well as Berger’s follow up discussion on the
social construction of religion (Berger, 1969), the guiding thesis was that human beings
construct their own reality. An important component of constructing a reality is
identifying exactly what is constructed. In social constructionist thought, these
constructed "things" can be thought of as different types of objects.
Key Components

Social objects. The world consists of objects, which are constructed, altered, and maintained by humans (Blumer, 1969). Although this is a critical component of social construction, the idea of objects is also shared with the symbolic interactionist school of thought. According to Blumer (1969), there are three types of objects: physical, social, or abstract. Physical objects consist of tangible items in the environment, such as doors, windows, and cars. Social objects are essentially the roles that we play in the social world. For example, “students, priests, a president, a mother, or a friend” are roles that are constructed and understood between two or more people (Blumer, 1969, p. 10). Therefore, they are social objects. Abstract objects are ideas, “such as moral principles, philosophical doctrines, or ideas such as justice, exploitation, or compassion” (p. 11). Essentially, Blumer (1969) was arguing that anything, “that can be indicated or referred to” (p. 11), whether or not the object is tangible, is an object.

Language. Another important concept with social constructionist thought involves the impact that language has on the spread of objects in the social world. Without language objects could not be constructed, and in order for language to have meaning those meanings must be constructed with language. Without that construction, sounds would convey no message to other people. For example, a sigh of derision is only understood as such because at some point in time an innately meaningless sound (i.e. the sigh) was attached to the socially constructed abstract idea of derision (i.e. mockery). Only after that attachment was made would the sigh of derision be understood as such. Berger and Luckmann (1967) wrote about language and experience that:
If the experience is shared by several individuals, it will be sedimented intersubjectively, may perhaps even form a profound bond between these individuals. As this experience is designated and transmitted linguistically, however, it becomes accessible and, perhaps, strongly relevant to individuals who have never gone through it. (p. 68)

In other words, language allows humans to transmit experiences to others who did not experience the same thing, making it possible for socially constructed objects to be spread more efficiently and thoroughly throughout the populace. Language also allows people to think about and internally process socially constructed objects that they experience in their daily life. Essentially, language is the backbone of social construction that allows humans to create, communicate, and understand the world around us.

With Blumer's (1969) assertion about the social construction of almost everything we encounter as humans, the question may be asked if there is anything that is not constructed, and is a natural fact. Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) argument for social construction allowed for the existence of biological facts, but postulated that every other fact is created and maintained by humans. For example, there are certain physiological facts about the human body, such as our possession of organs, hormones, and chemicals. However, the instant any meaning is attempted to be derived from those biological facts, interpretation must enter the equation, which is a social construction (Kuhn, 1962).

Social construction can be broken down into the three basic components of internalization, objectification, and externalization (Berger, 1969; Gerber, 1997). Berger and Luckmann (1967) postulated that it is impossible to determine whether internalization or externalization occurred first in human history. However, the processes
between them are inherently cyclical and symbiotic. They can occur between an individual and himself/herself, different individuals (Hollander & Gordon, 2006), communities (Guerin, 1992), or an individual and the environment (Demeritt, 2002; Gerber, 1997). For example, imagine a family that is gathered together playing a card game. Young members of the family likely grew up watching the game at family events, and through their formative years the younger family members had many instances of watching the other family members play. Through those experiences they will likely develop a general understanding of the rules. Then, possibly even without having the rules explained to them, they will be able to engage in the game without much difficulty. Subsequently, they are then able to pass their knowledge on to the next generation of children in the family. As they continue to play under the rules they learned, they further reinforce the rules for themselves, and normalize them for others. Due to the symbiotic and cyclical relationship between internalization, objectification, and externalization and since it has been postulated that it is impossible to determine whether internalization or externalization occurred first in human history (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), the subsequent separation of the components for discussion is only done to aide in understanding of the concepts. Pragmatically, it would be nearly impossible to determine where the process of internalization, objectification, or externalization end and the others began while they were actively occurring in the social world.

**Internalization.** Internalizing can be understood as the taking in of the social world. In other words, it is the method for taking in social objects from the world for internal processing. As previously mentioned, these social objects can consist of anything on a continuum between physical objects and complex abstract ideas or
philosophies. However, objects taken in during this process continuously pass through previous filters the individual has objectified (Gergen, 1985). Objectification can be identified as the process in which socially constructed objects are believed to be real, and are separated from the knowledge that they were constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For example, an individual who is already staunchly conservative will likely internalize abstract social concepts such as social welfare through conservative filters, which may include other abstract social objects such as the belief in moral hazard. In other words, that staunch conservative may feel that providing monetary resources to individuals who do not have them may actually serve to discourage them from obtaining those resources on their own. If the individual’s filters are at the point of being objectified, then any evidence that contradicts their internal filters will likely not pass through them, and will be explained away as anecdotal or faulty science.

Internalization was described by Berger and Luckmann (1967) as the process, “by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization” (p. 61). In other words, when we experience an object in the world, or experience it through language, then we “retroject”, or project, that social object back into the filters we have previously established in order to make sense of it. For example, rampage school shootings are rare enough that individuals are more likely to experience them through language (i.e. media) than through firsthand experience. Then, when the phenomenon is experienced through a secondary source, the information about the event is processed by the individual through their previously established filters or paradigms. The problem that arises with this social issue is when there are no preexisting paradigms from which to draw upon in order to explain the phenomenon. At that point, it is possible
that an individual’s perception may be able to be impacted to a greater degree by the media due to the absence of previous filters.

**Objectification.** When the point is reached where socially created objects began to be separated from the understanding that they are socially created, those objects began to be reified (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Berger & Pullberg, 1965). This is the process in which social objects transition from being viewed as constructed facts to being viewed natural facts. In other words, individuals began to see objects in their world as being inherently true, separate from their believing in them. Edles and Appelrouth (2006) described reification as:

> An extreme step in the process of objectivation, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable, inert facticity…the real relationship between man and his world is reversed in consciousness. Man, the producer of a world, is apprehended as its product, and human activity as an epiphenomenon of non-human processes. (p. 292)

Behaviors associated with waiting in line serve as an exemplar for objectification and reification. For example, in American culture people will frequently form lines, even without prompting, if a number of people are waiting for something. When asked, the people would likely report that lines are just the way things are done when people are waiting for something. In this regard, the people have forgotten that man constructed the concept of lines to meet our needs in a quicker manner, and were not due to “non-human processes” (p. 292).
When a socially constructed object becomes so enmeshed in a culture that it is objectified, continued externalization of the object becomes more apparent. The object also becomes typified and accepted within certain institutions and roles within that culture. As these processes continue in their reciprocal nature, the constructed object will continue to be reinforced and strengthened within that culture or individual.

**Externalization.** In essence, externalization is the output of socially constructed objects back into the environment. It consists of thoughts, vocalizations, behaviors, or the lack of any of the three. For example, a lack of an action can still be seen as a passive acceptance of the object upon which they are not acting. For an object to be classified as an externalization, the individual internalizing the object generally must believe the externalization is purposeful. Therefore, it must meet the previously discussed definition of an object, and with most cases, the externalizer intends to make a purposeful statement. However, the caveat with externalizations is that since reality is created within each individual, the person who is supposedly externalizing the object may not believe that they are externalizing at all, despite the individual who is internalizing the object believing that they are. It is also possible that the externalizations from one individual can be misinterpreted in the internalization processes of another. In other words, for an action to be considered symbolic, which then can be considered an externalization, it must be a purposeful behavior, thought, or vocalization for the individual externalizing (Blumer, 1969). On the other side of the equation, for the object to be successfully transmitted the internalizing individual must also believe that the object is purposeful. Therefore, it becomes possible for an individual to be seen as externalizing an object, when in their own reality they are not externalizing anything. For
example, it is possible that an individual (person A) who is entirely oblivious to their surrounding environment may not react to a crime occurring in public due to their being unaware of what is happening around them. If that crime happens to be domestic violence, a passerby (person B) who notices the individual not responding may internalize the crime as socially acceptable due to the non-response. In essence, person A is not purposefully engaged in a behavior (i.e. ignoring domestic violence), so in their reality they are not externalizing any objects. However, person B’s belief that they are engaged in a purposeful behavior means that it is an externalized object to their reality.

Externalizations frequently serve to reinforce previous objectifications for an individual and culture. Since the processes of internalization, objectification, and externalization is cyclical, they serve to solidify an individual’s reality. However, this does not mean that an individual accepts every externalization drifting around in the social world, and then subsequently objectifies it. Instead, throughout the processes of social construction, an individual installs filters which separate or translate social objects into their already constructed reality (Hruby, 2001). In other words, humans are more likely to attend to and process externalizations that fit with their current world view, while attempting to ignore, explain away, or modify externalizations that do not. For example, in recent years several states have attempted to enact legislation which made it a requirement to take a drug screen before a person could be approved for certain forms of welfare (for example see Pollack, Danziger, Jayakody, & Seefeldt, 2002). Individuals with a conservative viewpoint viewed the legislation as much needed due to their perspective that drug users who utilize social welfare represent a misuse of public resources (Associated Press, 2012), while those more associated with liberal thinking
viewed the drug screens as unconstitutional and a waste of money (Alvarez, 2012). Still others held a more moderate view that the legislation has the potential for societal benefit (Pollack, Danziger, Jayakody, & Seefeldt, 2002). Despite the spirit of the legislation remaining the same across the states that enacted the policy, different citizens viewed the meaning of the legislation entirely differently. These drastic differences in perceived reality are due to the various filters that people have installed and reinforced during the cycle of internalizations, objectifications, and externalizations throughout their lives. Also, as was illustrated with the previous example, these filters not only impact the way that we think, but the actions that stem from those thoughts as well. In social construction, this is typically referred to as the process of typification.

**Typification.** As the process of externalization becomes increasingly automatic, and involves decreasing levels of thought, the further a socially constructed object is objectified in an individual’s reality. The social object transforms into a sort of script, which guides an individual on how to act in given situations (McKinney, 1969). The impact of these scripts can vary, and either can be so ingrained into a person’s existence that the individual no longer questions or even thinks about the behavior/reaction before it occurs, or the script can simply provide a suggestion for how to respond in different situations. For people whose typifications have moved to a version of autopilot, the scripts can help with the efficiency of daily life. However, the scripts can also aide in an individual’s continued engagement in dysfunctional or delinquent behaviors, thoughts, or vocalizations.

Waiting in a line is a common and benign example of a typification that occurs daily throughout American culture, and is so engrained in societal thinking that any
deviation is strongly discouraged. When a person walks into a store or other establishment, and the location of their objective has people waiting, a line will naturally develop. Despite some confusion and the perceived anarchy related around events such as Black Friday (i.e. the day after Thanksgiving), if stores do not utilize lines, it could be strongly argued that deviation from the line paradigm would not bring about the end of civilization even if it did elicit some discomfort for the majority of people. However, it is just taken at face value and understood that a line will be the quickest method to get your needs met and will allow you to move on to your next task in the most efficient manner.

A more malevolent example of typification can be seen when examining violence and masculinity. Examples of some typified behavior connected with these concepts are “gay baiting” and other forms of homophobic violence. As Kimmel (2004) stated, “Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood” (p. 89), which indicates that the act of violence is an externalized social object which illustrates the behaviors it takes to be considered a male in society. In Wolfgang’s (1958) study of over 600 homicides he noted that,

A male is usually expected to defend the name and honor of his mother, the virtue of womanhood…his age, or his masculinity. Quick resort to physical combat as a measure of daring, courage, or defense of status appears to be a cultural expectation, especially for lower socio-economic class males of both races. (p. 188-189)

While a dated study, Wolfgang's (1958) quote still appears to be relevant in today's society, especially in regards to rampage school shootings. For example, Kalish and Kimmel (2010) noted that, " young men are socialised to embrace a set of behaviours
designed to prove or assert their masculinity, and taught to use violence, especially in response to threats against one’s manhood” (p. 457). Although the excuse is often given that “boys will be boys”, Kimmel and Messner (2000) argue that violence due to masculinity is a socially constructed object since it is not a “biological reality”, but “exists as ideology” (p. 7). Therefore, attacks on people who do not fit the stereotypical masculine mold are a typified response for both nihilating unacceptable behaviors in those individuals, and further legitimating a masculine ideal in society.

**Legitimation and Nihilation.** Through the cyclical processes of internalization, objectification, and externalization, cultural norms and institutions are established and supported (Berger, 1969; Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For those cultural components to perpetuate they must be reinforced, which in social construction is referred to as legitimation. However, it is also true that regardless of how firmly established a culture or institution is, there will always be individuals pushing the accepted boundaries, or operating outside of those previously established boundaries (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Therefore, attempts are made to either punish those individuals, or bring them back into realm of socially acceptable behavior (Shaw, 1973). Berger and Luckmann (1967) refer to this as nihilation, or the process of reverse legitimation.

Nihilation, “denies the reality of whatever phenomena or interpretations of phenomena do not fit into that (socially constructed) universe” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 132). This process can take many different forms, but always serves to support the structure of the created reality. Utilizing the previous example of violence and masculinity, “gay baiting” provides an exemplar for understanding this process.
In essence “gay baiting” is ridicule leveled at an individual who does not conform to traditional gender conventions by referring to them in homophobic terms (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Underneath that ridicule is a societal belief of what it actually means to be a man. Therefore, those males in society that do not conform to that standard are attacked, which creates an aversion to being outside acceptable masculine norms.

Kimmel and Mahler (2003) discuss this aversion when they state that:

There is much at stake for boys and, as a result, they engage in a variety of evasive strategies to make sure that no one gets the wrong idea about them (and their manhood). These range from the seemingly comic (although telling), such as two young boys occupying three movie seats by placing their coats on the seat between them, to the truly tragic, such as engaging in homophobic violence, bullying, menacing other boys, masochistic or sadistic games and rituals, excessive risk taking (drunk or aggressive driving), and even sexual predation and assault. (p. 1446)

As can be seen from the quote, the nihilistic processes can be extremely successful in altering an individual’s behavior, even to the degree of the person committing violent crimes. It would be pushing the bounds of the theory to postulate that there is a causal mechanism at play with nihilation, but a person’s fear of being thought of as outside of normalcy could serve as a motivating factor for certain typified behaviors.

Since nihilation is reverse legitimation (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), it is also important to explore the theoretical foundation for the concept. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe legitimation as the way that the socially constructed reality, “can be ‘explained’ and justified” (p. 61). Van Leeuwen (2007) reinforced this point and added
that, “Legitimation, finally, adds the answer, sometimes explicitly, sometimes more obliquely, to the question ‘Why’ – ‘Why should we do this?’ and ‘why should we do this in this way?’ (p. 93). Van Leeuwen (2007) also postulated that there are four types of legitimation: (1) authorization, (2) moral evaluation, (3) rationalization, and (4) mythopoesis. The two forms that are most intimately connected with rampage school shootings are authorization and mythopoesis.

Authorization is a type of legitimation that occurs due to the power that is granted to certain individuals. This type of legitimation can occur throughout the lifetime, but is frequently associated with children (Van Leeuwen, 2007), due to their close association with many hierarchical institutions (i.e. school). For example, a manual laborer may complete his job in a specific way due to it being the way his employer instructed him to do it. When asked why he does certain things the way he does, he would likely respond, “Because my boss said so”. Therefore, when specific individuals are looked up to because of their power or standing within a culture, they have the ability to act as a legitimizing agent for a social object. Sub-cultures or counter cultures may also possess individual(s) who have the power to legitimize certain behaviors or thoughts. For example, it could be argued that the shooters from the Columbine school shooting are legitimizing agents, since their rampage has been labeled as the “defining event” of the phenomenon (Larkin, 2009; Muschert, 2007b; Muschert, 2009, p. 165). As Frymer (2009) noted, the shooters from Columbine have become “celebrities” (p. 1389) within the culture of marginalized youth. Therefore, youth who may self-associate with that culture of alienated youth may adopt similar thoughts and behaviors from previous school shooters due to the status they have in that specific sub-culture.
Mythopoesis is best described as the creation of a mythology (Van Leeuwen, 2007). This type of legitimization is tied to authorization, since an individual whose actions or persona is raised to the status of a myth has immense amount of authorizing power in a specific culture. This form of legitimization is also tied to rampage school shootings and can be seen throughout the history of the phenomenon. For example, the image and mythology of the rampage school shooter has continued to grow since the 1990s. After the 1997 school shooting in Pearl, MS, the perpetrator (Luke Woodham) made the statement:

I am not insane. I am angry. . . . I am not spoiled or lazy; for murder is not weak and slow-witted; murder is gutsy and daring. I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. I am malicious because I am miserable. (Chua-Eoan, 1997, p. 54)

This was an often cited quote from the shooter that began to develop the mythology of the “weak” school shooter gaining power and glory through the act of a rampage school shooting. The image of the school shooter became fully developed after the Columbine High School shooting when suddenly there was a connection between trench coats and school shootings, and marginalized students began to be feared. The former connection led to an increase in trench coats being banned in various student dress-codes (Ogle & Eckman, 2002). However, after the solidification of the mythology surrounding rampage school shooters, an alienated youth needed to only wear a trench coat to school in order to make a powerful statement.

**Constructionism and Constructivism.** Two terms that have been frequently confounded in social constructionist literature is constructionism and constructivism
(Raskin, 2002). They have many conceptual similarities between them and have frequently been used interchangeably (Franklin, 1995), even though their historical roots are somewhat different (for example see Raskin, 2002; Waltman, 2002). Raskin (2002) described social constructionism as focusing, “on ways in which persons and societies create (rather than discover) constructions of reality” (p. 3). He goes on to discuss some of the nuances that are different between the two theoretical paradigms (i.e. personality, and length of stay with socially constructed objects). Hruby (2001) also eloquently defined the difference between the theoretical paradigms and stated that:

Perhaps the simplest way of distinguishing constructionism from constructivism is by defining the former as a sociological description of knowledge, while understanding the latter as a psychological description of knowledge…That is to say, while constructivism deals with knowledge formation in the head, constructionism deals with knowledge formation outside the head between participants in social relationship. (p. 51)

Despite their nuanced differences they hold the same essential foundational understanding that reality is created by its human inhabitants. For this research project the underlying theoretical perspective will be social constructionism, even though most of the theoretical discussion would also fit with the social constructivism school of thought.

**Social Construction and Media.** The purpose of this research project was to examine the perpetration factors associated with rampage school shootings as proposed by news media and scholars. The importance of their statements in the understanding of the phenomenon lies within the possible impact of those statements on problem definition, public perception, and policy. As previously mentioned, evidence regarding
incidents is incredibly difficult to come by unless you are a member of a government agency such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or Secret Service. However, for an experience to be transmitted to those individuals who did not directly experience the event, the general public must be able to interact with objects related to the phenomenon. Since factual evidence is difficult to obtain, two other sources available for the public to gain information from are the national media and researchers who study the social issue.

Another unique aspect of rampage school shootings is that there are not many prior incidents of school violence that can be drawn upon to act as filters. For example, this type of school shooting challenges the typical objectivation of murders in schools being committed by minority groups in large urban schools (Schiele & Stewart, 2001). In reality, a large portion of rampage school shootings actually occur in rural locations (Seaton, 2007). Therefore, if an individual attempted to “retroject” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 61) those incidents through filters which expected a minority perpetrator in an urban school, there would be some internal confusion. Retrojecting can be understood as the process of projecting experiences back through filters the individuals have previously established. Then the individual would have to internalize and process the new information in order to develop new filters which could be used to understand the phenomenon. It is at this juncture that the available information from print media and scholars would have the greatest potential to impact perception about the social issue.

This project does not attempt to answer whether these reports from national newspapers, news magazines, or journal articles actually impact public perception, since there already is theoretical and empirical support that perception can be impacted by the media (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Vasterman, 2005).
However, this project takes the next step of discovering exactly what factors those sources report are perpetration factors of rampage school shootings. To date, there have been various research projects utilizing the media to better understand the phenomenon (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Danner & Carmody, 2001; Frymer, 2009; Markward, Cline, & Markwoard, 2001; Muschert, 2009; Muschert & Carr, 2006), but none except for a recent pilot study (Mongan & Otis, 2010) have looked into perpetration factors associated with rampage school shootings. The findings from this study will then provide a bridge between what is said about the social issue, and the real world impact it has, such as bad policy (Mongan & Walker, 2012, Stanner, 2006). As a side note, to date there has not been any scholarly research completed that has brought in content analysis of scholarly perpetration factors for the sake of comparison or contrast with other sources (i.e. mainstream print news). For the purpose of this project, pulling in scholarly information will provide a unique ability to compare and contrast the perpetration factors as scholars postulate, with the reported on factors by the mainstream print news.

The methodological tool utilized to identify the perpetration factors found in national print media and scholarly journals was content analysis. The connection between content analysis and social construction is strong (Binder, 1993; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Lipschultz & Hilt, 1999), and will allow for an in-depth analysis of the findings. Essentially, the theory allows the findings to be “retroject[ed]” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 61) back into the social construction paradigm, and allows the author to discuss the implications of the findings in a meaningful way so that they will have real world applicability. An example
of this would be the process for defining a social problem, and the development of moral
panics that may arise because of the description of a phenomenon.

**Problem Definition.** When utilizing social constructionist thought in a research
project it is important to spend time defining concepts and terms used, due to the
underlying assumption with the theory that those terms are also socially constructed. The
first part of that process consists of understanding exactly how a social problem comes to
be defined, as that process of defining an issue is connected with social constructionist
thought (for example see Schneider, 1985; Spector & Kitsuse, 1973-1974; Spector &
Kitsuse, 2001). Best (1995) described the construction of social problems when he wrote:

…Our sense of what is or is not a social problem is a product, something that has
been produced or constructed through social activities. When activists hold a
demonstration to attract attention to some social condition, when investigative
reporters publish stories that expose new aspects of the condition, or when
legislators introduce bills to do something about the condition, they are
constructing a social problem. (p. 6)

Understanding how a social problem is constructed provides a foundational piece for the
argument on how claims makers (i.e. media & scholars) can impact the defining and
apprehension of a phenomenon (Best, 1987; Witkin & Gottschalk, 1988), the impact the
phenomenon is perceived to have (Payne, Swami, & Stanistreet, 2008), and the attempts
to address the problem (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). As
Weinberg (2009) stated, “social problems cannot be separated from the perceptions and
practical activities undertaken by members of the social worlds menaced by those
problems” (p. 61). This was also a major element of Hruby’s (2001) argument in support of social construction and against inductive research. Research is replete with examples of how the definition of social problems or constructs can impact the very foundation for understanding and discussing social issues (for example see Averill, 1985; Bartholomew, 1990; Hruby, 2001; McVinney, 2004; Perrin & Miller-Perrin, 2011). The impact of defining a phenomenon is not only theoretical, but can also have implications for the real world. For example, some have argued that discussion about rampage school shootings has caused a moral panic about social issues ranging from gun availability to video games (Aitken, 2001; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Ferguson, 2008; Goode, 2008; Springhall, 1999).

Moral Panic. Moral panic was defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) as:

…a scare about a threat or supposed threat from deviants or “folk devils”, a category of people who, presumably, engage in evil practices and are blamed for menacing a society’s culture, way of life, and central values. The word “scare” implies that the concern over, fear or, or hostility toward the folk devil is out of proportion to the actual threat that is claimed. (p. 2)

Due to their rarity and extreme nature, rampage school shootings provide a blank slate for claims makers, such as the media or scholars, to postulate on possible perpetration factors (For example see Degi (1999). This prognostication about what might cause these incidents in the future possesses the ability to impact perception, create moral panics, and thus alter how society responds to them.

Goode and Ben-Yahuda (2009) proposed three theories to explain how moral panics occur, which are all intimately connected with social constructionist thought.
They identified the theories as: The Grassroots Model, The Elite-Engineered Model, and the Interest-Group Theory. The two theories that can be argued are the most relevant to rampage school shootings are the grassroots theory and the interest-group theory.

They argued that the underlying argument with the grassroots theory is that, “panic usually originate[s] with the general public” (p. 55). Interest-group theory instead posits that organized groups (i.e. media) can define a social issue in a way that brings about moral panic because of some perceived benefit the group receives by framing the social problem in a specific manner (see next chapter for discussion on framing).

As this paper has stated several times, rampage school shootings are rare events. From 1974 on there have only been 29 incidents, which averages to less than one incident per year. When looking at the breakdown of their occurrence in Figure 1, a person can see that the incidents appear to occur in waves, with long periods of time between events.
Also, as can be seen from Table 1, there are many states that have never had an incident. Therefore, it can be argued that a vast majority of the country has not experienced the phenomenon directly. This shows that while the grassroots theory of moral panic seems plausible at first, it is not the best theory to explain this phenomenon. Without a source feeding the public information about the incidents, it is likely that some incidents would be completely unknown to the general public. Therefore, it would be difficult for a grassroots moral panic to start. Those factors, along with the media’s propensity to sensationalize violent stories (Vasterman, 2005), possibly for increased revenue, illustrate how the more applicable theory for how moral panics start in regards to rampage school shootings is the interest-group theory (see chapter four for in-depth review of how news is produced).
The theoretical framework for this research project centers on the argument that the perpetration factors discussed by the national print media and scholars aide in the construction and response to social problems such as rampage school shootings. However, without exactly knowing how the problem is being defined by those sources, it is difficult to understand the phenomenon, or why certain responses have been undertaken by society. With the foundation of social construction, and the understanding of the interplay between theory, problem definition, and the creation of moral panics, it becomes possible to understand and frame the findings of this project.
Chapter Four: News Production and Media Effects

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to uncover perpetration factors related to rampage school shootings as they are reported on by mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles. The use of mainstream print news underscores the importance of explaining the process of news production, and how the distribution of news aides in the understanding and perpetuation of perpetration factors. This section will concentrate on that purpose by first briefly discussing the history of the press in the United States. Then the processes of encoding and decoding news will be explored, which will entail further explication of agenda setting, framing, and priming. Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997) noted that going over the process of news production is important because:

It is widely understood that news editors and reporters have developed distinctive procedures, values, and workways to aide them in their challenging task of producing news quickly and on a regular basis...what makes a “good” story – enter not only into reporters’ choices in presenting their stories. As a result, particular perspectives, journalistic themes, and story angles can come to dominate the flow of news. (p. 481)

News Production History

Producing news involves the, “interaction between news organizations, the sources of their output, and other social institutions” (Deacon, Fenton, & Bryman, 1999, p. 9). That process of producing and distributing news to the public dates back to the Acta Diurna of ancient Rome (Emery, Emery, & Robers, 2000), which had the purpose of distributing information about, “senate votes and popular events” (p. 1). While the
*Acta Diurna* is important to mention due to it being the first news product in the world, it is well beyond the purpose of this proposal to cover the history of news production from the *Acta Diurna* to the first American colonial news sources. However, the first colonial print news began well before the founding of the country, and dates back to the 17th century (Emery, Emery, & Roberts, 2000).

According to Emery, Emery, and Roberts (2000), the first American colonial newspaper was *Publick Occurrences*, which was published in 1690. However, it was also one of the shortest run newspapers in the history of the forming country, as it was shut down after its initial issue. It was several years before the next group of newspapers began to appear in the American colonies. This next batch of newspapers consisted of the *News-Letter* (1704), *The Boston Gazette* (1719), and the *New England Courant* (1721). According to Emery, Emery, and Roberts (2000) this next group of newspapers, “were careful to notify their publics that they printed ‘by authority’” (p. 23). In other words, they were sanctioned by the Crown of England, which *Publick Occurrences* was not.

The press continued to play an important role in the American colonies, and served as a tool for framing the frustration that the newly forming country was having towards their English rule. During the American Revolution, “newspapers went into about 40,000 homes, but each issue had a larger number of readers per copy than would be true in modern times” (Emery, Emery, & Roberts, 2000, p. 57). It was during this timeframe that the first article of the Bill of Rights granted the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press to Americans. Thus, the print news began to become the tool for dissemination of information that it continues to be today. For a more complete look at
the history of news in America see *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of Mass Media* (Emery, Emery, & Roberts, 2000).

With the 1st Amendment of the Constitution, and the press being granted the freedom to write about almost any issue from almost any angle they wished, the question may be asked about how this production of news occurs and what impact it may have on consumers of media. The subsequent sections examine this question by pulling apart the different processes that make up the encoding and decoding process of news.

**Encoding**

The two main processes of news production and consumption are encoding and decoding (Deacon, Fenton, & Bryman, 1999). Encoding can be understood as all of the steps the media takes up to the distribution of the news story. Put another way, Jacobs (1996) noted four steps to news production, which are: discovery, research, production, and enactment. Encoding encompasses all of these steps except enactment, which in print news can be understood as the distribution of the news story.

Decoding can be understood as the internalization of a news story by an audience. In other words, decoding encompasses the information that is gained by people who read a news story, as well as the effect that the information has on their perceptions and actions. This latter part can be understood as media effects.

Scheufele (1999) covered the history of media effect thought in the United States and postulated that there has been four eras in how scholars have looked at and understood the effect media has on citizens. The first era he discussed encompasses the start of the twentieth century until about the 1930s, which he reported was dominated by the propaganda of World War I. Then from the 1930s to the 1960s, “existing attitudes”
of media consumers was viewed as having the larger impact on perception than the media content (p. 105). The trend of “existing attitudes” (p. 105) changed in the 1970s to the 1980s as there was resurgence in the belief of the power of the media. Finally, in the last timeframe, from the 1980s to today, the belief has shifted so that scholars mostly argue that the media aides in the construction of perception (Tuckman, 1980), but that it is not a passive phenomenon. Instead, there is interaction between the media consumer and the media source (Scheufele, 1999)\(^1\).

Ultimately, the process of encoding consists of agenda setting and framing, whereas decoding consists of priming and active decoding. The subsequent sections will discuss in greater detail those processes, since they aide in understanding how the production and distribution of news can impact the perceptions and actions of media consumers.

**Agenda Setting.** Agenda setting has been defined as, “the importance assigned to issues and personalities in the media” (Winter & Eyal, 1981, p. 376), or as the process of “defining problems worthy of public and government attention” (Entman, 2007, p. 163). As was discussed in chapter three in regards to moral panic theory, this aspect of media effects fits with the idea of interest-group theory (Goode & Ben-Yahuda, 2009). The interest-group (i.e. media) can engage in agenda-setting by overly focusing on specific perpetration factors that are inherently controversial, possibly creating moral panics.

With agenda setting in news, it is important to remember that salience is a critical part of determining what issues should be covered (Van Gorp, 2007). Salience can be understood as the importance an audience (i.e. consumers of media) puts into a phenomenon. For example, unless the events surrounding a presidential dinner are
interesting to the general public, the dinner or specific items the President eats at that
dinner are not salient to most of the public. They simply are not that important to most of
the consumers of news. However, if the President were to announce a major shift in
policy, the meal would likely garner much greater attention, because it then becomes
salient.

The question then may be asked about who actually sets the agenda for news
agencies. According to Deacon, Fenton, and Bryman (1999), scholars studying news
production have attempted to answer that question by focusing on the roles of ownership
and the values and practices of journalists. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) responded
to this question by writing, “The activities of interest groups, policy makers, journalists,
and other groups interested in shaping media agendas and frames can have an impact on
both the volume and character of news messages about a particular issue” (p. 12). Put
another way, the answer to the question of who sets the agenda is better answered by
looking at the interaction between various processes of news production. Attempting to
answer with either the ownership or journalistic values simply would not be a complete
enough answer.

It has been argued that there are two levels of agenda setting, with the first being
the previously provided definition (Weaver, 2007). The second level of agenda setting
has been described as, “the relative salience of attributes of issues” (Weaver, 2007, p.
142). Put another way, the second level can be defined as framing. Framing will be
discussed in greater depth in a subsequent section. However, there has been some
disagreement with the classification of framing as second level agenda setting, and
Weaver (2007) goes on to state that how the concepts of agenda setting and framing are
arranged (i.e. first level and second level) depends upon how they are defined. On that note, Scheufele (1999) and Van Gorp (2007) proposed that the definition for framing has been different between media researchers through time, which Scheufele (1999) believed was due to, “distinctly different approaches” to how the scholars framed their own research (p. 103). Much like the historical shifting of the definition of rampage school shootings, framing has never had a universally accepted definition.

**Framing.** The next part of the encoding process is framing. The conceptualization of framing can be understood by an analogy to a picture frame. The purpose of the picture frame is to set the boundaries for what will be seen of the picture when it is displayed. This is very similar to the role that framing plays in media discourse. Chong and Druckman (2007) describe framing as:

> The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and can be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue. (p. 104)

In other words, framing by the media is the process of packaging a social issue into a specific perspective in order to disseminate it to the wider public. When the public has an established frame for a social phenomenon they may choose not to attend to competing frames presented by the media or other sources (e.g., law enforcement, scholars). However, with a rare phenomenon such as rampage school shootings there were no preexisting national frames prior to the defining incidents (i.e. Columbine), and due to their rarity and extremely violent nature they are frequently subject to, “wide-
ranging interpretations” (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009, p. 1406). These factors have the possibility of exponentially increasing the effect that media-constructed frames can have on public perception, since those frames fill a void in the information available.

Ultimately, framing has different purposes. Framing draws attention to causes of phenomenon, it “encourages moral judgments”, and it can be used to “promote favored policies” (Entman, 2007, p. 165). The first purpose is self-explanatory. The second purpose essentially means that depending on how a news story is framed, the producers of that story may be attempting to elicit a moral judgment regarding the issue that is the focus of the news story. The final purpose involves agencies that may politically lean a certain direction. Therefore framing their articles in a certain way may help to gain support among the consumers of their media. However, that means that frames are inherently open to bias.

Framing bias. Entman (2007) identified three types of bias that may impact the way that the producers of news frame issues. He reported that the types of bias that can occur are: Distortion bias, content bias, and decision-making bias. Distortion bias is arguably the most obvious form of bias that can appear when issues are framed. This type of bias occurs when a news producer, “distorts or falsifies reality” (p. 163). Examples of this can be seen in news reports preceding a major election in the country. Prior to the election both liberals and conservatives will accuse the other of altering making up “facts” that fit their agenda. If it was true that either side distorted facts for their own gain, then they would be engaging in distortion bias.

The second form of bias is content bias essentially consists of news producers favoring specific sides of a story over another (Entman, 2007). A thorough example of
this can be seen in Deacon, Fenton, and Bryman (1999). They conducted a case study concentrating on the progression of the issue of false memory with a single newspaper. What they discovered was that there were competing sides to the issue (British False Memory Society vs. British Psychological Society). The British Psychological Society (BPS) came down on the side that it is possible to recover traumatic memories, whereas the British False Memory Society (BFMS) believed that these recovered memories have an extremely high risk of being constructed and false. What Deacon, Fenton, and Bryman (1999) discovered was that BPS was given much more space in the story, as well as being treated as more knowledgeable and credentialed than BFMS. That slant towards a specific side of an issue over another is precisely how content bias manifests itself in a news story.

The final type of bias that can occur in the process of framing an issue is decision making bias. This bias occurs due to the, “motivations and mindsets of journalists” (Entman, 2007, p. 163). Put another way, this bias exists due to the belief that newsmakers do not operate in a vacuum, and their values, beliefs, and morals may impact the issues that they cover. Confirmation bias can be thought of as a type of decision making bias, due to the possibility of a researcher consciously or subconsciously wanting to confirm their own hypotheses.

While the purposes and possible biases of frames outwardly appears rather clear, attempting to uncover how certain frames were initially developed is much more confounding (Chong & Druckman, 2007). For example, Chong and Druckman (2007) wrote that, “How frames in communication emerge continues to befuddle researchers” (p. 117). Van Gorp agrees with that assertion and noted that, “no one knows where exactly
they begin and where they end” (p. 62). The one aspect of framing that is understood is that, “frames are chosen with an audience in mind” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 117). That final aspect of framing is important to keep in mind because it helps to explain why news is frequently framed in a narrative manner, and due to the understanding that how an issue is framed impacts how people understand it (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

**Decoding**

Decoding is the process of internalizing a message from the media throughout processes such as active decoding and priming. As was previously discussed with Scheufele’s (1999) notion of eras, the current understanding of media effects (i.e. decoding) involves the acceptance that media consumers interact with media in the process of internalizing the message that is coded. However, as Deacon, Fenton, and Bryman (1999) noted when describing active decoding:

…The notion of ‘active’ should not be equated with ‘powerful’ and that the extent to which audiences genuinely exert power over the text is limited…differently located audiences may derive particular interpretations of texts, but that the text itself is rarely subverted. In other words, the essential power of authors to frame audience reception is not challenged; audiences engage in marginal interpretation. (p. 7)

As can be seen with the above quote, audiences may engage with media materials, but according to Deacon, Fenton, and Bryman (1999) the consumers of media do not hold much interpretive power over the producers of the content. However, according to Scheufele (1999) there are three ways that individuals process media content: active processing, reflective integrators, and selective scanners.
Active processing involves the media consumer actively engaging the material and, “seeking out additional sources” in order to better understand the material (p. 105). Essentially, this would lead to the most informed consumer of media, who would theoretically be less likely to be swayed by the media frame due to their active processing and seeking out of additional sources. Reflective integrators are media consumers who process the information from a media source, then attempt to engage in discussion with others in order to better understand the media source. This is another active approach to understanding media, and as long as the discussion participants were not of the same exact belief system, the media sources sway over the consumer with their selected frame would be limited in a similar manner as with active processors. The final method for consuming media is selective scanning. This process involves the seeking out of only the information that confirms their beliefs. Put another way, it is media consumers engaging in confirmation bias.

**Priming.** Priming can be defined as a process that makes certain concepts more likely to be thought of since they were brought up by the media source (Scheufele, 2000). Weaver (2007) noted that priming, “rely[ies] on the theory of attitude accessibility by increasing the salience of issues and thus the ease with which they can be retrieved from memory” (p. 145). For example, after a mass shooting occurs there inevitably emerges news articles that discuss the issue of gun availability in the United States. The underlying premise of priming is that continued discussion of gun availability being attached to mass shootings by the media makes that connection more salient in an individual’s mind. Thus, they are more likely to connect those two concepts. However, historically, this media effect has been connected most frequently with how,
“governments, policies, and candidates for office are judged” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

According to Weaver (2007), media studies examining priming are done at a much lesser rate than studies examining framing, but have increased “modest[ly]” over the last 10 years (p. 144).

Changes in News Delivery

Although this research project focuses on mainstream print news, it is important to explore the emergence of new technology that has changed the way that news has been encoded and distributed. The main reason that it is important to discuss is because a brief justification should be provided for why this study utilizes mainstream print media, when other possible mediums have emerged as major components of news distribution in the twenty-first century. As Emery, Emery, and Roberts (2000) wrote:

By the 1990s those involved with the distribution of printed information had quickly integrated themselves with the emerging broadcast technology, trying to avoid being swallowed up by the avalanche of new television systems…However, there were many questions to resolve regarding the future of the newspaper, magazine, and book industries. (p. 545)

Part of the “emerging broadcast technology” that Emery, Emery, and Roberts (2000, p. 545) were referring to was the growth of televised news and the “powerhouse” emerging medium of the internet (p. 550). During this time instant news was becoming a reality because those emerging technologies allowed media consumers to almost instantly have information about an event that was in progress on the other side of the world. For example, the rampage school shooting at Columbine High School and the terror attacks
on September 11, 2001 are just two examples of events that essentially unfolded before the eyes of media consumers.

The emerging technologies that allowed consumers of media to have instant access to news have been seen to have an impact on traditionally printed news sources. For example, *U.S. News and World Report* (a news magazine) at one time had nearly two million subscribers (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2012). However, as of 2010 it is no longer providing regular print news. Instead, it has reverted to providing various rankings (i.e. university rankings) yearly. Another, and even more recent example, can be seen with *Newsweek*. *Newsweek* once had “3.2 million copies [circulated] weekly” and challenged *Time* as the top news magazine in the United States (Emery, Emery, & Roberts, 2000, p. 562). However, as reported on *CNN* (Mod, 2012), starting in 2013 *Newsweek* will no longer be printed and will be available digitally only. These two examples illustrate exactly how the emergence of new technology has changed the distribution of printed news. Therefore, justification for why mainstream print news is going to be utilized for this study is warranted (see chapter 5 for complete overview of methods).

The two main justifications for this study’s use of mainstream print news instead of other news mediums (i.e. internet, televised news) involves accessibility and timeframe for the occurrence of rampage school shootings. The first justification is the accessibility of televised reports from the earliest shootings (i.e. Olean, NY). It may be possible to obtain transcripts from 1970s televised news from databases such as the Lexis-Nexis database, but just using transcripts of televised news poses its own unique problems. For example, a major component of visual news is the visuals that are present
in the news story. Transcripts alone miss this critical component, and there simply is not a readily accessible database for historical televised news. As technology continues to engage in the digitizing of sources, it may be possible in the future to conduct this type of study using actual televised news from 1974 (i.e. first rampage school shooting) to today.

The second justification involves the timeframe of rampage school shooting occurrences. The incidents range from 1974 to 2007, which makes the use of internet news problematic. As was noted by Emery, Emery, and Roberts (2000) the internet really did not emerge as a media powerhouse until the 1990s. Therefore, it would not be a viable source for obtaining information on the first six rampage school shootings. However, that does not mean that the internet cannot be used as a tool to obtain print news that was originally in print format and not digital, which is exactly the method this study will utilize (see next chapter).

As can be seen from this section, the technology that aide in the distribution of news has changed over time. However, mainstream print news continues to be a viable means for obtaining information about phenomenon such as rampage school shootings. The previous justifications should provide a solid argument for why the medium of printed news is going to be utilized in this study instead of other mediums, such as the internet or televised news.

**Conclusion**

The process of news production, the dissemination of the news, and the decoding of the news by media consumers is what opened the door to questioning exactly how the media impacts public perception and action. However, in order for this question to be answered, methodological tools needed to be developed and utilized in order to uncover
what the message of the media is, and exactly how that message impacts consumers. The former issue (i.e. uncovering the message) is exactly what this research project aims to do, which is why the methodological tool that will be utilized to complete that purpose is content analysis. The subsequent sections will discuss that methodological tool before explicating the methods that will be used for this study.
Chapter Five: Methods

Introduction to Content Analysis

The purpose of this research project was to explore the factors associated with rampage school shootings as reported by mainstream print news (i.e. national print newspapers and news magazines), and scholarly journal articles. The methodological tool that was used to tease apart those factors from their sources was content analysis. This chapter will first explore this chosen methodological tool for this study (i.e. content analysis) by briefly discussing its history, as well as touching on how content analysis relates to social constructionist thought. Next, the study that was completed will be broken down and explored through discussion of the various components of a content analysis study as they were proposed by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998). That will include discussion of the research questions, artifacts, as well as the categories for the analysis, and how inter-rater reliability was calculated.

Content Analysis as a Methodology

History. Content analysis has a long and extensive history as a tool for helping people understand the world around them. Krippendorff (2004) suggested that people have been analyzing messages in various mediums for at least the last 500 years. However, in the last century Kingsburg and Hart (1937) and Lindesmith (1938) are commonly cited as some of the first researchers to utilize content analysis as a systematic methodology. Lindesmith (1938) was interested in exploring a theory of drug addiction, and did so by examining “data secured largely in personal interviews” (p. 609). Since that time Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) noted that researchers became more interested in utilizing the methodology for understanding other forms of media, such as newspapers,
magazines, and advertisement. It was also at this point in time when the foundation for the process of conducting content analysis was explicated. The original technique consisted of:

(1) choose[ing] a universe or sample of content; (2) to establish a category frame of external referents relevant to the purpose of the enquiry…(3) to choose a ‘unit of analysis’ from the content…(4) to seek to match the content to the category frame by counting the frequency of the references to relevant items in the category frame…and (5) to express the results as an overall distribution of the complete universe or chosen content sample in terms of the frequency of occurrence of the sought-for referents. (McQuail, 1994, p. 277)

Since then, content analysis has become an established methodology, especially when examining media content (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). For a historical overview of the literature on content analysis and mass communication see Riffe and Freitag (1996). Overall, the methodology has become a preferred method for examining how media portrays and defines certain social phenomenon, as well as how media affects the public’s perception about social objects in the world. Content analyses can also serve as “‘reality checks’, whereby portrayal of groups, phenomena, traits, or characteristics are assessed against a standard taken from real life” (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998, p. 10). In regards to rampage school shootings, the use of media and content analysis is one of the most widely accepted and utilized methodological tools (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Danner & Carmody, 2001; Frymer, 2009; Markward, Cline, & Markwoard, 2001; Muschert, 2009; Muschert & Carr, 2006).
Relation to Social Construction. Since this study is a deductive content analysis, theory can help guide the discussion of the findings. The connection and interplay between content analysis and social construction has been well established (Binder, 1993; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Lipschultz & Hilt, 1999). The theory, as well as the method, will provide avenues for understanding and interpreting the results of this study.

In his exploration of media theory McQuail (1994) argues that social constructionist thought became more attached with studies examining the effects of media in the 1970s. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) described this view concisely when they wrote, “media discourse is part of the process by which individuals construct meaning” (p. 2). In other words, the media can construct a social issue in a certain way that can impact public perception when that construction is transmitted to the general public (Tuchman, 1978). The media also serves as a medium for transmitting objects to others who may not directly experience those objects. For example, as has been previously mentioned, the occurrence of rampage school shootings is incredibly rare, as well as being a unique manifestation of school violence. Therefore, the consumption of media is one of the most likely methods that people will use to gather information to construct their reality of the phenomenon. An exemplar of this was the reaction to students’ clothing (Ogle & Eckman, 2002) and fear associated with school violence (Brener et al., 2002) after the widely covered rampage school shooting at Columbine High School. For example, Ogle and Eckman (2002) examined media dialogue in regards to the Columbine school shooting and noted that there was a fear associated with
students wearing trench coats post Columbine, which led to several schools banning that item of clothing from being worn.

As discussed in chapter four, the process of an individual incorporating a constructed reality from the media is not immediate or done without conscious thought on the part of the individual consuming the media (McQuail, 1994). Put another way, the process is not passive. Instead, it is an interaction process between individuals and the media (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Montiel & Shah, 2008, Tuchman, 1978). However, the media plays an important and powerful role in this relationship (Tuchman, 1978). As McQuail (1994) wrote, “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” (p. 327).

Methods

For the results of this study to be valid and interpretable, the study must be well designed and address specific components unique to the methodology (Krippendorff, 2004). According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) a well-designed content analysis study must explore: Conceptualization and purpose, design, and analysis (p. 47). These sections can be thought of as an analogous to the putting together of a “some assembly required” piece of furniture. Conceptualization is the laying out of the various pieces, whereas the design section is the actual directions for assembly. Without directions (i.e. design) a table is about as likely to become a bookshelf, if any useable furniture is actually produced in the process. The final section is the putting together of the furniture and checking it over to make sure no important pieces were left out. The subsequent
sections are the delineation of those three sections of the study, which will continue to draw upon Riffe, Lacy, and Fico’s (1998) work.

**Conceptualization and Purpose.** This initial component of well-constructed content analysis projects consists of three small sub-components that drive the entire research project. First, the problem that the project intends to address must be discussed. Second, the theory undergirding the research, as well as the relevant literature, must be reviewed to give the audience an idea of where a researcher is coming from (i.e. literature review) and where they will likely be going (i.e. theory to interpretation of results). Finally, the research questions for the project must be explicated. The first section is essentially addressed in its entirety by the first three chapters of the proposed dissertation. However, a brief overview of these sub-components will be discussed in order to provide a clear and concise response to the parts that are needed for a valid content analysis study (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

The problem that is being addressed by this research project is the dearth of research that explores perpetration factors that are associated with rampage school shootings based on mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles. The second sub-component is the review of the literature and theory (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). These components are explored in greater depth in chapters two and three, but several overarching themes can be highlighted from these chapters. First, the selected theory is social construction, since it helps explain how the social problem came to be defined, and explains how the media’s discussion of the perpetration factors is passed on to the general public, which then aides in the construction of the phenomenon. The second theme that can be seen in chapter two is that the scholarly literature on rampage school shootings
shootings is fragmented. The third theme is that media studies have been well established for use in studying rampage school shootings (for example see Muschert, 2007a). Finally, there is a gap in the literature regarding the construction of perpetration factors attributed to the phenomenon by the media versus scholars.

The final sub-component is the research questions that will be explored by the project. This study has three major research questions that it will be addressed:

1. What perpetration factors does mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines), and scholarly journal articles attribute to the phenomenon of rampage school shootings?

2. Are there significant differences between what perpetration factors the mainstream print news (i.e. national print newspapers, news magazines), and researchers attribute to rampage school shootings?

3. Does the discussion of perpetration factors change over time with either or both the mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines), and scholarly journal articles?

**Design.** Understandably, the largest section in Riffe, Lacy, and Fico’s (1998) model for conducting content analysis studies is the design section. Arguably, this is the most important section in the development of any study utilizing content analysis. The first major part of this section is the explication of exactly what “content” will be analyzed by the study, since this will be the location from which the data will be extracted.

**Content.** The first sub-component of this section is the explication of the content that will be analyzed in the research project. As the research questions specify, the
sources that were used in this study were a sample of the national print newspapers, news magazines, and scholarly journal articles that discuss rampage school shootings. The sampling process will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent sub-component discussion. The newspapers used are all among the top 25 daily newspapers in the United States of America, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2012). The newspapers consist of: *USA Today* (2nd), *New York Times* (3rd), *New York Daily News* (5th), *Washington Post* (8th), *San Jose Mercury News* (6th), and the *Houston Chronicle* (14th). The criteria used in selecting the newspaper sources consisted of: The newspaper had to be nationally distributed, it had to be popular as evidenced by circulation, and the newspaper had to be accessible on the Lexis-Nexis database. The six newspapers used met all of these criteria.

The Lexis-Nexis database was used as the database for the mainstream print news for a couple of reasons. First, it has a well-established history as a tool for gathering news for content analysis studies (for example see Binder, 1993; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Danner & Carmody, 2001; Frymer, 2009; Kensicki, 2004; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Scharrer, Weidman, & Bissell, 2003). Second, and of pragmatic concern, it is the primary mainstream print news database available at the University of Kentucky.

Two news magazines were also selected for inclusion due to their being nationally distributed, highly circulated, available on the Lexis-Nexis database, and also because news magazines typically are allotted a larger space for stories. The two news magazines that will be included in the study are *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*. In regards to circulation, *Newsweek* has a current circulation of 1,527,156 (Audit Bureau of
Circulation, 2012). However, *U.S. News and World Report* stopped regular circulation in 2010, but prior to that had a peak circulation of around two million in the 1990s (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2012).

A logical question may be posed about the need to discuss availability of sources, and why the top five newspapers were not just automatically selected for inclusion in the study. Two arguments are provided for justification of the newspapers selected. First, of the top five circulated newspapers (*Wall Street Journal, USA Today, New York Times, Los Angeles Times*, and *New York Daily News*), all but one are east coast publications, with most being northeastern publications. Although all of the newspapers are nationally distributed, they do not represent a broad swath of America. Therefore, to get a more national sample, a west coast newspaper (*San Jose Mercury News*) and southern newspaper (*Houston Chronicle*) were included. The second argument is pragmatic in nature and is due to the lack of archival accessibility of some of the sources (i.e. *Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times*). While these “logistical” issues should not dictate an entire study, Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) state that:

…it is unfortunately true that not all researchers have unlimited resources or access to ideal materials for content analysis. The design phase should, to be realistic, involve some assessment of feasibility and accessibility of materials. One cannot content analyze the last 40 years of environmental coverage in the nation’s top 15 prestige dailies if the library has only the local weekly on microfilm. (p. 49)

Therefore, since more than just east coast publications should be included in the research study, two other sources were substituted for those that would not be feasible to include.
Also, the differences between the two west coast publications (*Los Angeles Times*, and *San Jose Mercury News*) in terms of circulation is less than 50,000 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2012).

Scholarly journal articles are the second primary source used in this research project. Since rampage school shootings are discussed in varying journals, the selection process for them was different than what was utilized for the newspapers and news magazines. The sampling method used will also be discussed in much greater depth in the sampling plans sub-component section.

*Operationalization.* The next sub-component deals with the operationalization and discussion of the categories that will be analyzed in the research project. Since the only research to date that has examined perpetration factors reported by the media or scholarly sources were a pilot study (Mongan & Otis, 2010), the categories used were initially derived from that study. See Table 2 for the listing and description of the categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categories that will be used for Analysis</strong>*</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Analysis Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year of publication or print</td>
<td>The year in which the article or news story was printed, or in the instance of a telecast, when it was broadcast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed source</td>
<td>For media sources the printed source is what newspaper, news entity, or magazine the article was seen or read in. For scholarly articles the printed source is the journal the article was printed in.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 2 (continued)

*Categories that will be used for Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of pages</td>
<td>Since transcripts are being used, the number of pages in the transcript will be counted. In addition to whole pages, an article that is less than a page can be counted as $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, or $\frac{3}{4}$.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Paragraphs</td>
<td>The total number of paragraphs of the article or printed media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>This category consists of the discussion of violent music, movies, video games, or television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>Any discussion of masculinity, male roles, or the impact being male had on the shooting. Also, comments that are homophobic (by shooter, other students, or the printed source) are counted in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Scripts</td>
<td>This category consists of the discussion of the shooting being associated with the violent culture of America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to guns</td>
<td>The discussion of the accessibility of guns. Also, references to a gun culture will be counted in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>The discussion of delinquent or illegal behavior by the shooter. Also, any reference to the shooter being a sociopath since that is not a DSM-IV-TR diagnosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad parenting / parenting roles</td>
<td>The discussion of how parenting impacted the shooters, or the report that they were either good or bad parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>The discussion of physical, social, mental, or emotional bullying of the shooter. May overlap with masculinity due to the form of teasing referred to as “gay baiting”. Those cases will count for both the categories of bullying and masculinity.</td>
</tr>
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### Table 2 (continued)

**Categories that will be used for Analysis***

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological predisposition</td>
<td>The discussion of the shooters having a biological predisposition to murder, or extreme acts of violence. This category also covers the reference that genetic or physical illness had an impact on the shooting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy in school</td>
<td>This category covers the discussion power differences between certain peer groups in the school, or the existence of a hierarchy in the school culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>This category consists of the discussion of the shooter having a diagnosable mental illness prior to the shooting. Mental illness that was diagnosed post-shooting will not be counted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Shooter</td>
<td>The gender of the shooter is discussed as a relevant factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>This category consists of the discussion of substance use, abuse, or dependence of the shooters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Advice</td>
<td>This category is counted if the article contains a quote from a person who is portrayed as knowledgeable in the topic, or the mentioning of the author consulting an expert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer/Marginalization</td>
<td>Discussion of peer groups or being marginalized from a peer group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Any paragraph that does not qualify for any of the other categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satanism/Occult</td>
<td>This category consists of the discussion of the occult or Satanism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist</td>
<td>The discussion of the perpetrator(s) being racist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>The rejection or loss of a girlfriend or significant other.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Categories that will be used for Analysis*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copycat</td>
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</table>

*Table taken from Mongan & Otis (2010), *Category added and not present in Mongan & Otis (2010)

Co-coders had the ability to add additional categories as they were found in the articles they review. Also, coders were trained in content analysis, which will be discussed further in a subsequent sub-component (i.e. reliability).

As can be seen in Table 2, at least some of the categories that were used for the content analysis are concepts that a single word may not be able to describe. There are also categories that can be described by numerous different phrases. Therefore, this project aimed to examine articles for both manifest and latent content. As stated by Berg (2004), “manifest content is comparable to the surface structure present in the message, and latent content is the deep structure meaning conveyed by the message” (p. 269). Manifest content (i.e. listing of specific shootings, number of pages and paragraphs) is important to capture, but for this project latent content is equally important. Although frequently overlooked, Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) discuss the importance of theory guiding the whole process of content analysis projects. Therefore, social constructionist thought is applicable since it would be extremely interested in uncovering categories that are viewed as facts (i.e. reified).

The next important piece of operationalization is the explication of the unit-of-analysis. The unit-of-analysis is the level at which artifacts (i.e. articles) are content
analyzed. Generally speaking the unit-of-analysis can range from, “words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, sections, chapters, books, writers, ideological stance, subject topic, or similar elements relevant to the context” (Berg, 2004, p. 271). This research utilized paragraphs as the unit-of-analysis, which is done for a few reasons. First, this project examined artifacts for both manifest and latent content. While manifest content by itself can easily be captured with single words, phrases, or sentences, the latent content this study aims to uncover is more clearly unearthed with at least a paragraph serving as the unit-of-analysis. Also, paragraphs as the unit-of-analysis allows for a more in-depth analysis than is possible by using entire articles as the unit-of-analysis. Therefore, paragraphs were used since they allow the study to have depth, and still be able to explore the manifest content of the artifacts.

**Sampling Plans.** The next and equally critical sub-component is the method for sampling the artifacts that were included in the research project. In this study, the sampling method and keywords were different for the mainstream print news and scholarly sources. The news sources sampled were: *U.S. News and World Report, Newsweek, New York Times, New York Daily News, Washington Post, Houston Chronicle, San Jose Mercury News,* and *USA Today.* The sampling of the mainstream print news consisted of five steps:

1. Articles were gathered from the Lexis-Nexis database in order to create a sampling pool. The keywords used for the print media articles included the shooters name, in addition to the term “school shooting”. Also, the location of the incident, in addition to the term “school shooting” was used to check for any articles that do not name the perpetrator but still discuss the incident. Finally, the
generic term “school massacre” and “rampage school shooting” was used to check for articles that may discuss the phenomenon without discussing specific cases.

2. Duplicate articles were removed from sampling pool.

3. Random sampling of each incident. Due to the way that the articles are gathered, I sampled each rampage school shooting incident. Therefore, an attempt was made so that each of the 29 incidents had at least 10 news articles randomly sampled which represent them. Since there were not 10 articles available to represent some specific shootings, then all that were available were included. Since an article may discuss more than one rampage school shooting, in this step a single article may fit for inclusion with different incidents. These articles were available for each mentioned incident during the sampling of each shooting step. However, after that sampling step, the article was eliminated from the sampling population if it was used in at least one of the shootings. This variation from randomly selecting articles from all shootings is purposefully done and justification for it is subsequently provided in this chapter.

4. Articles included in step three were eliminated from the sampling pool so the remaining articles had an equal probability of being selected.

5. Remaining sampling completed. Following step four, news articles continued to be sampled until 250 articles were selected for analysis. This number was not selected arbitrarily, and was based on the saturation of Columbine based articles that occurred in the Mongan and Otis (2010) pilot study.
Due to the deviation from initially utilizing equal probability random sampling of all the rampage school shooting incidents (see step three), some explanation and justification should be given. An argument may be made that if a researcher holds true to the theoretical underpinnings of social constructionist thought, the saturation with certain rampage school shootings that would occur with equal probability random sampling should not matter. The theory would posit that the incidents causing saturation in the media are exactly what should be explored the most, even to the oversight of the least covered incidents, because the popular events are exactly the ones that are defining the phenomenon. That argument is logical and would seem to hold true on most accounts. However, it does not take into account the uniqueness of the phenomenon, or the eternally shifting construction of the social issue.

The first justification for the sampling method is based on the uniqueness of rampage school shootings. The events are incredibly rare, and as discussed in the literature review chapter, they have various differences between them. Therefore, having at least 10 news articles will allow the researcher to notice any differences between how perpetration factors were discussed depending upon the event. Those differences have the possibility of yielding valuable information about how certain characteristics of rampage school shootings lead to a greater amount of media attention, or even discussion about perpetration factors. Just 10 articles may not be enough to statistically test for differences between shootings, and it is the goal to include more than 10 articles per shooting. However, if Mongan and Otis (2010) are any indication of how many could be included, 10 articles may not be able to be found with some shootings. Therefore, 10
articles is a proposed number in order to attempt to ascertain representation with each shooting.

The second argument for the use of the sampling method is the theoretically supported idea that the construction of perpetration factors has the possibility to change over time. If all rampage school shootings had occurred over a relatively short period of time, the argument against random sampling each shooting might be stronger. However, the events have been spread out and occurred over a long period of time. Therefore, perpetration factors have possibly changed over time; however, if a content analysis does not make an attempt to account for all of the shootings, that change may not be discovered. Even if Columbine is seen as the defining event (Larkin, 2009; Muschert, 2007b, Muschert, 2009), national news reports prior to this point of time (i.e. April 20, 1999) would indicate the start of factor construction for the phenomenon even before the defining event. For these two reasons, attempts to sample from every shooting are justified and theoretically supported.

The other major source of artifacts that was analyzed was scholarly journal articles. The sampling of this source was different than the mainstream print news articles for two main reasons. First, scholarly research is fragmented, which means that research has been completed from various competing paradigms, yet to date there has not been an attempt to clarify and condense that literature (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Muschert, 2007a). Second, the scholarly literature base for the phenomenon is limited. Therefore, all scholarly articles that fit criteria for inclusion were included in the study. The inclusion of all of these articles allowed the researcher to definitively identify the
perpetration factors as they are reported on by researchers. Put another way, there simply is not much research, so all of it will be analyzed.

Another part of the sampling plan is the discussion of how articles were located, and what keywords were used to facilitate the process of locating them. As previously discussed the Lexis-Nexis database was used for the newspaper and news magazine articles, and the EBSCO search engine (with all databases selected) was used as the first step in identifying journal articles. Once the journal articles were gathered, since citations are a major component of scholarly research, the citations for the articles were checked for additional inclusion of articles that may meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. Through these two steps the population of scholarly journal articles was identified.

As previously noted, the keywords used in searching for the scholarly articles are different than those used for the mainstream print news, and they were: “rampage school shooting”, “school massacre”, and “school shooting”. The date range that used for all articles both scholarly and news was from 1974 to present. The reason to include articles after the last rampage school shooting is because additional articles may have been written on the anniversaries of certain shootings, and since the construction of perpetration factors may change over time, it is theoretically relevant to include the articles from this time frame.

The last step in this sub-component is to define the criteria for inclusion after the scholarly articles have been gathered and before the sampling has occurred. This step is needed due to the inevitability that article(s) will slip into the sampling pool that are outside the purview of this study. For example, a scholarly article may be collected that
has a keyword of “school shooting”, but focuses exclusively on targeted school shootings. This article should be excluded from the sampling pool since it represents a phenomenon that is outside the scope of the proposed study. Therefore, the following boundaries were set for inclusion in the study: (1) the articles must discuss rampage school shootings in primary or secondary schools, (2) the articles must not be duplicates, (3) the articles cannot be a book review.

**Reliability.** The discussion and calculation of inter-rater reliability is critical to the validity of content analysis projects (Lacy & Riffe, 1993). However, as Riffe and Freitag (1996) discovered, almost half of the content analyses they analyzed did not report inter-rater reliability, which is one of the largest potential problems with content analysis projects (Krippendorff, 2004). The reliability sub-component is also where the coding process and coder training is explicated.

Inter-rater reliability will be calculated for this research project using Krippendorff’s alpha (α). As discussed by Hayes and Krippendorff (2007), other frequently used measures for inter-rater reliability such as: percent agreement, Scott’s Pi, Cohen’s Kappa, and Cronbach’s Alpha, fail to satisfy at least one of the five criteria for an appropriate measure of inter-rater reliability (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). They describe the five criteria as:

1. It should assess the *agreement* between two or more observers who describe each of the units of analysis separately from each other…
2. It should be grounded in the distribution of the categories or scale points actually used by the observers…
3. It should constitute a numeric scale between at least two points with sensible reliability interpretations…
4. It should be appropriate to the level of
measurement of the data…5. Its sampling behavior should be known or at least computable. (p. 79)

According to Hayes and Krippendorff (2007) one of the common measures in inter-rater reliability is percent agreement, and it does not meet the third criteria. Additionally, it is only appropriate with nominal level data. The other frequently used inter-rater reliability measure of Cronbach’s Alpha is lacking because it also fails to meet the third criteria. The author’s go on to state that Cronbach’s Alpha, “does not directly index the extent to which observers actually agree in their judgments” (p. 81). Thus, for the reasons mentioned, Krippendorff’s Alpha (α) will be the inter-rater reliability measure used in this study since it is the only measure to satisfy all five criteria (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

The coding process is another critical component to discuss due to its critical role in the development of the final results. The coding was done by one main coder and two additional co-coders in order to establish inter-rater reliability. The second coder will code a random sample of 10% of both research and news articles. Then the third coder will examine a random sample of 20% of the second coders articles. The justification for this coder arrangement is mostly pragmatic, due to limited resources for additional coders and coding. However, the additional coders should provide adequate information to calculate inter-rater reliability, since there will be more than just one or two coders, and since every coder could be compared to each other.

The training of coders consisted of two parts. First, a coding form (Appendix) the table of categories (Table 2) and the list of shootings (Table 1) was provided to the coders. Then the process of content analysis was explained to the coders, before a
sample article is provided. The sample article was analyzed as a group to provide practice for the coders, and to answer questions as they arise. Then, five of the same sample articles will be provided to each coder to complete individually. Then, the main coder (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998) looked over the articles and answered questions, or conduct additional training as needed. Finally, the coders were provided with their articles to individually code. If any of the coders noticed a category that is not being captured, they were able to bring it to the main coder's addition for inclusion.

**Analysis.** The final section in the designing and completion of a content analysis project is the analysis section (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). This section explicates the actual coding, data analysis, and interpretation of the results.

**Coding process.** There are many ways that content analysis projects can use to code their material. Essentially, they break down into manual coding and computer assisted coding. According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) choosing between those two types of methods has been an ongoing discussion and debate for nearly a half century. Computer assisted content analysis has grown exponentially over the last two decades (Berg, 2004), but can still be cost prohibitive (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998), so manual coding provides an alternative to possibly cost prohibitive computer assisted coding. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) provide a breakdown for when researchers should select one method over another (see p. 188-189). Their analysis essentially argues that the choice should be determined by cost, type of content, and the desired level of analysis. Berg (2004) also cautions researchers and states that computer-assisted methods only assist the coder and does not actually analyze the data for them.
This content analysis project utilized hand coding for all of the coders. The justification of using hand coding over computer assisted coding is for a few reasons. First, expense and logistics impede the ability of three coders to utilize a program that could be used for examining both manifest and latent content. Second, much of the scholarly sources are scanned in such a manner that they are actually pictures instead of documents. Therefore, searching them is impossible, and one of the only programs that allow multiple file formats is ATLAS.ti, which requires users to purchase licenses to use. The last justification is based on the level of analysis, and is because programs frequently do not allow the typical depth that individual coders can attain. Some programs can be programmed to uncover some of the deep structure found with content analysis, but they require documents and will not work appropriately with pictures. Also, programs that might outwardly appear useful in this project would require extensive training for the additional coders, which would add additional resource and logistic challenges to the study. Therefore, for all of those reasons discussed, hand coding will be the utilized method.

Hand coding typically utilizes highlighters to highlight words or sentences of interest. However, instead of using that method of hand coding, the coding process consisted of bracketing paragraphs and placing numbers – that correspond to the categories – next to the bracketed paragraph. Due to the number of coding categories and the use of multiple coders, the use of brackets and numbers provided a quicker and more pragmatic approach to hand coding.
Chapter Six: Results

Descriptive

There were a total of 435 articles analyzed, which consisted of 185 scholarly articles and 250 media articles. Several scholarly articles were eliminated prior to analysis based on the criterion of elimination that was used (see previous chapter). For example, scholarly articles were eliminated if they were book reviews, did not mention the keywords used, and if they exclusively discussed collegiate rampage shootings instead of primary and secondary school shootings. The same criterion was used for media articles; however, excluded articles were able to be replaced through continued sampling until the predetermined number of 250 print news articles was reached. That option was not available with scholarly articles as the entire population of scholarly articles was used in the analysis.

Media Articles. A total of 8 news sources were sampled in the study and consisted of: Newsweek, US News and World Report, New York Daily News, Houston Chronicle, New York Times, San Jose Mercury, Washington Post, and USA Today. See Table 3 provides frequencies for the printed news articles that were sampled from each source.

Since the study’s research questions focused on the differences between print news and scholarly journal articles, for the subsequent analyses, the seven news sources were condensed into a single print news variable. After being condensed, initial descriptive statistics were calculated for both the raw data from the coding categories, and the rates for the categories (see Table 4 and Table 5). Rates were calculated to help
control for the difference in the length of articles. As a note, the terms category and factor are used interchangeably throughout the remainder of the results and discussion.

### Table 3

*News Sources and Articles Examined*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Magazines</td>
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</tr>
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<td>New York Daily News</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston Chronicle</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose Mercury News</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top categories discussed in the print newspaper articles by rate of appearance were: (1) guns ($\bar{x}=0.10$, SD=0.22), (2) media ($\bar{x}=0.06$, SD=0.18), (3) school ($\bar{x}=0.04$, SD=0.04), (4) mental illness ($\bar{x}=0.03$, SD=0.10), (5) cultural scripts ($\bar{x}=0.02$, SD=0.10), parenting ($\bar{x}=0.02$, SD=0.11), and bullying ($\bar{x}=0.02$, SD=0.11). However, as can be seen from Table 4 and Table 5, the data appeared to have substantial normality issues.

Due to concerns regarding the distribution of the data and the impact it would have on subsequent analyses, attempts were made to transform the data to correct the severe distribution problems. However, despite these attempts, transformations were unable to correct the distribution issues. Therefore, the variables were recoded into
dichotomous variables, since that is how the data for those variables appeared to be behaving. Put another way, the categories either were in an article or they were not.

Table 4

Media Discussion of Categories

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<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<td>Skew</td>
<td>Kurt</td>
<td></td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>Kurt</td>
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<td>250.00</td>
<td></td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>15.81</td>
<td>250.00</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
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</table>
There simply was not enough variability in the factor data for those variables to perform like interval level data.

After the variables were recoded into dichotomous variables, percentages of appearance were calculated to uncover the frequency of appearance in the print newspaper articles. Based on the percentage of appearance, the top five factors in the

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>5.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>7.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Advice</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Abuse</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>7.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satanism</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>7.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info</td>
<td>35.48</td>
<td>29.47</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
print news articles were: (1) Guns (24.8%), (2) Media (23.6%), (3) Mental Illness (15.6%), (4) Bully (12.8%), and (5) Peer (12.0%). The information variable was not included as it was simply a “catch all” variable. See Table 6 for complete list of ranks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage of Appearance (Rank)</th>
<th>Rank of Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of Appearance (Rank)</td>
<td>Scholarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>24.8 (1)</td>
<td>44.3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>23.6 (2)</td>
<td>48.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>15.6 (3)</td>
<td>35.7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>12.8 (4)</td>
<td>51.4 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>12.0 (5)</td>
<td>42.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Script</td>
<td>10.0 (6)</td>
<td>36.8 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>9.2 (7)</td>
<td>38.4 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>7.6 (8)</td>
<td>20.5 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copycat</td>
<td>6.4 (9)</td>
<td>5.4 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satanism</td>
<td>4.4 (10)</td>
<td>8.6 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist</td>
<td>4.4 (11)</td>
<td>11.9 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>4.0 (12)</td>
<td>14.6 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>3.6 (13)</td>
<td>31.9 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>3.2 (14)</td>
<td>3.8 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>2.8 (15)</td>
<td>16.2 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1.6 (16)</td>
<td>21.1 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Abuse</td>
<td>1.2 (17)</td>
<td>2.7 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>0.8 (18)</td>
<td>23.8 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>0.4 (19)</td>
<td>3.2 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Bait</td>
<td>0.4 (20)</td>
<td>13.0 (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were some differences between the top five categories according to the percentage of appearance (as nominal level variables) and mean appearance (as interval
level variables). See Table 6 for the complete listing of percentages of appearance in the print newspaper articles.

**Scholarly Articles.** As previously mentioned the print news variables in the analysis were either present or were not, instead of performing like interval level variables. The scholarly discussed categories performed similarly, and therefore were also recoded into dichotomous variables.

The top five categories by percentage of appearance in scholarly articles appear similar to the top five for the print news articles. The top five for the scholarly articles were: (1) Bullying (51.4%), (2) Media (48.1%), (3) Guns (44.3%), (4) Peer (42.7%), and (5) Parenting (38.4%). The percentages of appearance showed that there were some differences between print news articles and scholarly sources in relation to the categories they discussed as having an impact on the phenomenon of rampage school shootings. See Table 6 for the percentage of appearance with the other factors.

**Inter-rater Reliability.** As mentioned in the methods section, inter-rater reliability was calculated using Krippendorff’s alpha (α). The study was designed in a way that each coder was able to be compared to each other. In other words, the main coder could be compared to coder 2 and coder 3, as well as coder 2 being able to be compared to coder 3. That way agreement between pairs of coders could be checked. This is especially important in content analysis projects that aim to capture latent content.

The overall inter-rater reliability for the analysis was excellent (α=0.896), and is likely due to the methods used for training the co-coders, as well as the appropriateness of the categories. Even with co-coders having the option for open coding, they all were mostly in agreement with the categories used for coding. None of the coder pairs that
were examined for inter-rater reliability were under $\alpha=.800$. These findings indicate two important things. First, the categories used for the content analysis were well developed, and coders felt comfortable fitting the data from the artifacts into those categories. Second, and arguably the most important, subsequent findings and discussion are further supported due to the coders essentially viewing the articles in a similar manner. This is of critical importance when discussing findings, due to arguments that will be made from a social constructionist perspective. It is a stronger argument to state that people will read an article and internalize certain categories if inter-rater reliability greatly exceeds the minimum accepted standard.

**Findings**

**Research question 1**: The first research question proposed for this study was: What perpetration factors do mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines) and scholarly journal articles attribute to the phenomenon of rampage school shootings? This question goes beyond just describing the categories that were used for coding (see Chapter 5), but also delves into how/if the discussion of perpetration factors plays out between print news and scholarly articles during the cursory examination. Addressing this research question requires an initial examination of differences between the two sources, and thus, provides a foundation for the second research question. Answering this research question also involved exploring whether the categories broke down into broader constructs that may help to guide discussion of the findings, as well as advance research into the phenomenon of rampage school shootings.

There were roughly 20 categories that were coded during the analysis, and there appeared to be differences in rank (according to percentage of appearance in the articles)
and percentage of discussion between print news articles and scholarly articles (see Table 6 for complete list). For example, in scholarly articles, masculinity (23.8%) and sex (21.1%) played a substantial role in the discussion of why rampage school shootings occur (rank 9 and 10 respectively). However, these perpetration factors played a minimal role in the news articles, with masculinity only appearing in 0.8% of articles and sex appearing in just 1.6% of articles (rank 18 and 16, respectively). Another category whose rank was distinctively different between the two sources was the copycat factor. In the print news the copycat factor was the ninth most frequently discussed factor based on percentage of appearance, whereas this factor ranked seventeenth among scholarly articles. It was also the only factor examined that was discussed in a higher percentage of print news articles than it was in scholarly articles (6.4% and 5.4%, respectively).

An examination of commonalities among categories suggested that there was some constructs that would help to explain groups of categories. For example, the various categories used in the content analysis appeared to fit into constructs such as: School related factors, cultural factors, biological factors, individual factors, and family factors.

School-related factors consist of hierarchies in school, school, peer marginalization, and rejection. All of these factors are intimately related to the school environment. Cultural factors consisted of those categories that are inherently in American culture, such as gun availability, violent media, masculinity, gay baiting, bullying, cultural scripts, and copycat. Within this construct there also appeared to be a sub construct that will be subsequently referred to as gender harassment, which consisted of masculinity, gay baiting, and bullying.
An argument may be made that bullying would be a better fit in the school construct, but in regard to the examination of rampage school shootings it is a better fit within the cultural construct. Three assertions provide support for this position, and are based on the following assertions: (1) bullying is a national issue, (2) bullying is not isolated to the school environment, and (3) in regards to rampage school shootings, bullying is inherently connected to other cultural factors (i.e. masculinity and gay baiting). With regard to the first assertion, according to the 2011 *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012), “Bullying is now recognized as a widespread and often neglected problem in schools that has serious implications for victims of bullying and for those who perpetuate the bullying” (p. 44). Also, bullying goes on well beyond the schoolhouse gates. For example, 24% of 12 – 18 year olds reported being bullied away from school (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012). Finally, as will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, there is a strong connection between bullying, masculinity, and gay baiting, which makes bullying a better fit within the cultural construct.

The biological fact construct consists of those factors that social constructionists would likely lump together as factors that are outside of being socially constructed. They consist of sex and biology. The family construct consists of the parenting factor. Lastly, the individual factors construct consists of: individual characteristics, mental illness, Satanism, Racist, delinquency, substance use, and animal abuse.

There are likely arguments that can be made that some of the factors may fit better within other constructs. However, at this stage of research into rampage school shootings the constructs proposed will allow for a fuller discussion of the findings, and
subsequent research can focus on examining the fit, or lack thereof, with the factors in the various constructs.

While these potential commonalities among the factors exist, for the purposes of the current analyses, the factors were not further condensed into the broader constructs due to the loss of information about specific characteristics of the various factors that would occur with further data reduction. Instead, the broad constructs will provide a framework to guide further exploration of the factors in the subsequent Findings and Discussion chapters. Overall, the factors discussed and the difference between their percentages of appearance reinforces the importance of, and leads into, the second research question.

**Research question 2:** The second research question examined was: Are there significant differences between perpetration factors the mainstream print news (i.e. national print newspapers, news magazines) and scholarly journal articles attribute to rampage school shootings? As was seen in the response to the first research question, there appeared to be differences when the factors were initially examined. Due to the normality issues in the data and the recoding of the interval level variables into dichotomous variables, chi square was used to test for statistically significant differences between the sources, and phi was used to determine the strength of the bivariate relationship. Lambda was disregarded due to the large discrepancy in row totals possibly leading to invalid results (Healey, 2009). Since the factors had to be condensed into dichotomous variables due to severe normality issues in the data, the density of discussion could not be used to determine statistical differences between sources. Also, given the similarities in a number of relationships, not every factor will be discussed in
See Tables 7 – 11 for results of factors that were able to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 7
*Media, Masculinity, and Gay Bait Discussion between News and Scholarly Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>96 (51.9%)</td>
<td>191 (76.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>89 (48.1%)</td>
<td>59 (23.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>28.45</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guns</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>103 (55.7%)</td>
<td>188 (75.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>82 (44.3%)</td>
<td>62 (24.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>90 (48.6%)</td>
<td>218 (87.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>95 (51.4%)</td>
<td>32 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>76.44</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.419</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>Scholarly</td>
<td>Print News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>119 (64.3%)</td>
<td>211 (84.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>66 (35.7%)</td>
<td>39 (15.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>23.40</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>106 (57.3%)</td>
<td>220 (88.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>79 (42.7%)</td>
<td>30 (12.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>53.37</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.350</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Script</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>117 (63.2%)</td>
<td>225 (90.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>68 (36.8%)</td>
<td>25 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>45.29</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 9

**Masculinity, Sex, and Gay Bait Discussion between News and Scholarly Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculinity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>141 (76.2%)</td>
<td>248 (99.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>44 (23.8%)</td>
<td>2 (0.8%)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>59.39</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.370</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Sex**          |           |            |
| Not Mentioned    | 146 (78.9%) | 249 (98.4%) |
| Mentioned        | 39 (21.1%) | 4 (1.6%)*  |
| Totals           | 185 (100%) | 250 (100%) |
| Chi-Square ($X^2$) | 45.30     | $p \leq .001$ |
| Phi ($\phi$)     | 0.323     | $p \leq .001$ |

| **Gay Bait**     |           |            |
| Not Mentioned    | 161 (87.0%) | 249 (99.6%) |
| Mentioned        | 24 (13.0%) | 1 (0.4%)*  |
| Totals           | 185 (100%) | 250 (100%) |
| Chi-Square ($X^2$) | 31.03     | $p \leq .001$ |
| Phi ($\phi$)     | 0.267     | $p \leq .001$ |

*=$X^2$ may be unreliable due to <5 cell count
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parenting</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>114 (61.6%)</td>
<td>227 (90.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>71 (38.4%)</td>
<td>23 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>53.44</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.350</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Hierarchy</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>126 (68.1%)</td>
<td>241 (96.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>59 (31.9%)</td>
<td>9 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>64.53</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delinquency</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>147 (79.5%)</td>
<td>231 (92.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>38 (20.5%)</td>
<td>19 (7.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>15.64</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>Scholarly</td>
<td>Print News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>155 (83.8%)</td>
<td>243 (97.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>30 (16.2%)</td>
<td>7 (2.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>24.59</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.238</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>158 (85.4%)</td>
<td>240 (96.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>27 (14.6%)</td>
<td>10 (4.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>15.34</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>$p \leq .001$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racist</th>
<th>Scholarly</th>
<th>Print News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>163 (88.1%)</td>
<td>239 (95.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>22 (11.9%)</td>
<td>11 (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>185 (100%)</td>
<td>250 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square ($X^2$)</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>$p \leq .01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi ($\phi$)</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>$p \leq .01$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of all the factors analyzed only three failed to produce significant differences between news and scholarly articles. The three that did not produce significant relationships were: Copycat ($\chi^2=0.187$, $p=0.665$), school ($\chi^2=0.11$, $p=0.74$), and animal abuse ($\chi^2=1.33$, $p=0.25$). Of these non-significant factors, the only ones that had large differences in rank (by percentage of appearance) were the copycat and Satanism factors (see Table 6). Despite those differences in rank, few articles from either source mentioned these factors. For example, 10 (5.4%) scholarly articles mentioned the copycat factor at least once, whereas 16 (6.4%) news articles mentioned the factor. With Satanism, 16 scholarly articles mentioned the factor (8.6%), compared to 11 from news articles (4.4%).

The remaining 16 factors analyzed had significant differences between the news and scholarly sources. However, these differences are likely due to the fact that once the factors were recoded into dichotomous variables, variability was removed, and percentage of discussion was much higher with all the factors in scholarly articles. As previously noted, this recoding was important due to the severe normality issues. Pragmatically, maintaining the variability would have produced results that likely would not have been valid. However, as dichotomous variables, all the factors except cultural scripts were discussed in substantially more scholarly articles. For example, the top print news factor according to percentage of appearance was gun availability with 24.8%. However, that percentage would have barely cracked the top ten of scholarly factors. Therefore, there are significant differences between print news and scholarly sources with nearly all factors, but that is simply because discussion of factors appears more frequently in scholarly articles once variability is removed. Since the factors were recoded into
dichotomous variables, and only had to appear in an article once to be counted, literature reviews likely account for the high percentage of appearance with many of these factors. Therefore, the answer to this research question post-recode is that there are differences in the rank (by percentage of appearance) of factors discussed by print news and scholarly articles, and there appear to be differences in the rate of discussion (Tables 4 and 5). However, as discussed previously, the severe normality issues in the data prevent any means-based significance testing. Any statistical differences between the two sources (i.e. print news and scholarly articles) post-recode are due to the fact that once variability is removed from the equation, scholarly articles simply discuss factors at a higher percentage per article. Therefore, subsequent reporting of findings will not report chi-squared. These results can be found in Tables 7 – 11. The difference between the rate of discussion (Tables 4 and 5) and percentage of appearance (Table 6) illustrates this issue. For example, availability of guns was a major factor with both print news and scholarly sources. In scholarly articles it was discussed in 44.3% of scholarly articles, which dwarfed over the percentage of discussion in the print news articles (24.8%). However, when comparing rate of discussion (i.e. appearance per paragraph) print news actually discussed gun availability at a much higher rate than scholarly articles (10% of paragraphs to 3% of paragraphs, respectively). Therefore, subsequent discussion of findings will mostly utilize percentage of appearance, since that was used to test differences between the sources. Rates of discussion and rank (i.e. importance) of factor will also be used as supplemental support in both the findings and discussion as a way to triangulate support for arguments used. While it is important to reiterate that normality issues in the data prevent too strong of conclusions being drawn from rates of discussion,
the three pieces of data (percentage, rank, and rate) that are used in the subsequent findings provide a means for triangulating the findings in a way that further support the arguments provided, even if they cannot be fully tested statistically. In regards to content analysis, Krippendorff (2004) has discussed the importance of triangulating findings whenever possible, as it adds additional support to the conclusions drawn from the study.

Put another way, the initial purpose of this quantitative content analysis study was to examine the differences of the categories. However, due to the violation of the assumption of normality, which was unable to be corrected, t-tests could not be used. Next, a non-parametric statistical tool (e.g. Mann-Whitney U) was attempted to be used, but due to the extreme deviation from normality, there still remained a substantial risk of type I errors. Therefore, the data was condensed, and Chi-Squared was used to test for differences between the sources. However, that information was misleading, due to the removal of variability, which occurred when the data was condensed. This caused scholarly sources to have substantially more discussion with essentially every category. For those reasons, triangulation of findings was then used to avoid possible type I errors that might emerge with any of the other approaches.

Cultural factors appeared to play the largest role with both sources examined. Three of those controversial factors with high percentages of appearance in both media and scholarly sources were bullying, violent media, and access to guns. Violent media refers to the tendency of sources to blame media formats such as video games, music, and movies for impacting the occurrence of rampage school shootings due to containing violent content. Almost 50% of the scholarly articles at least mentioned violent media as a factor that impacts the occurrence of rampage school shootings, whereas only about
25% of media articles discussed the factor. In regards to the rate of discussion of violent media, news and scholarly articles were nearly identical ($\bar{x}=0.06$, SD=0.18; $\bar{x}=0.06$, SD=0.13, respectively). Specifically, about 6% of news and scholarly paragraphs discussed violent media as a factor that impacts the occurrence of rampage school shootings. Put another way, about a quarter of print news articles and a half of scholarly articles mentioned violent media, but articles from both sources spent a great deal of space discussing the impact of the factor on the phenomenon.

Availability of guns performed similarly to how violent media performed. About 44% of scholarly articles mentioned the availability of guns as a factor that impacts rampage school shootings, as compared to only about 25% of print news articles. However, unlike violent media, there appeared to be some difference in the rate of discussion between the two sources. Scholarly articles discussed the availability of guns in about 3% of paragraphs ($\bar{x}=0.03$, SD=0.08), compared to about 10% of paragraphs in news articles ($\bar{x}=0.10$, SD=0.22). What this illustrates is that although 44% of scholarly articles mentioned availability of guns as a factor, the discussion was rather cursory since only about 3% of paragraphs actually mentioned the factor. However, with news articles only a quarter of them discussed the factor, but 10% of paragraphs discussed the factor. Put another way, the data indicates that scholarly sources did not overlook the importance of the availability of guns. However, researchers appeared to only briefly discuss the availability of guns, and then spent the majority of the article discussing other factors. Media, on the other hand, not only mentioned the availability of guns as an important factor in impacting the occurrence of rampage school shootings, but also devoted a larger amount of print space to discussing the factor. Since amount of space in an article
dedicated to a specific factor can serve as a proxy for the importance of the factor to the source, the data hints at the likelihood that print news views the availability of guns as a more important factor than scholarly sources despite scholarly articles mentioning the factor more frequently.

Another cultural factor was the impact that bullying has on rampage school shootings. Bullying was also the only factor that over half of all the scholarly articles at least mentioned (51.4%). Only about 13% of print news articles mentioned the factor, and only about 2% of paragraphs discussed the factor ($\bar{x}=0.02, SD=0.11$). With the rate of discussion being three times greater in scholarly articles ($\bar{x}=0.06, SD=0.11$), bullying plays a prominent role in the scholarly exploration of rampage school shootings.

Although scholarly articles discussed bullying more frequently and at a much higher rate, scholarly discussion of the factor also was different in regards to the content of discussion regarding bullying. For example, researchers frequently delved into the sub-construct of gender harassment that was previously mentioned. For example, researchers would explore the roots of bullying that impact rampage school shootings (i.e. masculinity), as well as specific types of bullying seen with the phenomenon (i.e. gay baiting). In regards to gay baiting, the factor was discussed in 13% of scholarly articles, but was discussed in less than 1% of the print news articles. With masculinity, almost 24% of scholarly articles discussed the factor, as compared with less than 1% of the print news articles. Although it may not appear like an issue since both sources (news and researchers) discuss bullying frequently, the more elaborate exploration of the sub construct in scholarly articles provides a much clearer picture of how the factor impacts the occurrence of rampage school shootings. Put another way, scholars appear to agree
that – in regards to rampage school shootings – not all bullying is created equal. This can be seen in Kimmel and Mahler’s (2003) exploration of this issue:

There is much at stake for boys and, as a result, they engage in a variety of evasive strategies to make sure that no one gets the wrong idea about them (and their manhood). These range from the seemingly comic (although telling), such as two young boys occupying three movie seats by placing their coats on the seat between them, to the truly tragic, such as engaging in homophobic violence, bullying, menacing other boys, masochistic or sadistic games and rituals, excessive risk taking (drunk or aggressive driving), and even sexual predation and assault. The impact of homophobia is felt not only by gay and lesbian students but also by heterosexuals who are targeted by their peers for constant harassment, bullying, and gay-baiting. In many cases, gay-baiting is “misdirected” at heterosexual youth who may be somewhat gender nonconforming. This fact is clearly evidenced in many of the accounts we have gathered of the shootings. (p. 1446)

The authors’ of this journal article not only discuss bullying, but the role that the ideals of masculinity play in impacting bullying, as well as how those ideals can lead to gay baiting of individuals who do not meet traditional gender roles. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) go on to state:

Research has indicated that homophobia is one of the organizing principles of heterosexual masculinity, a constitutive element in its construction…And as an organizing principle of masculinity, homophobia—the terror that others will see one as gay, as a failed man—underlies a significant amount of men’s behavior,
including their relationships with other men, women, and violence. One could say that homophobia is the hate that makes men straight. (p. 1446)

These two paragraphs, as well as other journal articles examined, delve into the role that both masculinity and gay baiting have on bullying. That connection between gender harassment and rampage school shootings is more important to understand than simply a generic connection between bullying and the phenomenon. This discussion of gender harassment provides a much clearer picture of bullying and how prevention efforts for extreme school violence should address these factors if the phenomenon is to be truly prevented. In contrast, print news frequently discussed bullying in a more cursory manner:

They believe that what they call the "toxic culture" of the school -- the worship of jocks and the tolerance of bullying -- is the primary force that set Dylan off. But they confess that in the main, they have no explanation. (p. 17)

This paragraph from the New York Times (2004) discussed the point that one of the shooters from the Columbine rampage school shooting was bullied, but does not delve any deeper into gender harassment or how that bullying may have impacted the perpetrator’s decision to become violent. These are pivotal issues if the phenomenon is to be understood and prevented.

Another cultural factor was cultural scripts, which appeared in 36.8% of journal articles and 10% of news articles. However, the rate of discussion was twice that in journal articles as compared to news articles ($\bar{x}=0.04, SD=0.08; \bar{x}=0.02, SD=0.10$ respectively). What these findings indicate is that this factor is mentioned seldom in print
news articles, and when it is mentioned there is not much space dedicated to exploring how these factors impact the occurrence of rampage school shootings.

Some of the school environment factors that played prevalent roles in both scholarly and news discussion of rampage school shootings were peer group and marginalization, and school hierarchies. The discussion of peer groups and marginalization, as well as school hierarchies were two factors that appeared to play a larger part in scholarly discussion than print news discussion. The discussion of peer groups and marginalization was discussed in 42.7% of scholarly articles as compared to just 12% of news articles. Although this factor ranked as almost equally important (per percentage of appearance) in both sources, the rate of discussion further illustrates the difference in importance of this factor. Journal articles discussed this factor in about 5% of paragraphs ($\bar{x}=0.05$, $SD=0.10$), as compared to just 1% of paragraphs in news articles ($\bar{x}=0.01$, $SD=0.04$).

Another important school environment factor to explore, which was also discussed quite differently between journals and print news, was the role played by school hierarchies. This is an important factor, as it is one of the factors that can be impacted at the local level if it is identified as an important contributor to the occurrence of rampage school shootings. Only about 4% of news articles mentioned this factor, but even more importantly it was discussed in less than 1% of news paragraphs ($\bar{x}=0.00$, $SD=0.03$). However, about 32% of journal articles mentioned school hierarchies, and 4% of paragraphs discussed the factor ($\bar{x}=0.04$, $SD=0.12$). This discrepancy suggests that the discussion of school hierarchies and their impact on rampage school shootings was essentially skipped over by the print news sources, despite its prevalence in scholarly
discussions of rampage school shootings. An example of this can be seen in an article by Klein (2006b):

The spate of school shootings across the United States between 1996 and 2002 has drawn attention to the pressing social problem of school violence…What has not been asked is the opposite question – that is, how are these crimes connected to the conventional paths for young boys to achieve popularity in their schools? The response, I argue, lies in an analysis of the peer hierarchies in schools and the ways students accrue cultural capital and gain status. (p. 53)

As previously mentioned, the role of school hierarchies is a factor that can be addressed at the local level. Therefore, it is another important factor in the prevention of rampage school shootings, and the dearth of discussion of this factor in the print news can have reverberating repercussions with prevention. How the differences in discussion of this factor may impact prevention of the phenomenon will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent chapter.

Overall, the answer to this research question is that there appears to be differences between print news and journal articles regarding the factors that are discussed as having an impact on the occurrence of rampage school shootings. However, the statistical difference between the two sources is based on journal articles having a much higher percentage of appearance of factors. This issue would have likely have not been a problem if there was not severe normality issues in the data. However, through triangulation of the percentage of appearance, rate of appearance, and rank (per percentage of appearance), the argument can be supported that there is a difference between print news and scholarly journal articles regarding the factors discussed.
The only individual construct factor that appeared to produce noteworthy differences between the media and researchers was mental illness. With mental illness, journal articles discussed the factor in 35.7% of articles, compared to just 15.6% of print news articles examined. They also discussed the factor equally in regards to rate ($\bar{x}=0.03$, $SD=0.06$; $\bar{x}=0.03$, $SD=0.10$ respectively). The only difference between the sources in regard to their discussion was the rank (per percentage of appearance). Mental illness was the third most discussed factor with print news, as compared to the seventh most important factor in journal articles. Essentially, both sources found mental illness to be an important factor, but researchers found other factors more important to discuss than mental illness.

The other two constructs of biological facts and family did not appear to have noteworthy or substantial differences between the sources examined in this study. However, the appearance of differences between cultural factors, school factors, and at least some individual factors support the exploration of the final research question, as it explores the differences across time of the various factors and constructs.

**Research question 3:** The third research questions was: How does the discussion of perpetration factors change over time with either or both the mainstream print news (i.e. national newspapers and news magazines), and scholarly journal articles? The purpose of this question is to ascertain the extent to which discussion of factors has changed through time. However, to analyze that question there must be at least some grouping of years since there have been periods of time without rampage school shootings (see Table 1), or without scholarly journal articles discussing the phenomenon. Using an arbitrary breaking down of time (i.e. by decade) would also be inappropriate as
it does not account for any of the unique characteristics of the phenomenon and how it has been reported on and researched through time. Previous research has suggested the possibility of timeframes existing in regards to rampage school shootings (Muschert, 2007a), and Mongan and Otis (2010) were able to identify three periods of time according to the discussion of rampage school shootings by the print news. The timeframes they uncovered broke down into: The overlooked years (1974 – 1993), the focused years (1994 – 1999), and the reflective years (2000 – 2012).

As Mongan and Otis’ (2010) work provides a platform to explore the change in discussion over time, it will serve as a starting place for the final research question. However, it is important not to just accept these timeframes and to verify that they are still relevant with the articles, both news and scholarly, that were examined in the current project. Therefore, the same methods that were used in Mongan and Otis (2010) to uncover the timeframes were used to verify that the timeframes are still valid with this data. To test whether the timeframes were still valid the number of articles that mentioned each shooter exclusively, and the number of articles that referenced each shooter, were calculated (see Table 12 Table 13) to compare how the discussion of each shooting broke down.

By breaking down the number of times that each shooting was mentioned exclusively, or in reference to another shooting, there appeared to be support for the timeframes proposed by Mongan and Otis (2010). As with their work, the timeframes were most evident with the news articles. Therefore, the timeframes proposed by those authors’ appeared to still be valid with this data, and will be used throughout subsequent discussions.
Shootings from 1974 – 1993 (the overlooked years) seldom referenced other rampage school shootings in the print news. Actually, the only shootings from this time period that did reference another rampage school shooting was the first shooting in Olean, New York and the last shooting in Grayson, Kentucky. Neither of these is surprising as the initial occurrence of a phenomenon is likely to be referred to again with subsequent occurrences, and the Grayson shooting appears to be a transition point to the second timeframe. The shootings in this timeframe also were rarely discussed in scholarly literature either exclusively or in reference to other rampage school shootings.

The focused years (1994 – 1999) were described by Mongan and Otis (2010) as the years that attention was most focused on rampage school shootings. In Table 12 and Table 13 there is an evident shift in the frequency of discussion of the shootings. For example, the sum of exclusive and references to shootings for all of the shootings in the overlooked years (47) was eclipsed several times over by just one of the shootings in the focused years (i.e. Columbine), and was nearly reached by several other shootings (i.e. Pearl, MS; Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR; and Springfield, OR). While scholarly discussion of rampage school shooting incidents was rarely exclusive, except for Columbine, there still appeared to be a dramatic shift during this timeframe. There were 14 shootings during this timeframe, and all but five of the incidents single handedly surpassed the total number of journal articles during the overlooked years. This timeframe was evidently the period of time where discussion of rampage school shootings was at its peak for both print news and journal articles.
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* = Exclusive, ** = Referenced
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*=Exclusive, **=Referenced
The final timeframe identified by Mongan and Otis (2010) that appeared to be verified in this project was the reflective years (2000 – 2012). During this timeframe, there appeared to be less exclusive discussion of rampage school shootings, as well as a dramatic decrease in the total number of articles discussing the phenomenon. This pattern also held true with journal articles, as there is an evident decrease in articles discussing the phenomenon, with the exception of a couple of shootings (e.g. Red Lake, Minnesota).

Since the timeframes established by Mongan and Otis (2010) held true with the data from this analysis, they were used as a platform for examining how the discussion of factors related to the occurrence of rampage school shootings has shifted through time. As a note, several factors were unable to be statistically examined due to low cell counts when simply examining the differences between sources during the analysis for the second research question. When breaking down the factors by source and timeframe, there were no factors that were able to be statistically examined due to low cell counts. Therefore, similar to the discussion regarding statistical significance mentioned during the response to the second research question, subsequent discussions for this research question cannot be further supported statistically. However, using a method similar to that used for the second research question, arguments can be made regarding the shifting discussion of factors and constructs through time.

In order to explore how the discussion of factors and constructs has shifted through time, a table was created showing the number of articles – separated by source – that mentioned each factor during each time period (see Table 14). The total number of articles during each timeframe, as well as the percentage of appearance per timeframe
was also calculated and rounded to the nearest percentage. For example, rejection was mentioned in 6 news articles during the focused years, which constituted 5% of news articles during that time period. Calculating the percentage of appearance per time period is a critical piece in the examination of how the discussion of factors has shifted through time.

Table 14
Discussion of Factors Over Time by Timeframe

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<td>Hier.</td>
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Table 14 (continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Discussion of Factors Over Time by Timeframe</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overlooked Years (1974 – 1993)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Focused Years (1994 – 1999)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective Years (2000 – 2012)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 (2%) 0 (0%)</td>
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<td>Gay Bait</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>121 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>94 164</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = N is News, S is Scholarly and (T) is total number of articles

The overlooked years. The most evident result when examining the discussion of factors through time is that the overlooked years (1974 – 1993) were essentially overlooked in scholarly literature. The only scholarly article to appear during this timeframe, and focused on the type of school shooting that later became identified as rampage school shootings, was an article by Collison, Bowden, Patterson, and Snyder (1987). They appeared to be discussing the shooting at Ferguson High School in Lewiston, Montana, which was the fifth rampage school shooting to occur. The authors’ of that article focused on the response to the incident, as well as how schools can develop a response plan for that specific type of school shooting. An intriguing part of their argument was that, “a specific tragedy cannot be prepared for” (p. 390), yet they still recommended crisis teams be prepared in case of a tragedy occurring. They go on to state:
We suggest that schools develop tactical and strategic plans for different kinds of events (e.g., shootings, violent storms, suicides, teacher or student deaths). The Jefferson County, Colorado, schools have developed crisis intervention teams...with persons identified as being responsible for (a) team leadership and media contact, (b) first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, (c) communication with involved families, (d) personal effects, (e) a telephone network, (f) traffic control, (g) contact with close friends of those involved, (h) contacts with acquaintances of those involved, and (i) handouts and materials. (p. 390)

It was evident that indeed, “a specific tragedy cannot be prepared for” (p. 390), as Jefferson County schools was the location of the worst middle or high school shooting in the history of the United States, and the responses of the school and local law enforcement were extensively criticized post shooting. However, Collison, Bowden, Patterson, and Snyder’s (1987) were the first and only journal article to appear during the initial timeframe. In this regard, print news actually led the way in introducing the phenomenon, as well as factors related to the phenomenon, to the general public. That initial discussion by the print news could have played a major role in the internalization of information regarding a phenomenon, which will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent chapter.

During the initial timeframe (i.e. the overlooked years), print news focused most of its attention on cultural and school factors, with individual factors barely being discussed. For example, cultural factors such as the role of gun availability (26%), violent media consumption (17%), and bullying (11%) were some of the most prevalent factors. The school factors such as, peers (17%), and school characteristics (11%) were
also frequently discussed. However, the most frequently discussed individual factor was mental illness (11%). Since the print news was the first to directly discuss factors related to rampage school shootings, it was not surprising that researchers examined and discussed these factors after the transition to the focused years (1994 – 1999).

*The focused years.* The focused years saw the initial intensive discussion of rampage school shootings by scholars, which was not surprising as it was the time period that had the most shootings (N=14), and consisted of shootings that garnered the most attention (i.e. Columbine, CO; Pearl, MS; Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR; and Springfield, OR), and were the most lethal. The factors that were the most prevalent in the print news during the overlooked years continued to garner attention in the news during the focused years. In other words, cultural factors like gun availability (28%), violent media consumption (23%), and bullying (12%) continued to be discussed frequently. Other factors such as, mental illness (16%), and peer (12%) also garnered some attention. However, cultural scripts, another cultural factor, also began to emerge during this time in the news (17%). The emergence of the family construct also occurred during this time frame, with the role that parenting plays in the incidents of rampage school shootings being discussed in 11% of articles. The family construct and cultural scripts garnered little attention in the previous time frame, but became more prevalent during the focused years. It could be argued that they became more relevant for a couple of reasons. First, the higher profile incidents during the focused years likely led to an increased discussion of the role that parents play because of the difficulty in understanding how children could kill numerous peers and adults. Also, it is likely that during this time period the school shooting incidents that previously had appeared separate and different, began to be
connected to one another and people started to question whether there was a cultural shift that made rampage school shootings an option for students who perceived an injustice at school. For example, an article in the *Houston Chronicle* during this time (McDonald, 1998) wrote:

Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark., called it "an unspeakable horror" and "the most traumatic event" ever in his state. He said all Americans "must wonder what it says about our culture" that such young people could commit such acts of violence. (pp. A17)

This quote, as well as the title of the article “Schoolyard ambush; Reno to study recent incidents for possible ‘common elements’”, illustrate that during this time period there was the beginnings of a discussion by the print news on whether there was a cultural component developing that was impacting the occurrence of rampage school shootings.

Journal articles during this timeframe increased substantially, and appeared to mostly focus on factors and constructs that were prevalent in the print news articles during the previous time period. For example, the most discussed construct by scholars during the focused years was cultural. References to violent media consumption (45%) and gun availability (40%) were prevalent in journal articles during these years. Also, cultural scripts were tied for the most frequently discussed factor in journal articles (45%). As mentioned earlier, this can likely be explained due to the increase in both the number, as well as the lethality, of rampage school shootings during this timeframe. A phenomenon was emerging and cultural factors were being explored. That shift was summarized concisely in a *Newsweek* (1999) article:
The wave of gun violence has irrevocably altered the national self-image and
should be a wake-up call to parents. People had their confidence shaken and their
complacency dispelled this past year, says Cornell University's James Garbarino,
who has studied children and violence for years. There is a growing recognition
that the epidemic of youth violence has now reached a point where virtually every
school contains boys who are troubled, angry and violent enough, who have
access to weapons and violent scenarios and images, to become the next tragedy. I
think people are now understanding that in their hearts--and minds. (Kantrowitz et
al., 1999, pp. 39)

Essentially, the phenomenon began to be described as an epidemic of extreme youth
violence, which called into question the role that American cultural had on the occurrence
of the incidents.

Two other factors that played prevalent roles in the scholarly discussion of
rampage school shootings during the focused years were parenting (30%) and school
hierarchies (20%). Discussion of parenting as a factor also doubled with the print news
sources during this time period (11%); however, it was not among the top five factors
discussed by the news. Further supporting the increased blame directed towards parents,
Bliss, Emshoff, Buck, and Cook (2006) noted that during the end of the overlooked years
and throughout the focused years, parents were frequently blamed for the violence of
their children. For example, they wrote:

...a 1999 national random sample of 1,025 adults and a 1993 national random
sample of 12,680 parents of third to twelfth graders placed blame for school
violence on parents, specifying that lack of parental involvement in children’s lives led to violent behavior by youth. (p. 266 – 267)

During this time period print news also appeared to frame a portion of their stories in ways that drew attention to the roles parents played in the school shootings. For example, an article in the *New York Times* (1999) noted:

> Before April 20, before Columbine, Michael Shoels was a small-business owner who had never given a full-blown rafters-shaking speech. In his new life as his son's avenger he hungrily seeks the spotlight, and has traveled to Georgia, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, Alabama and now New York. As he speaks, his voice and his emotions rise. Soon he is screaming, his words garbled but his vehemence and his anguish still clear. "They ask us if we blame the parents?" he thunders. "Who else do we blame? I taught my son right from wrong. My son wasn't shooting people up. My son was in the library doing what he was supposed to do." (pp. 61)

As can be seen from these examples, there had been a shift in blame being directed towards the parents of rampage school shooters during this timeframe. However, unlike the previous factors, hierarchies in school emerged in journal articles during this timeframe, but it was not a factor that print news spent much time exploring.

About 20% of journal articles in the focused years discussed the role of school hierarchies in the occurrence of rampage school shootings. As will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent chapter, school factors such as student hierarchies at school are one construct that can be addressed at the local level for prevention efforts. Therefore, school hierarchies can play an important part in prevention efforts, but it appears that from the overlooked years through the focused years the news mostly
skipped over the potential importance of this factor despite it being one of the key factors since the emergence of scholarly discussion of rampage school shootings.

Discussion of biological factors and individual characteristics was not prevalent during the focused years, and those constructs were mostly overlooked with the exception of mental illness. Essentially, during this timeframe most attention was geared towards either the school environment or cultural factors. This finding indicates that there was not much stock put into the role that individual agency played into the shootings.

The reflective years. The final timeframe is the reflective years (2000 – 2012), which arguably is still the timeframe that is being experienced. This timeframe conversely saw a decrease in the number of print news articles (from 121 to 94), but a massive increase in the number of journal articles (from 20 to 164). About 90% of all scholarly articles were published in this time frame. Mongan and Otis (2010) identified this as the reflective years due to the tendency for reports to reflect back on the shootings from the focused years. This is likely due to understanding in the focused years that the various school shootings in Table 1 were a similar phenomenon. Also, the defining example of rampage school shootings (i.e. Columbine) occurred during the focused years. Therefore, it is understandable that subsequent rampage school shootings would refer to incidents that have subsequently been used to define the phenomenon.

During the reflective years the print news sources slightly shifted some of their discussion of factors and constructs. For example, where cultural scripts had played a prominent role in news articles during the focused years, the discussion dropped drastically from 17% to 4% of news articles during the reflective years. However, this change is better understood when also examining the rise in the discussion of the copycat
factor during the last time period. The copycat factor was only mentioned in 3% of news articles during the focused years, but was discussed in 13% of news articles in the reflective years. Using the framework previously discussed regarding the focused years being the defining time period of the phenomenon, this shift fits with the characteristics of the different timeframes. Put another way, during the focused years the phenomenon was becoming recognized as such, therefore the news was examining cultural characteristics that could be impacting the occurrence of the shootings. However, after the transition to the reflective years, all the subsequent shootings were generally discussed as copycats of the shootings that occurred during the focused years. For example, an article in *Newsweek* (2005) explored how similar the shootings at Red Lake, Minnesota, and Columbine, Colorado were when it stated:

> The echoes of the 1999 Columbine massacre were chilling: the adoration of Hitler, the social isolation, the frightening Web postings, even the Goth clothing and trench coat. "He didn't have any buddies," said Thunder. School officials had sent Weise to a psychiatrist last year and put him on Prozac. They allowed him to be schooled at home with a teacher so he could get special attention and work through his emotional problems. Hidden among bogs and soaring pines, this Chippewa homeland seems a world apart from the white, middle-class enclaves of earlier school shootings. But for now, the Red Lake principal, Chris Dunshee, is left to lament, "We have joined a tragic fraternity." (pp. 33)

While the quote does not specifically state that the Red Lake shooting was a copycat, the highlight byline of the article was, “A Columbine copycat shatters the calm in Minnesota” (Johnson, pp. 33). When the defining incident, as well as all of the Big Four
incidents (see Figure 2) occurred during the focused years (Mongan & Otis, 2010), it is not surprising that shootings during the reflective years were compared to that timeframe.

The Big Four was part of a heuristic created by Mongan and Otis (2010) to break down the impact that various rampage school shooting incidents had on the frequency of factors discussed. What they found, which is also supported by the findings of this project, was that there are four tiers of shootings that appear to impact the discussion of rampage school shootings to various degrees. For example, the defining incident is Columbine (Larkin, 2009; Muschert, 2007b; Muschert, 2009), which (see Table 12 and 13) has commanded exponentially greater attention from both news and scholars than any of the other rampage school shooting incidents.

The other three tiers that were identified by Mongan and Otis (2010) consisted of: The Big Four, The Small Seven, and The Rest. As mentioned previously, all the four incidents classified as The Big Four (Pearl, MS; Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR; and Springfield, OR) occurred during the focused years. The Small Seven, as well as The Rest, are the remaining incidents that did not command the level of attention that the two higher tiers commanded.

Once again, cultural factors continued to dominate discussion during the reflective years. Other cultural factors that played prominent roles in the print news during the reflective years were the availability of guns (20%), violent media consumption (27%), and bullying (14%). These factors were the main factors discussed by the print news sources, and despite some slight dropping off of the discussion of the availability of guns from the focused years to the reflective years. Cultural factors such as these can be seen as bearing the brunt of the blame for impacting the occurrence of
rampage school shootings. Individual factors were again mostly overlooked, with the exception of mental illness (17%).

Figure 2: Importance Placed on Different Incidents of Rampage School Shootings

Factors discussed by journal articles during the final timeframe increased drastically. There were 8 factors discussed in 30% or more of the articles from this time period, and the most discussed factors were cultural. For example, the most discussed factors were: bullying (55%), violent media consumption (49%), gun availability (45%), peer (45%), and parenting (40%). The factors of mental illness (38%), cultural scripts (35%), as well as school hierarchies (34%) also played substantial roles in scholarly discussion of the phenomenon during this timeframe. As can be seen from the discussion of factors, cultural factors bore the brunt of the blame.

While it is impossible for the current study to statistically test whether scholarly discussion was following and directly responding to the media discourse of some of the
most discussed factors (e.g. bullying, gun availability, violent media consumption, mental illness), there is some indication in a few of the journal articles that suggests that this might be the case, at least in terms of the discussion of cultural factors such as gun availability and violent media. In regards to violent media consumption, Ferguson (2008) wrote that:

…the issue of video game exposure should be discarded as a facet of any such profiles. There simply is no quality evidence for the predictive value of violent game exposure as a risk factor for school shootings. Indeed, the risk of false positives is significant, even when considered in light with other variables (the inclusion of even one or two ‘universal variables’, that is, variables that are near universally true for the population of interest, give the illusion of multiple risk factors when considered in combination). Even if the focus is on ‘incessant’ interest in violent games, most elders (teachers, parents, psychologists, etc.), as unfamiliar with game culture as most are, simply lack the perspective to evaluate what constitutes ‘incessant’ interest, and what is developmentally normal or even healthy…Certainly, the inclusion of violent game exposure as a potential risk factor worsens the predictive utility of any such profile. (p. 34)

What this quote essentially states is that the factor of violent media consumption, especially in regards to violent video games, cannot be used for prevention and would actually hinder prevention if used. Due to the frequent discussion of this factor by print news in the timeframes before the reflective years, Ferguson (2008) could be responding not only to other social scientists who champion this factor, but also the general belief – supported by the media – that violent media consumption impacts the occurrence of
rampage school shootings. Furthermore, Ferguson (2009) continues to deconstruct this factor when he wrote the following year that:

In the case of school shootings…The alleged corrupting influence of violent video games has been identified by some as one root cause. Ignoring the youth-violence data, ignoring inconsistent data from multiple studies, even ignoring contradictory data from their own studies, some social scientists have presented the research on violent games as strong, consistent, and unequivocal. In truth, it is none of these things. (p. 39)

This quote is primarily directed towards other social scientists, but is also indicative of the battle that some scholars have experienced in combating the factors that are prevalent in print news articles. How this could impact prevention will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

In regards to gun availability, Kleck (1999; 2009) plays the role that Ferguson (2008; 2009) played disputing the role of violent media consumption. Kleck (2009) states in the abstract for his article that:

The most frequent policy lesson drawn following the Columbine school shootings was the need for more gun controls. Review of the details of both Columbine and other contemporary school shootings indicates, however, that the specific gun control measures proposed in their aftermath were largely irrelevant and almost certainly could not have prevented the incidents or reduced their death tolls. (p. 1447)

Gun availability was a consistently discussed factor regardless of time period and source, and with the news was either the most or second most discussed factor throughout the
timeframes. What Kleck (2009) was arguing in his article was that discussion of gun availability is not relevant to the prevention of rampage school shootings. Additionally, as can be seen in another one of his articles, Kleck (1999) was attempting to at least partly address the role that the media was playing in perpetuating the view that the availability of guns was a central factor in the occurrence of rampage school shootings. This factor will also be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

Two other factors frequently mentioned in journal articles during the final timeframe that also differed from news articles were parenting (40%) and school hierarchy (34%). The discussion of parenting by the news actually decreased during the final timeframe from 11% during the focused years to 9% during the reflective years. However, with journal articles the discussion increased from 30% to 40%. One argument that could be used to explain these shifts are that researchers were following the lead of the media in exploring the role that parenting has on the occurrence of rampage school shootings. In regards to why print news discussion shifted between these time frames, the argument can be made that due to space restrictions frequently imposed on news articles, those sources began to focus on the hot button factors instead of the less salient factors. This argument appears to be supported by the data, as only three factors even garnered 15% or more frequency in the news during the final timeframe.

School hierarchy discussion continued to increase in the reflective years. The frequency of scholarly discussion of the factor increased from 20% in the focused years to 34% in the reflective years. However, news discussion of the factor decreased from 5% to 3% during the same timeframes. The difference between the sources on this factor continues to be noteworthy due to the potential role that the factor can play in prevention
efforts. It is worth noting again that the final timeframe was a period of time where news focused on primary hot button issues (i.e. gun availability, media violence) instead of undertaking a more in-depth look at the phenomenon. Scholarly articles, on the other hand, increased dramatically with their discussion of factors during this timeframe. That shift by the news towards the hot button cultural factors and away from factors prevalent in journal articles during the most recent timeframe further illustrates the tendency of the media to focus on the more sensationalized aspects of the phenomena (Barnett, 1997; Cooper & Rotor, 2000; Karpinski, 2009).

**Conclusion.** In summary, the findings of this project answered all three of the research questions that were posed. There are numerous factors and constructs that print news and journal articles attribute to the occurrence of rampage school shootings (see Table 2). Although there are about 20 factors discussed by both sources, they differ in regards to the frequency that they discuss those factors.

In response to the second research question, the data showed that there was a difference between sources on the blame placed on various constructs. Although the statistical results were due to journal articles discussing nearly all of the factors with much greater frequency, through triangulation of the available data there did appear to be major differences with the discussion of factors.

Examination of the final research question showed that there appeared to be distinct timeframes in regards to rampage school shooting discussion. The frequency of factors was shown to shift through time, with the news initially leading the discussion of factors. Subsequently, journal articles did appear to respond to at least some of the factors; however, scholars also branched off and concentrated on factors that were
essentially overlooked by the print news. The final chapter will explore the impact that
the findings of this project can have on real world aspects of the phenomenon, such as
prevention efforts, and the creation of moral panics.
Chapter Seven: Discussion

The findings of the analyses showed that there is a difference between the factors that the print news and scholarly sources attribute to impacting the occurrence of rampage school shootings. As discussed in greater depth earlier, the statistical findings are likely due to the recoding of the data, but there are still many arguments that can be made based on the triangulation of the information that was gathered. However, the critical question that must be answered with these findings is, what real world impact might these findings have, and what can be done to combat the problem of the media attributing factors to the phenomenon that researchers do not find as important?

Importance of a factor is difficult to define empirically, but the findings of this study illustrate the argument that space dedicated to discussing factors can serve as an accurate proxy for importance. This question of differences in importance will be answered in the following discussions by first explicating how differences in attribution of blame between print news and researchers can impact prevention, threat and risk assessment, and policies aimed at prevention of the phenomenon. Then, the impact that the media can have in starting moral panics in regards to rampage school shootings will be explored. Next, using the framework of newsmaking criminology, ways to negate this difference in attribution of blame are discussed. Finally, limitations of this study are explored as well as how to move the findings of this project on to subsequent research. As a note, the terms media and print news sources examined will be used interchangeably throughout the remainder of the discussion. As only major print news sources were examined, the findings cannot be generalized to other formats of news (i.e. internet, broadcast). When statements are made applying findings to the general media they are intended to be
tentative, and serve more as theoretical generalizations since the internalization, objectification, and externalization processes would be as likely to occur regardless of the format through which information is received.

As a note, the following chapter is based on the argument that scholarly literature should be guiding responses to rampage school shootings, and that if the media is guiding the process instead, there will be negative consequences (i.e. bad policy, failed prevention). However, a competing assertion could be made that since research regarding the phenomenon is fragmented (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Muschert, 2007a), and research has yet to produce data that support a causal relationship between any of the factors and the phenomenon, then that argument is invalid since researchers cannot definitively state that a factor impacts the occurrence of the phenomenon. However, for several reasons that will be discussed, the guiding argument of this project and chapter is valid, and the propagation by the media of factors not well supported by researchers is still problematic.

The first support for the argument used throughout this project is that although research into rampage school shootings may be fragmented (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Muschert, 2007a), this research project has shown that there is some consensus among researchers for what factors likely play a critical role in the occurrence of the phenomenon. Also, research is generally theory driven, and follows a process that aim to explain phenomenon from that theoretical perspective. For example, seven factors were discussed in more than one-third of all journal articles (see Table 6 for complete list). Therefore, an argument can be made that researchers have reached a point where they can
assert that there are certain factors that likely have an impact on the occurrence of
rampage school shootings, and could be used to guide decisions currently.

Another support for the argument used in this chapter involves the state of
research into the phenomenon, and the desire to prevent additional loss of life from future
occurrences. Rampage school shootings are extremely violent and rare events, and as can
be seen in Table 1, there have only been 29 occurrences. As a note, the shootings at
Chardon High School (Ohio) and Sandy Hook Elementary (Connecticut) appear to meet
the criteria for rampage school shootings, but were not included in this study due to the
date of their occurrence being after data was gathered. The rarity and low occurrence of
rampage school shootings leaves empirical examination of data difficult, if not currently
impossible. It is entirely probable that enough future rampage school shootings will
occur, which would then allow empirical examination of factors. However, if prevention
efforts are to be implemented before the additional loss of life that would occur before
that point in time, the basis for those efforts should be grounded in the best arguments
currently available. That indicates that although research cannot state with certainty what
factors should guide decision making in regards to prevention or policy, it is a reasonable
argument to assert that prevention and policy would be in a better place if it was based
off of researchers’ arguments and not the factors propagated by the media.

The final support that will be discussed is that there are some studies that have
indicated that the factors important to researchers may help in prevention of the
phenomenon, at least in regards to the use of threat assessment. As will be discussed in
greater depth later in the chapter, Cornell et al.’s (2004) work with the application of
threat assessment in schools shows promise and illustrates this point. Therefore, there is
some support for the assertion that researchers are on the right track in regards to factors that they deem are important.

All three of these supports provide a solid basis for the argument that internalizing factors discussed by researchers instead of the media will lead to better outcomes with prevention and policy creation. Therefore, throughout the remainder of the chapter, arguments will be made with the underlying assumption – supported by these assertions – that although research into the phenomenon by scholars is still in its infancy, the discrepancies between researchers and the media that was uncovered by this research project are problematic and need to be addressed if prevention of the tragedies is to be achieved. Also, it is important to remember that the arguments in this chapter are also based in the understanding that research into the phenomenon is still growing, so ultimately there currently is no data to definitively guide the decision making process.

**Impact of Findings.** When applying findings from a study, it is critical to weave the theory used for the project into the impact that the results might have. Therefore, all of the subsequent discussion relies heavily on social constructionist thought. The processes of internalization, objectification, and externalization play important roles in how the differences in attribution of blame between print news and scholarly journal articles may impact the perceptions of the public, which in turn may impact prevention, assessment, and policy-related decisions and actions. Put another way, the public has been provided information about the phenomenon, and since it is a phenomenon that is extremely violent and rare, internalization will likely utilize information that has been readily available. Then through internalization and objectification, attribution of blame
for rampage school shootings is solidified and perpetuated through policy, and other purposeful actions of the general public.

**Prevention.** Arguably the largest impact that the findings of this study highlight, is that the prevention of rampage school shootings could be hindered due to misinformation from print news. As was discussed in chapter four, the media frames stories about newsworthy phenomena in ways that accentuate factors important to the media source (Entman, 2007). The problem arises when the information differs from what scholars are attributing to the phenomenon, or when information is spread without taking into account the particulars of the phenomenon that are unknown. Then, when the public uses that possibly faulty media information due the internalization process, an inaccurate representation of the phenomenon may be internalized. Since the media can impact perception (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Tuckman, 1980; Vasterman, 2005), that process of internalizing faulty information can also occur if the media is not cautious about framing stories in a way that draws attention to factors that researchers have been unable to connect to the phenomena with data or strong arguments. This project has shown that the print news sources that were examined differ from scholarly sources in regard to the factors that impact the occurrence of rampage school shootings. This section will illustrate how those differences may impact prevention efforts.

The first consideration when explicating how prevention may be hindered is looking at the population of people that serve in prevention roles. In regards to rampage school shootings these people mostly include faculty, administrators, local police, educators, support personnel, and policy makers. Since this section is concerned with
prevention on the local level, policy makers will be explored in a subsequent section. Individuals involved in prevention efforts range from faculty to school administrators, so it is important to explore the ways that misinformation may impact their roles in preventing rampage school shootings from occurring.

Logically, prevention efforts can only be implemented if there is information available on what can be done to actually prevent the phenomenon from occurring. Whether or not that information is accurate is another consideration, but prevention involves some action being taken according to information that is available about the issue. Thus, if prevention efforts hope to be successful, prevention strategies need to be based on an accurate understanding of the phenomenon. This can be seen in Cornell et al.’s (2004) success in avoiding expulsions due to threats when evidenced based factors were utilized in the disciplinary decision making process. Only with accurate information can evidence-supported prevention be implemented. Therefore, it can be argued that since there is a difference between what the print news perpetuates as factors associated with rampage school shootings and what scholars find important, the prevention efforts of those previously mentioned people – from teachers to administrators – are may not be evidence-supported, if they are based on the media reports. Further perpetuating this problem is the fact that scholarly articles are often expensive and difficult to obtain if a person is not actively involved with a college or university. An example of this process would help to illustrate this point.

As an example, imagine a family with limited income who has saved their money for an extended period of time in order to purchase a trampoline for their child. Their primary concern was to buy the safest trampoline for their child. However, they do not
have access to the findings of researchers who have been studying trampoline safety, and
to purchase access to those reports would cost enough that they would be unlikely to have
the money to then buy a trampoline. Additionally, the parents fear that they would not be
able to understand the statistics and jargon of the reports even if they were to purchase
them. Also, to make things even more difficult for the family, the sale that even allows
them to be financially able to purchase the trampoline ends in a day. Therefore, the
parents have to make a decision regarding which trampoline to get in a short amount of
time, and therefore must rely on information that is readily available to them. So, they
reflect on some investigative news stories they read after a terrible trampoline accident in
the community a few weeks ago, and remembered the news stated that trampoline brand
X was not safe due to its shape. Therefore, the parents decided to purchase trampoline
brand Y since it had a different shape, and because the news did not talk about its shape
as being unsafe. However, unknown to the family, researchers had already shown that
trampoline shape did not have a relationship to safety, and that trampoline brand Y was
actually more unsafe than brand X due to the parts being used in brand X. So, the parents
purchased trampoline brand Y, due to the information perpetuated by the media, and due
to their inability to obtain evidenced-supported information regarding trampoline safety.
Subsequently, the family shared their decision with family and friends, possibly
impacting their trampoline purchasing behaviors in the future; despite the brand they
purchased actually being more unsafe.

This truncated example provides a good parallel to how differences between print
news and scholarly sources can impact prevention efforts for rampage school shootings.
Much like how the trampoline accident made safety a newsworthy item, school shootings
generally cause a saturation of media reports immediately following the event. This can be seen with Muschert and Carr’s (2006) research on media salience following a rampage school shooting. Compounding this factor, as shown by this research project, subsequent news articles after a tragedy report on factors that are different than what researchers have deemed as important, or report on factors that have not been fully explored by researchers. Add in the difficulty the general public has in obtaining scholarly journal articles, and the intensity and malleability of perception after a major traumatic event (Carnegy & Anderson, 2007), and the stage is set for internalization and externalization of faulty information. Once that information is internalized and subsequently objectified, further actions serve as externalizations of that faulty information. For instance, in the trampoline example, the purchasing of the hazardous equipment and discussion of their decision with their family and friends are externalizations of the faulty belief that trampoline shape impacts its safety. The same phenomenon can occur in the prevention of rampage school shootings.

For example, two factors deemed important by researchers are the role of masculinity, as well as the role of hierarchies in the school. However, masculinity was only mentioned in less than 1% of print news articles examined, and school hierarchies in only 3.6% of news articles examined. Since, as discussed previously, space spent discussing factors can serve as a reliable proxy for importance, it is a reasonable argument that the print news sources did not believe these factors were important, or were too complicated to communicate to their audience. Researchers, however, discussed these factors in about one-fourth and one-third of the articles respectively.
Therefore, it is unlikely for prevention efforts to address these areas if media information is the primary source available to those in prevention roles.

For example, if people involved with prevention only became concerned after a rampage school shooting had occurred somewhere else (i.e. copycat), and are primarily looking out for students with mental illness, who are bullied, and had been previously delinquent, then prevention takes a reactive approach that will tend to draw attention to already marginalized students. This issue was expressed by Reddy et al. (2001) when discussing the importance of using a threat assessment framework based on scholarly supported factors, instead of relying on information prevalent in the media. Other top print news factors are cultural factors, which are areas the school cannot address and must be addressed at the societal level (i.e. gun availability, and violent media consumption). However, if factors are addressed that are more prevalent in scholarly research, such as school hierarchies, then there are ways for the school to combat those factors proactively in their prevention efforts. These same issues can also be seen with school workers who are tasked with determining when somebody poses a valid threat to the school.

There are several approaches that schools could use to address hierarchies, power differences between groups of students, and peer marginalization that can occur due to those power differences. While it is beyond the scope of this study to exhaustively explore these types of prevention, approaches such as peer mediation (for example see Johnson & Johnson, 1996), or the use of distributive justice in schools (see Furman & Shields, 2005) could be employed to address those factors.
**Threat and Risk Assessment.** One of the most evidence-supported approaches for prevention of rampage school shootings is threat assessment (Reddy et al., 2001). However, one of the dangers discussed by Reddy et al. (2001) was the tendency to rely on clinical judgment to assess risk of a threat. They identified it as dangerous due to the state of research into the phenomenon being unable to definitively identify causal factors. However, it is also dangerous due to the misinformation that this research project uncovered. If media and scholars differ on what they identify as factors that impact the occurrence of rampage school shootings, then it is important to discuss how the information from the media may impact how risk is assessed by professionals.

A prime example of this can be seen by the differences in the rate of discussion of a few factors. For example, the important factors identified by researchers (by rate) are peers (5% of paragraphs), school hierarchy (4% of paragraphs), and masculinity (4% of paragraphs). However, the print news sources discussed these factors in 1% or less of paragraphs. Therefore, the more readily available information (i.e. media) hardly discusses factors that are deemed relevant factors in understanding the phenomenon. Instead, the focus appears to stay on hot button cultural issues such as the consumption of violent media and the availability of guns. While scholars also found these factors relevant enough to discuss – as evidenced by the percentage of articles in which they appeared – they serve tertiary roles in local prevention. School factors would be the more appropriate factors to focus on for prevention.

With this dynamic occurring, there is a risk that staff unfamiliar with the specifics of rampage school shootings may fall back to relying on information internalized from the readily available sources of the media. While this study cannot say definitively that
those tasked with assessing risk will fall back on this information, the argument can be made that it is a risk. For example, Mongan and Otis (2012) showed that disciplinary decision makers in Alabama school districts were inconsistent in their utilization of major disciplinary actions for major disciplinary incidents. If those disciplinarians used a framework such as the evidenced-supported threat assessment proposed by Reddy et al. (2001), then there would appear to be some level of consistency with the disciplinary decisions that are made. Since the decisions are not consistent, the argument can be made that their decisions are based on information from non-standardized or informal risk/threat assessments.

It is important for professionals to receive training specific to the phenomenon of rampage school shootings, since there is a difference between different types of school shootings (see Chapter one). Therefore, prevention efforts that may be geared towards targeted violence or mass school shootings may have little impact on prevention of rampage school shootings. For example, targeted school shootings include gang related shootings, which would logically require at least slightly different prevention methods than would be needed to prevent school shootings that are similar to the Columbine High School shootings. As discussed in Chapter three, peoples’ purposeful behaviors are based on objectifications previously made regarding the issue at hand that the action is addressing (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Consequently, without specific training related to prevention of rampage school shootings there is a risk that professionals would revert back to prevention of other school violence phenomena that the individual understands better, or even more problematically could revert back to their typifications of rampage
school shootings that are impacted by media sources similar to the ones this project examined.

**Impact on Policy Prevention.** The possible influences on perception regarding what factors are associated with the occurrence of rampage school shootings have the ability to not only impact prevention on the local level, but also national policy that is directed towards preventing these tragedies from occurring. This policy attention is likely due to the extreme nature of the phenomenon, as well as the media salience that these events command (Muschert, 2009, Muschert & Carr, 2006). Put another way, rampage school shootings are extremely violent and frequently draw a large amount of media attention. A problem again arises when factors that are associated with the phenomenon by the media are not factors that are deemed important by scholarly sources, or when factors are blamed by the media that have yet to be fully examined by researchers. This is a major issue, since as mentioned earlier, effective prevention must rely on accurate information about a phenomenon. Therefore, when policy is pursued or enacted due to misinformation there is a real risk that the policy will not prevent people from dying due to rampage school shooters, which is the paramount goal of the policies directed at the phenomenon. This subsection will briefly explore historical and current examples of how policy has, or is, being impacted by the media. Then, discussion will explore possible policy changes that could be incorporated utilizing scholarly information instead of information perpetuated by the media. As a note, it is important to first define policy before continuing with the discussion in order to prevent any confusion arising regarding why certain types of policies (i.e. court opinions, Executive branch
explorations) are discussed as such. The definition that will be used, and has been used throughout this project, is that a policy is simply a course of action.

Arguably one of the most evident historical policies that can be used to illustrate reactions to rampage school shootings are the zero tolerance policies that became entrenched in American schools following the Columbine High School shooting (Mongan & Walker, 2012). As was explored by Mongan and Walker (2012) zero tolerance policies were passed before the focused years (1994 – 1999). However, they did not become entrenched in school districts, especially in rural areas, until after the defining rampage school shooting event (i.e. Columbine). This sudden adoption of zero tolerance policies was due to the moral panic (explored in the subsequent section) that was created during the focused years regarding rampage school shootings. Due to the extreme nature and apparent randomness of the phenomenon, pressure was put on policy makers to protect students at school (Mongan & Walker, 2012). The reaction was to adopt an extremely hyper-vigilant policy (i.e. zero tolerance) that would pounce on any indication that a person was thinking about hurting other students at school. However, zero tolerance has been shown to not prevent rampage school shootings from occurring, and may actually provide a final stressor that increases the risk of an incident occurring (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Those policies also do not account for the nature of the phenomenon, which is more akin to a tactical strike than just snapping at school. As has been seen in many previous rampage school shooting incidents, the perpetrators generally do not bring their guns to school before the attack and have attacked even post-suspension or expulsion (i.e. Springfield, OR; Red Lake, MN).
A current and ongoing example of how factors perpetuated by the media receive policy attention despite their perceived irrelevance in much of the scholarly research involves the factor of violent media consumption, and can be seen in the recent rampage shootings in Newtown, Connecticut. As can be seen by the Ferguson (2012) news article, violent media consumption was a factor that was heavily blamed by the media for impacting the incident in Newtown. Subsequently, the Vice President of the United States began to direct attention towards the factor. For example, Wallace (2012) wrote on CNN:

Biden also criticized the idea of arming teachers and other school personnel, though he did indicate support for having a police presence within schools known as resource officers.

He spoke in favor of a federal gun trafficking law, increasing the number of police officers on streets and studying both mental health and the impact of violent video games. (para. 21 – 22)

Another CNN contributor (Zakaria, 2012) wrote on the policy shift addressing the media proposed connection between Newtown and violent media consumption:

Vice President Joe Biden was meeting video game representatives yesterday as the Obama administration and the U.S. public grapples with the question of gun crime – and why it is so much more prevalent in America than other rich countries.

The oft-debated premise behind such talks is clear. Young males weaned on a diet of violent and graphic images, it is argued, are more likely to engage in deadly violence themselves. (para. 1 – 2)
These articles illustrate that one of the most prominent members of the executive branch, supported by the President of the United States, was exploring the impact that violent media consumption had on the occurrence of rampage shootings. This is a critical shift in policy that is important to explore, due to the power that the Executive Branch can have in the creation of policy. For example, another cultural issue heavily pursued during this timeframe, and one that is continuing to be pursued, is the role of gun availability. In regards to this factor, the President has already utilized his Constitutional power of enacting executive orders due to the belief that gun availability impacts the occurrence of rampage shootings (for example see White House, 2013). These orders consisted of several “executive actions” intended to address loopholes deemed important by the President (for example see page 3 of the report).

In regards to the impact that media attention can have on policy directed specifically towards violent media consumption, another example can be seen with a policy that was attempted to be enacted in California. In 2005, California attempted to enact a policy prohibiting the sale and rental of violent video games to minors (California Assembly Bill 1179, 2005). This policy was subsequently challenged by the Entertainment Merchants Association (EMA). The challenge ultimately made it to the United States Supreme court (Brown v EMA, 2011), where the Justices teased apart the difference between the appearance of a connection between violence and violent media, as perpetuated by some scholars and the media, and a connection that is based on rigorous scientific analysis. Justice Scalia wrote the opinion of the court and noted that:

The State’s evidence is not compelling. California relies primarily on the research of Dr. Craig Anderson and a few other research psychologists whose studies
purport to show a connection between exposure to violent video games and harmful effects on children. These studies have been rejected by every court to consider them, and with good reason: They do not prove that violent video games cause minors to act aggressively (which would at least be a beginning). Instead, “[n]early all of the research is based on correlation, not evidence of causation, and most of the studies suffer from significant, admitted flaws in methodology.”

*Video Software Dealers Assn.* 556 F. 3d, at 964. They show at best some correlation between exposure to violent entertainment and minuscule real-world effects, such as children’s feeling more aggressive or making louder noises in the few minutes after playing a violent game than after playing a nonviolent game…the same effects have been found when children watch cartoons starring Bugs Bunny or the Road Runner, *id.*, at 1304, or when they play video games like Sonic the Hedgehog that are rated “E” (appropriate for all ages) (p. 12 – 13)

While not allowing minors to purchase or rent violent video games is arguably not a life altering policy, it is still an exemplar for how policy makers can attach onto factors and subsequently attempt to pass policies to prevent phenomenon like rampage school shootings from occurring. Although some of the evidence that California attempted to use was provided by researchers (i.e. Anderson), the policy itself would likely not have gained traction if not for the moral panic over violent media consumption that was created by the media. Ultimately, the possibility of policy makers internalizing information that is faulty and externalizing their beliefs via prevention policies can hinder actual prevention of the phenomenon.
Evidence supported prevention. Due to the issues that have been discussed throughout the chapter regarding the impact that faulty information can have on the prevention of rampage school shootings, a logical next step is to discuss possible prevention strategies that have some basis in research and are not based on moral panics created by the media. The prevention strategies that will be subsequently discussed are proposed by the author of this project, are supported by scholarly research, and will be broken down into strategies geared towards preventing the shootings from occurring, and those that prevent additional loss of life. However, there are a couple of unique characteristics of the phenomenon that should be mentioned. First, the perpetrators plan the attacks and do not simply snap (Newman et al., 2004). As mentioned previously, the attacks are more akin to tactical attacks than simply snapping one day, grabbing a gun, and shooting anybody the perpetrator sees. Second, there has been evidence that nearly every perpetrator has “leaked” information about the attack prior to actually engaging in the shooting (Bender, Shubert, & McLaughlin, 2001). Subsequently, this will be discussed as leakage.

In regards to rampage school shootings, one level of prevention strategies involves preventing the shootings from occurring. Put another way, as discussed in Mongan, Hatcher, and Maschi (2009), and Mongan and Otis (2012), the perpetrators of rampage school shootings go through a process that moves them from seemingly normal students to perpetrators of mass violence. Therefore, this level of prevention is geared towards preventing a student who is already contemplating a rampage school shooting from following through with the attack. This is done by addressing leakage, and instituting evidence-supported threat assessment.
Leakage is arguably the most important aspect of primary prevention since threat assessment requires that another individual recognizes the threat of the perpetrator. If students overlook leakage, which has occurred numerous times in the past (for example, Columbine, CO; Red Lake, MN; Bethel, AK), threat assessment will not be effective as those “threats” would be overlooked. This position appears to be supported by research, as Swezey and Thorps (2010) noted:

…when school shootings are averted, it is most likely because fellow students overhear or are told of the plans and report the incident to parents or school authorities. Hurst (2005) cites an example of this at Holland Woods Middle School in Port Huron, Michigan. Allegedly, four students had developed detailed plans that included stealing weapons, kidnapping the principal, and then executing various students and staff members. The alleged plan was foiled when a classmate heard their discussions and notified authorities. (p. 289)

This example illustrates how leakage can lead to a threat assessment. In the example provided by Swezey and Thorp (2010), if the students had not informed adults about the plans of their peers, any subsequent threat assessment would not have occurred. It is then likely that the attack would have occurred. Therefore, breaking the code of silence and increasing the reporting of leakage is of paramount concern in primary prevention.

The other critical component of this level of prevention is threat assessment (Cornell et al., 2004; Reddy et al., 2001; Twemlow et al., 2002). After the Columbine rampage school shooting the Federal Bureau of Investigations helped create a threat assessment tool that was subsequently field tested by Cornell et al. (2004). The findings from their field test illustrated that it was possible to differentiate between valid threats
and those threats that do not pose harm to the students or schools. Arguably, the most substantial result of the field test was that of the 188 threats that were part of the study only 3 posed a real risk, which subsequently resulted in those students being expelled (Cornell et al., 2004).

Essentially, the two components that make up this level of prevention can be understood as zero tolerance with brains. There should be a zero tolerance for threats or other forms of leakage that indicates that an attack may occur on a school. However, as discussed by Cornell et al. (2004), not every threat is created equal. Therefore, all the leakage must be examined, but subsequent decisions must be based on an evidence supported tool that was created for this specific type of extreme school violence.

The second level of prevention is geared towards preventing additional loss of life once an attack is imminent. This level is secondary, since at this point it can be argued that a number of systems failed if a student perpetrator was able to make it to this point. For example, leakage was likely ignored by students, family, co-workers, and individuals working at the school, along with any number of other individuals who interact with perpetrator on a regular basis. Also, the student was able to obtain a weapon and ammunition, and likely rehearsed the attack (Mongan, Hatcher, & Maschi, 2009; Mongan & Otis) without interruption from anybody. Therefore, when an attack is about to occur, prevention shifts from preventing the perpetrator from following through with the attack, to preventing additional loss of life. As a note, scholarly discussion of this level of prevention is scant as it is nearly impossible to state with certainty that a specific policy at this level prevented additional loss of life. However, there is some indication that certain prevention strategies are better than others.
Bender and McLaughlin (1997) explored this level of prevention and supported one of the critical components of secondary prevention, which is the lockdown process. They wrote that teachers should, “leave doors to the hallway open during class” (p. 212), so that they could be aware of any sudden events that occur in the school. They go on to note that if an attack does occur teachers should, “shut your door and let no students in or out until you are informed that the situation is resolved” (p. 212). Essentially, lockdown is the paramount piece in prevention of additional loss of life. Put another way, a rampage school shooter must be able to find a person in order to shoot them. If they are unable to access the parts of the school where students are located, then they will be unable to harm them.

Another prevention strategy that has gained some traction due to the media and specific lobbying groups is the idea of having additional armed individuals at school. It is beyond the scope of this project to explore the intricacies of this proposal, but it is relevant to note that armed security has failed to prevent rampage school shootings in the past, as evidenced by the incident at Red Lake, Minnesota. The perpetrator of that school shooting obtained his weapon by killing his grandfather, who was a police officer, then killing the security officer at the school who was also armed. However, the argument for increasing armed individuals at school follows the logic that if there is more than one individual armed and a potential perpetrator does not know who is armed, there is a greater chance that additional loss of life can be prevented by the anonymous secondary individual who is armed.

Other parts of prevention could include aspects such as the security or structure of the school. As noted by Addington (2009) there has not been much research in this
arena, especially in regards to “visible security measures” (p. 1426). Therefore, this piece of secondary prevention is based on the argument that the areas mentioned could decrease loss of life during a rampage school shooting. For example, it was reported that the perpetrator in the Newton, Connecticut rampage shooting was able to break in to a fairly secure school by breaking through the glass by the door. This was due to a structural issue that allowed the perpetrator to get through an otherwise appropriate system for monitoring visitors to the school. Another aspect of this level of prevention is the safety of the areas that students are in during lockdown procedures. For example, the best lockdown plan will not be effective if a shooter can break in to the lockdown area, or shoot individuals who are in the area without actually breaking in (i.e. through windows). However, with these aspects of prevention, schools will likely have to weigh the competing concerns of keeping students’ safe, and maintaining a school that is not viewed to be prison-like.

Moral Panic

As discussed during the theory chapter moral panic is defined as:

…a scare about a threat or supposed threat from deviants or “folk devils”, a category of people who, presumably, engage in evil practices and are blamed for menacing a society’s culture, way of life, and central values. The word “scare” implies that the concern over, fear or, or hostility toward the folk devil is out of proportion to the actual threat that is claimed. (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, p. 2)

Moral panic can be understood as a fear that develops due to the association of something to a fear-inducing phenomenon. In regards to rampage school shootings, moral panic can be understood as factors associated with the occurrence of the phenomenon that
subsequently frighten individuals enough that they are likely to take action on the factor associated with the phenomenon. For example, the current salience of the arguments surrounding the potential impact of violent media consumption on the perpetration of mass violence has led to the Executive Branch of the United States government proposing additional research into the possible connection between violent media and the perpetration of violence (Wallace, 2012).

Throughout this chapter the discussion has focused on how the process of internalization, objectification, and externalization can impact the prevention of rampage school shootings. The creation of moral panic follows these same processes except that a moral panic is essentially extreme examples of externalizations that are based on faulty information (for example see Ogle & Eckman, 2002; Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2003). Put another way, before a factor rises to the level of a moral panic it still may play a part in the externalizations of people. However, when it becomes a moral panic, it overrides many of the other considerations that may have played a part in externalizations previously. It essentially becomes one of the most important considerations.

The propensity for moral panics to arise in relation to factors associated with rampage school shootings is also due to how the problem is constructed and defined. Rampage school shootings are rare and violent events that command attention, yet due to their nature it is difficult to identify exactly what caused them (Newman et al., 2004). Therefore, those that define the phenomenon have essentially a blank slate on which to develop a potential explanation. This issue becomes even more problematic when faulty information is propagated by the media, which has the power to impact perception (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Vasterman, 2005). The power of
the media may be due to the possibility that it can act like an authorizing or legitimating agent (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In other words, the media can come across as a group that knows what they are talking about, so the information they provide is viewed as accurate. The internalization of information from an authorizing source is problematic enough, but a protective factor that people have is that information generally passes through previously established filters before it can become internalized (see theory chapter) (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1985). It is at this point that information that is incongruent with those filters is disregarded. However, with rampage school shootings there simply has not been many evidenced-supported filters available to people, and the event is enough unlike other forms of school violence that many filters likely would not apply. This can be seen in the confusion surrounding the phenomenon when people began to realize that it was mostly occurring in predominately white, middle-class, rural or suburban schools, and not urban schools that consist of mostly minority students (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002; Schiele & Stewart, 2001). In addition to the lack of filters previously available, the ones that were available were based on the media as it was the initial source to construct the phenomenon during the overlooked and focused years. So, essentially the media is the constructor of the phenomenon and the main authorizing agent providing information about the phenomenon to the general public. These factors allow the media almost carte blanche power in creating moral panics associated with rampage school shootings.

A prime example of this can be seen with the responses to student attire post-Columbine (Ogle & Eckman, 2002; Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2003). The media highlighted the clothing worn by the perpetrators of the Columbine rampage school
shooting, and subsequently school districts began to enforce dress codes more strictly due to the panic surrounding wearing certain attire such as trench coats. Subsequently, research (i.e. Ogle & Eckman, 2002; Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2003) was pulled along with the moral panic created earlier by the media, and examined the factor that was propagated by the media. As shown with this research project, this process can also be seen with other cultural factors such as violent media consumption and gun availability.

The development of moral panics in relation to rampage school shootings is important for researchers to understand because of the impact previously discussed. Understanding this process also provides a platform to address the differences between factors as they are discussed by the media and scholars. It is at this point that researchers can be proactive in combating faulty information that is available regarding the phenomenon. A method for addressing this discrepancy was proposed by Barak (1994a), and provides a framework for researchers to insert themselves into the discussion of factors associated with a phenomenon in order to alter the course of discussion related to that phenomenon. He refers to this process as newsmaking criminology.

**Newsmaking Criminology**

With the results of this study showing that there is a difference between print news and scholarly discussed factors in regards to rampage school shootings, the question may be posed about what can be done to correct the discrepancy. This is a critical component in advancing public knowledge and prevention efforts due to the role that the media plays in impacting the perception of the public (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Vasterman, 2005). If the media portrays rampage school shootings in ways which highlight factors that are different from those cited by researchers, there is a
valid concern that public perception regarding what causes these tragedies could be incomplete, or even more problematic, entirely incorrect. This is also true if the media propagates information that has not been fully examined by researchers. These points are exemplified by Barak (1994a) when he wrote that it is important to recognize:

…the tremendous influence that the mass media have on the development of beliefs and attitudes, and on the subsequent development of policies of criminal justice…As the mass media create a social reality of crime for their audiences, they also shape their audiences’ perceptions about crime and the larger world. (p. 20)

It is also problematic if the media focuses too much on national level factors that have no easily distinguishable connection to local prevention of the phenomenon. This, which is arguably as problematic as faulty information, can draw attention away from local factors that can be addressed. It also leaves the door open for people in prevention roles to state that there is really nothing that can be done at the local level to prevent these tragedies from occurring. For example, the skipping over by the news of masculinity and hierarchies in school are two areas that could be addressed at the local level. Gun availability and violent media consumption, however, are nearly impossible to address for people at the local level.

One solution to this issue can be found in newsmaking criminology, which encourages researchers to engage with the media in order to combat misinformation that is prevalent in many different research arenas (Barak, 1994a). Doing this could change the frame(s) that are currently being used to describe rampage school shootings, which in turn could impact objectifications regarding the phenomenon. For example, this study
illustrated that violent media and gun availability were two of the most discussed factors in print news. However, the impact of peers or lack of peers was not discussed nearly as often in the print news, despite it playing a prevalent role in scholarly discussion. This same trend can also be seen by how differently the frequency of discussion was with other factors such as masculinity, and the role of hierarchies in schools. The potential impact of these factors for prevention illustrate why it is important to frame the phenomenon in ways supported by scholarly research.

If school administrators internalize mostly cultural factors such as violent media and availability of guns as connected to rampage school shootings, there are few proactive steps that can be taken by the school to address those factors. For example, guns are already banned on school property, and as mentioned previously, the school wields no power in eliminating the consumption of violent media off of school grounds. Therefore, the internalization of these factors would only allow for a rudimentary “profile” that warns administrators’ to monitor students who like violent media and have access to guns. However, if school factors that appear frequently in scholarly discussion regarding rampage school shootings are internalized (i.e. lack of peers, hierarchies in school environment), then there are courses of action that can be taken to address those factors. For example, schools could work to foster a student body with fewer power discrepancies between the popular and unpopular cliques. However, for the phenomenon of rampage school shootings to get framed in a way that is supported by scholarly research, researchers must find ways to engage in the news making process.

An approach for researchers to address the media was explored by Barak (1994a), which he labeled as newsmaking criminology. He states that:
Pertaining to media biases and the production of news stories about crime and justice, newsmaking criminologists distinguish themselves from those weakly founded condemnatory judgments of media pundits and others because they ground their analyses and critiques on scientific assessments…Newsmaking criminologists ask questions about how the inherent selectivity, summation, and simplification of news production influences the context of what becomes newsworthy crime and deviance. They ask questions about the relationship between changes in media biases and changes in the wider social order. They also ask questions about the various stereotypical profiles that are used to construct images of criminals and victims. (p. xi-xii)

Essentially, newsmaking criminology consists of educating the public about criminological phenomena through engagement with various formats of the media, through the utilization of research supported information. This can be done via interviews (i.e. print, video, audio), prepared public statements regarding research findings, and opinion pieces.

An example of newsmaking criminology can be seen with Ferguson’s (2012) article regarding the discrepancy between the blame being placed on violent media (e.g. violent video games) by the media and researchers in regards to the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary school. Ferguson’s thesis in the opinion article was that the evidence regarding the history of the perpetrator was rather scant, and, “There is no good evidence that video games or other media contributes, even in a small way, to mass homicides or any other violence among youth” (para. 3). He goes on to further reinforce his thesis when he writes:
Why then, when the evidence is so poor, do we always return to media to blame for societal ills? The notion that simply removing video games would make these events go away is as understandably tempting as it is nonsensical. After the 1999 Columbine massacre, the nation uselessly diverted itself into a decade’s worth of video game violence laws that were struck down by the courts as unconstitutional. (para. 6)

Essentially Ferguson (2012) challenges the role that violent media plays as a factor related to rampage shootings, which offers a different frame than was present in prior media reports regarding the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting. Henry (1994) refers to this type of newsmaking criminology as “replacement discourse”, since it involves, “deconstruct[ing] that which is established truth” (p. 289). After Ferguson deconstructs the impact that violent media plays in this type of phenomena, he alters the direction of the discourse towards other factors based more strongly in scholarly research. He does this by ending his opinion piece with the statement that, “Let us hope that Senator Rockefeller’s efforts do not distract us from the bigger tasks at hand: gun control and improving our mental health system” (para. 6).

While Ferguson’s (2012) opinion piece was one method of replacing unsupported discourse and was geared for a national audience, newsmaking criminology also can occur in other formats and at a local level when misinformation appears to be prevalent in smaller populations. Greek (1994) provides a wealth of information regarding potential challenges and solutions to several obstacles that may occur when researchers engage the media in other formats such as radio and television interviews. An example of this on a local level can be seen with radio interviews (Mongan, 2012a; 2012b) conducted a week
after the Aurora, Colorado rampage shooting. The community surrounding the radio station requested information regarding the impact that violent video games and other violent media may have on the occurrence of rampage shootings such as the one in Aurora, as well as other shootings that would meet criteria for rampage school shootings. Prior to the two part interviews there was an underlying assumption by the local public, as well as the agency conducting the interviews, that violent media directly impacts rampage shooters, and may even cause these events to occur.

As recommended by Greek (1994) many of the questions were known ahead of time, and the agency conducting the interview allowed the researcher to formulate additional questions on his own. Responses were prepared and rehearsed ahead of time in order to make responses succinct and easily digestible in the format in which they were presented (Greek, 1994). The purpose of the researcher going into the interviews was to engage the media and become part of the discussion in order to deconstruct assumptions and misinformation that were present regarding the various phenomena of rampage shootings. According to Barak (1994b) this is important since, “by participating specifically in the newsmaking process as credible spokespersons, criminologist can work to redefine the parameters of acceptable or favorable themes about crime and justice” (p. 250).

These examples illustrate how researchers can engage the media to deconstruct and reframe factors associated with rampage school shootings that are perpetuated by various news formats. This process of deconstructing and reframing is important for researchers to complete if evidence-supported prevention efforts are to be attempted, in order to prevent rampage school shootings from occurring in the future. This study plays
an important role in first uncovering the factors that are prevalent in both mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles, and then analyzing the differences between them. This is the first step in gathering the evidence for how the different sources (i.e. mainstream print news, scholarly articles) frame factors associated with the phenomenon, which then subsequently will allow researchers to engage the media in order to combat the frames perpetuated by the media, but yet are not supported in scholarly research.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations in the study was the distribution of the data and the variability of the various factors. The frequency of the factors was gathered on an interval level, but due to the limited variability, the data had to be condensed into nominal level variables. This limited the type of statistical tools that could be used to examine the research questions, and although the research questions were able to be answered, more complex follow up questions that would require advanced statistical tests were not able to be completed. It is important to not violate the assumptions and limitations of various statistical tools due to the possibility of producing invalid results, but ultimately the condensing of the data in this study did limit what could be done with the data.

Another limitation of this study is the inability to generalize the findings to other types of mainstream news. In regards to news, this project only analyzed mainstream print news, not broadcast or internet news. Therefore, the findings will not be able to speak to what perpetration factors are associated with the other mediums for news. Due to this limitation, it is possible that the frequency of discussion regarding factors may change if these other sources were utilized in the analysis. However, this study was the
first attempt to uncover factors, and therefore attempted to uncover factors in a readily available source. The addition of other media formats in future research would allow researchers to speak with greater confidence about what factors are the most prevalent in media reports.

Additionally, there is an overall limitation to the current state of rampage school shooting research which somewhat hinders the discussion of findings for this research project. That limitation is that researchers have yet to uncover data that definitively supports a direct connection between any of the factors and the occurrence of rampage school shootings. What this means for the findings of this research project is that the factors that the researchers discuss the most are the best supported assertions for what impacts the occurrence of the phenomenon. However, differences between the reporting of those supported assertions between journal articles and the media is still problematic in the ways previously discussed in this chapter.

The final limitation that will be discussed is the possibility that other categories of factors exist in the data and were overlooked by both the head coder and co-coders. The exclusion of other factors could possibly impact the findings of this research, but every attempt was made to minimize this potential limitation. For example, co-coders were instructed to engage in “open coding”, which allowed them to not only arrive at additional categories on their own, but also allowed them to challenge the categories that were established. Also, the inter-rater reliability was sufficiently high to suggest that categories were not overlooked. Overall, with all the steps taken to prevent this from being limitation, it seems unlikely that meaningful categories were overlooked, but it is still prudent to discuss this as a potential limitation.
Moving Forward

This study showed that there is a difference between rampage school shooting factors as they are discussed in the mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles. It also demonstrated that the discussion of factors and constructs has changed through time. However, with the lack of variability in the data, many additional questions were unable to be examined. Therefore, there are many avenues of future research that could build upon this study.

Since this study showed that there indeed is a difference in the discussion of factors between mainstream print news and scholarly articles, one avenue of future research is the examination of other media formats to see if similar differences appear. For example, this study did not look at broadcast news or internet news. Examination of these other formats have the possibility of being distributed normally, thus allowing researchers to examine other questions that rely on more advanced statistical tools.

While each of these other formats would present their own challenges, they also open up the possibility of examining the research questions from this study in even greater depth.

The combination of factors into constructs for discussion purposes also provides another way for research to move forward from this study. There is a possibility that the rarity and differences between rampage school shootings is causing researchers to focus on idiosyncratic characteristics of the individual shootings, instead of focusing on broader constructs that are prevalent in every incident. Future research may look at stepping back from extremely specific factors related to rampage school shootings, and instead condensing those factors into the constructs proposed by this study. Doing that may allow the connection of this phenomenon to others that are actually like it but are
currently being overlooked. This could possibly lead to increasing the understanding of the phenomenon.

Another avenue for moving this research forward, which was previously discussed in greater depth, is to increase engagement in newsmaking criminology. Since there is a difference between the print news and scholarly sources regarding factors associated with rampage school shootings, it is important for researchers to actually utilize this data to reframe the phenomenon in ways that are supported by research. This would also lead to scholars to take a proactive role in discussions discussion regarding the phenomenon, instead of simply reacting to the framings of the phenomenon by the media.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study set out to examine the way that rampage school shootings have been portrayed by mainstream print news and scholarly journal articles. Analyses of the data uncovered differences in terms of the perpetration factors that are propagated from both sources. Distinct timeframes where the discussion of factors shifted were also uncovered in the data. Utilizing the framework of social construction, the findings of this project explored how the differences in discussion of factors can impact prevention of the phenomenon, as well as the creation of moral panics when the media concentrate on specific hot-button factors. While there were a few limitations of the study that impacted the extent to which the data could be statistically analyzed, there was still a great deal of information that was able to be gleaned from the data. Overall, this study helps pull together the research on the phenomenon of rampage school shootings, and provides a platform for future research to build upon. Copyright © Philip C. Mongan 2013
Footnotes

Introduction

1 The Enoch Brown incident is the earliest recorded school shooting, and according to Cort’s (1886) historical account:

…the massacre was perpetrated by a squad of Seneca Indians from western New York. Richard Bard in his narrative states that his father was at work near the place of massacre on the 26th of July, 1764, and owing to the strange movements of his dog he concluded that Indians were skulking in the thicket near by. He retreated to the house and in about an hour saw a party commanded by Capt. Potter (afterwards Gen. Potter of the Revolution) who were in pursuit of a party of Indians, who had on that morning murdered a school-master named Brown with ten small children, and [they] had [been] scalped and left for dead. (p. 2)

2 It is important to note that the shootings listed here occurred in the late 1990s. The technology available for distribution of news at this point in time may have had an impact on the growing reporting of the incidents mentioned. See chapter five for a more in-depth discussion of technology change and the distribution of news.

Literature Review

1 It is important to note that Harding, Fox, and Mehta were all major contributing parts of the team that completed the intense case studies of the rampage school shootings in Paducah, KY and Jonesboro, AR, which led to the publishing of one of the seminal works on rampage school shootings (i.e. Rampage, 2004). As noted in their article this work led to a great deal of insight into unique issues facing research into the phenomenon.
Toby and Newman engaged in a limited back and forth regarding the validity of Newman et al.’s work (2004).

As can be seen from the evidence gathered from the Columbine shooters after the incident, they indeed wanted to become infamous and be remembered for the massacre they planned. They have been successful in this regards as there are several movies and songs based on the incident, with the most obvious portrayal being Zero Day (2003). It was a movie based off of the basement tapes recorded by the Columbine shooters leading up to the attack. There are also several references to the shooters in popular music, with bands from P.O.D. to Ill Bill referencing Columbine in their work.

Judges from the 6th court of appeals discussed an issue with mens rea not being a part of zero tolerance policies at schools. To show the possible defects with this exclusion from the policy, they discussed this story:

... a student who surreptitiously spikes the punch bowl at a school dance with grain alcohol, with several students, none of whom having any reason to know that alcohol has been added to the punch, taking a drink. Suppose that the school has a code of conduct that mandates suspension or expulsion for any student who possesses or consumes alcohol on school property, but does not specifically provide that the alcohol must be knowingly possessed or consumed. Under the Board's reasoning, the student who spiked the punch bowl would of course be subject to suspension or expulsion, but so would any of the students who innocently drank from the punch bowl, even if the school board was completely convinced that the students had no idea that alcohol had been added to the punch. Suspending the students who drank from the punch bowl, not realizing that
alcohol had been added, would not rationally advance the school's legitimate interest in preventing underage students from drinking alcohol on school premises any more than suspending a handful of students chosen at random from the school's directory. (p. 14)

The judges’ point from this story was that a punitive policy without including mens rea essentially makes punishment for violating the policy random. A student could do no wrong, yet still be expelled from simply drinking punch from a punchbowl provided to them by the school district itself.

5A separate field test completed by Cornell et al. (2004) showed promising results. Out of the 188 threats the teams assessed, only 3 were deemed significant enough for expulsion. That allowed 185 other students to continue their education. Despite that very limited use of the most severe school punishment tool (expulsion), none of the threats were actually carried out.

6Grossman’s work *On Killing* (1995) was a seminal work on exploring and discussing how the military teaches its personnel to kill, and the impact that it has on the psyche of the individual. Overall, it has advanced the understanding into mental health casualties, and provided a source for people unfamiliar with the culture and experience of the military. Of the book’s 367 pages, 295 were dedicated to that important mission. However, the remaining 72 pages consists of the final section of the book, where it veers off of Grossman’ main thesis and attempts to make a statement on the effect of violent media on youth. An overview of the various sections of the book quickly highlights this ad hoc component of the section, and in the totality of the book, that final section appears to be a place where Grossman felt he need to step onto his “soapbox”.

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Causal links between violent media consumption and violence has remained the “holy grail” of research into this phenomenon. Anderson’s (2004) work claims to have shown that causal link. However, a 2010 United States Supreme Court case (Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association, 2010), as well as several other courts, held that statement to the legal standard for evidence, and found that Anderson’s statement regarding a causal link was unfounded. In order to properly frame Anderson’s (2004) argument it is relevant to review the Justices opinion following the Brown v. EMA case:

The state’s evidence is not compelling. California relies primarily on the research of Dr. Craig Anderson and a few other research psychologists whose studies purport to show a connection between exposure to violent video games and harmful effects on children. These studies have been rejected by every court to consider them and with good reason: They do not prove that violent video games cause minors to act aggressively…They show at best some correlation between exposure to violent entertainment and miniscule real-world effects…Even taking for granted Dr. Anderson’s conclusions that violent video games produce some effect on children’s feelings of aggression, those effects are both small and indistinguishable from effects produced by other media…he admits that the same effects have been found when children watch cartoons starring Bugs Bunny or the Road Runner. (p. 12-13)

Ferguson (2009) brings up several valid observations regarding the funding sources for some of the studies purporting findings supporting a link between violent media and violence. For example, he states that Anderson et al.’s (2008) work was funded by the National Institute of Media and the Family, which holds an anti-violent media stance.
However, Ferguson (2009) also appears to have an axe to grind (possibly of Dr. Anderson as he references his work throughout the article), which is exemplified by his statement that, “PhDs cease functioning as scientists when they make active efforts to stifle debate, ignore opposing research, ignore real-world data, fail to inform the public about the limits of social-science research, and make tenuous connections” (p. 39).

In a separate poster presentation Ferguson, Rueda, and Cruz (2008) noted that many of the experimental methods used in video game research (i.e. noise blast) does not actually predict aggressive real-world behavior.

Effect size is a statistical measure that controls for the impact that sample size has on the relationship between two variables, and essentially measures just how large an impact the independent variable actually has on the dependent variable. On the other hand, confidence intervals are the range of values in the sample in regards to the hypothesis being tested. If confidence intervals cross zero, it is an indication that the results are actually not statistically significant. So, Ferguson's (2007) assertion about studies measuring the impact between violent video games and aggressive behavior, is that the researchers are not doing due diligence and are reporting misleading results.

Kimmel and Mahler's assessment of the impact of masculinity argues that masculinity is the unique characteristic that can explain the occurrences. They even make a similar argument as Watson (2007). However, "gay-baiting" and homophobic bullying occurs across the United States, yet rampage school shootings have not occurred in every state. The reliance on "red states" culture to explain also falls prey to this critique, since many "red states" have not had rampage school shootings despite sharing a similar culture. The authors notice this issue and dedicated a section addressing the critique. However,
Kimmel and Mahler only postulate that there are protective factors at play that may allow "gay-baiting" to not impact two different people exactly the same. However, this explanation can be used for other factors Kimmel and Mahler discount (i.e. violent media, gun accessibility, poor parent supervision).

12Kleck (2009) provides a thorough and logical argument against many of the claims made by advocacy groups pushing for stricter gun control laws. His arguments do not appear to be very biased, but they call into question methods and data propagated by others and provide support for appropriate policy responses to rampage school shootings.

13Throughout Stolinsky et al.'s (1998) article they appeared to be making an argument with emotion that was void of logical, unbiased information. For example, they wrote:

Does anyone need to have a private arsenal of high-powered weapons? They are of no value for hunting [1], and their use for target practice seems dispensable [2]. They are certainly not needed for protection against crime [3]. Moreover, they are worse than useless [4]. In recent years, large stashes of firearms have figured importantly in other major losses of life. Hundreds of guns were found at Waco, and cash from the sale of stolen weapons was used to build the bomb that devastated the federal building in Oklahoma City. (p. 1375)

The first four arguments, notated by the numbers located inside the brackets of the quote, appear to be drawn from the authors' personal distain for guns, and not logic or an understanding of the topic they are writing about. Argument 1 is based on the premise that semi-automatic weapons are a "private-arsenal", so they are of no use for hunting. However, semi-automatic simply refers to the weapons capability to fire one time per trigger pull, without the need to manually chamber another cartridge. It does not mean
that you can hold down and trigger and fire automatically. Semi-automatic weapons are effective and legal hunting weapons that hunters may use due to personal preference. Their killing potential for game is equal to that of non semi-automatic weapons due to their use of the same caliber rounds. Therefore, they have value to hunting, even if they are not always used by hunters. The authors' second statement is incredibly paternalistic, since their lack of interest in target practice with semi-automatic weapons does not mean that the rest of the country shares their opinion. They could likely go without that form of recreation, but it is dangerous ground to argue for policy changes based simply on personal preference. The third argument is steeped in controversy that goes beyond this work to address. However, it fails for the same reason as the second argument. Also, logic would dictate that quicker, more powerful weapons would be the ideal choice for home protection due to their "stopping power". Finally, their fourth argument is clearly biased. Guns, as tools, have proven their use in hunting, sport, security, and safety. If they truly have no use, why would officers and military personnel have them?

14 One possible conceptual flaw of Leary et al.’s, (2003) article was that they did not appropriately define the population they were studying. For example, of the 14 school shootings researched, two did not meet criteria for rampage school shootings, and were actually targeted individual shootings. Therefore, it is possible that the addition of those conceptually different incidents impacted their results. This issue is further confounded when they create a "tentative profile" (p. 213) out of their data, which contradicts prior research (for example see Reddy et al., 2001; Vossekull et al., 2001).
News Production

Scheufele’s (1999) historical look at media effect timeframes is interesting, especially when looking at the second timeframe and comparing it against the backdrop of research during that period of time that was looking at media consumers’ knowledge about relevant political issues. For example there was some questions regarding the knowledge of average citizens in the 1950s through the 1960s (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Chong and Druckman (2007) wrote that:

Early studies of mass public opinion conducted in the 1950s and 1960s raised serious doubts about the competency of citizens to participate in political affairs. On the whole, citizens were woefully uninformed about the institutions of American government, political office holders, and contemporary political issues. Their views on issues were superficial and unconnected to overarching principles such as liberalism or conservatism…It was much debated whether a sizeable portion of the general public could even be said to hold meaningful attitudes. (p. 103-104)

Methods

Hruby (2001) described the waves as “paradigmatically distinct”. He reported that the three waves of social constructionist thought broke down into: “sociological and empirical”, “psychological and postmodern”, and “new realisms” (p. 49). He argued that social constructivist thought needed to be thought of separately from social constructionism, and he also noted that the term social construction was being used too loosely.
Figure 3: Categories of School Shootings

School Shooting

Was any victim selected at random?

Yes

Were there political motives behind the attack?

Yes

Terroristic School

No

Targeted School Shooting

No

Was the attack done to restore peace at the school?

Yes

Was the shooter a current or former member of the school?

Yes

Government School

No

Mass School Shooting

Rampage School Shooting
CODING FORM
*Codebook taken from Mongan & Otis (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article ID Number</th>
<th>Number of Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Basic Information

- **Year of publication or print**
- **Printed source**
- **Word Count (Paragraphs)**
- **Reference to shooting (All/timeline)**

Categories

- **Media/Fascination w/ Vio. or Guns**
- **Masculinity**
- **Cultural Scripts / Copycat**
- **Access to guns**
- **Delinquency**
- **Parenting/parenting roles/Family**
- **Bullying**
- **Biological predisposition**
- **Hierarchy in school**
- **Mental Illness**
- **Gender of Shooter**
Substance use/abuse/dependence

Expert Advice

Animal Abuse

Peer/Lack of Peer/Marginalization

Informational

Other

If the article conveys an “overall” blame, what category is it
This research project is a study of the correlation of factors associated with school shootings between media reports and scholarly journal articles. Since it is a content analysis, you will be examining the latent and manifest content of media and journal articles. Manifest content is the coding of items that directly mention the categories, whereas latent content is when a paragraph hints at one of the categories. The following example illustrates this:

1. A statement like, “He showed me his gun” would not be included in the Access to Guns category because it simply mentions the word “gun”.

2. However, a statement like, “Children are increasingly being able to obtain guns” would qualify in the category of Access to Guns.

The latent content will be examined with the Unit-of-Analysis being the paragraph. Do not code individual sentences, but paragraphs as a whole. It is possible for a paragraph to contain information that can be counted in 2 or more categories.

**Basic Directions**

1. Start by reading the entire article without coding anything. This will provide you with an initial familiarity with the article and how it is constructed.

2. Read a second time using the coding form, and record the number of times each category is discussed throughout the article. Remember the unit of analysis is the paragraph, and only use one coding form for each article/report.

After you have finished with the second reading you will write down if the article appears to place blame on a specific category, and what that category is.


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Mongan, P. “I Have a Dream”. Presented at the 2005 Annual Student Achievement Conference, Bemidji, MN.

Publications


Articles Being Prepared for Submission
Mongan, P., & Otis, M. (). The connection between media and scholarly reports on rampage school shootings.


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