

Michael Slobodian: The Forgotten School Shooter

An Examination of the On-Scene Offense Characteristics of the First Canadian School Shooting,
Brampton, Ontario, 1975.

by

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ABSTRACT

Mass murders and school shootings have become an emerging social problem in North America over the last two decades. Although rare, these terrifying events elicit horror, shock and fear across the nation. Despite the difficulties in studying school shootings, existing literature on this increasingly common form of school violence have focused primarily on the *form* of the shootings in an effort to understand the causes of these violent school attacks. However, various factors remain unaddressed: First, existing literature pertaining to firearm-related homicide on school property fails to critically analyze the occurrence of school shootings from a Canadian context. Second, the literature on firearm-related homicide in school settings neglects to account for the variables that explain the variations in outcomes of school shootings. And third, there is a lack of analysis present in the current literature explaining the school shooter's vector of aggression. As such, this paper applies Shon's model of mass murder and lethality of outcomes to the very first school shooting in North America. In doing so, this research sheds light into the shooter's attack planning patterns and contributes to understanding the variation in outcomes of shooting events and the dynamic factors that sparked this deadly trend of firearm- related school violence.

Key words: *school shooting; Michael Slobodian; vector of aggression; weapon familiarity; targeted attack.*

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INTRODUCTION

The term ‘school shootings’ was not a popular term used to describe mass murders committed in school settings until the mid to late 1990s (Langman, 2009b). This form of attack has become an increasingly common type of violent outburst to occur on school property in the last 20 years (Rocque, 2012). Isolated as these incidents may be, school shootings involving multiple victims spread horror, shock and fear across the nation (O’Toole, 1999). Despite a growing interest and literature on school shootings, relatively little attention has been focused on the first school shooting in North America in Brampton, Ontario, in 1975. This paper will examine this incident for the purpose of demonstrating its importance within the broad context of the literature on school shooting, as well as its significance within the Canadian context.

Despite the difficulties in studying school shootings, it is important to embark upon the cause and effects of this form of violent attack in the Canadian context, in order to identify and explain why Canadian school shootings have not had the same systematic analysis that has been offered in the US. It is simply unknown if the killings in Canada are different from the killings the United States, largely because we have not studied them from a Canadian context to the extent that they have been studied in the US. As a result, it is imperative to conduct analyses on events of mass murders and school shootings from the Canadian context and incorporate the findings into scholarly works relevant to the topic. Although numerous studies have attempted to examine these incidents, existing literature on school violence has focused primarily on the *form* of the shootings in an effort to understand the causes of these violent school attacks (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). In an attempt to provide social, political and scientific commentaries on the occurrence of violent school homicides, researchers and scholars have exhaustively

studied various risk factors such as, family histories, psychological pathologies and cultural explanations (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

Although the works of previous researchers provide a wealth of knowledge, valuable insights and information on school shootings, such as typologies of school shooters, motives, and the role of culture, there are various factors that remain unaddressed in the current literature. First, there is a lack of attention placed on school shootings in Canada. In other words, the existing literature pertaining to firearm-related homicide on school property fails to critically analyze the occurrence of school shootings in a Canadian context. It is important to examine why this form of gun-related homicide occurs in Canada simply because Canada is a nation that has stricter gun control laws and regulations compared to the United States of America.

Second, the current literature on firearm-related homicide in school settings has neglected to account for the variables that explain the variations in outcomes of school shootings. Shon (2012) explains that the number of victims killed in school shooting and mass murder incidents can be explained by the following three factors: (1) Weapon procurement, (2) weapon deployment, and (3) tactical deployment strategies. According to Shon's (2012) model of mass murder, the preceding three factors are important aspects to consider when examining incidents of school shootings, as these factors help researchers explain the shooter's pre-attack and attack behaviours and provide an understanding of the variation in lethal outcomes (Shon, 2012). The current study attempts to apply that model of mass murder to a Canadian context.

Third, there is a lack of analysis present in the current literature explaining the school shooter's vector of aggression. Studies conducted on school shootings often focus on the killer's behaviours, lifestyles, values and other causal explanations (Shon, 2012; Ferguson, Coulson, &

Barnett, 2011; Fox & Levin, 2012; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). However, the literature neglects to provide a formal analysis and explanation for why some school shooters attack superordinates (persons holding power such as principals and teachers – whom are recognized as symbols of the school), while other shooters carry out their attacks against peers (i.e. persons who are viewed as equals in the school setting).

Current studies on mass murder and school shootings do not evaluate the on-scene offense characteristics of shooting events. Shon's (2012) model of mass murder offers three key factors to consider when examining school shooters' attack patterns. These factors include the (1) shooter's pre-attack behaviours, (2) on-scene attack related-behaviours, and (3) vector of aggression (Shon, 2012). When evaluated collectively, these three offense characteristics shed light into the shooter's attack planning patterns and contribute to understanding the variation in the outcomes of shooting events. Thus the exploration of the preceding three characteristics relative to school shootings in Canada is not only warranted, but necessary.

As a result, this paper examines the offense characteristics such as pre-attack behaviors, on-scene attack-behaviors, and the vector of aggression in the very first school shooting in Canada. Assessing the offense characteristics in the very first school shootings in Canada allows academics across various disciplines of research to identify and comprehend the dynamic factors that sparked the deadly trend of firearm-related school violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers and social scientists across various disciplines have exhaustively examined mass murders and school shootings in the last decade and a half. Most of the research conducted on the topic of school shootings focuses mainly on the shooter's family history, their social and

psychological pathologies, motives and cultural explanations (Newman et al., 2004). The following review will synthesize the current literature on school shootings, by highlighting key recurring themes.

Definition: In the last two decades, North America has witnessed the seemingly exponential growth of school violence into a different and more deadly form (Rocque, 2012). School shootings, an increasingly common form of gun violence, can be placed on a continuum that distinguishes rampage shootings from other types of school-related homicides, such as targeted attacks resulting from conflicts between gangs or issues over drug dealings (Langman, 2009b; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta & Roth, 2004; Rocque, 2012). For the purpose of this paper, the focus is placed on rampage shootings, as this type of shooting is the most common form of school shooting. The term rampage school shooting is used to characterize the occurrence of school attacks involving students who currently attend (or formerly attended) the institution where the shooting takes place (Langman, 2009b; Newman et al., 2004; Muschert, 2007). These shootings are recognized as public acts – as they are essentially committed in plain view of others and involve multiple victims, some of whom might be shot randomly, while others may be symbols (such as a principal) of the school (Langman, 2009a; Newman et al., 2004). Other victims of rampage shootings may be targeted due to grievance or the product of a held grudge resulting from a perceived wrong (Dutton, White & Fogarty, 2013; Langman, 2009a).

History: School shootings are not a new event (Arcus, 2002). These deadly attacks have become increasingly common in the last decade (Duwe, 2007). The occurrence of these violent attacks was once regarded as rare events up until the mid-1990s when there was a shift from adult invaders killing children to current or former students attacking their peers (Langman, 2009a; Rocque, 2012). From this point onward, there have been an unprecedented number of school

shootings in North America, particularly the United States (Duwe, 2007). During this time, Americans have witnessed some of the most heinous acts of gun violence committed on school property – some incidents more memorable than others – such as Columbine and Virginia Tech, two of the most notable examples of school shootings that have made a significant impact in the US history of school shootings.

Bullying: School violence has taken many forms, from verbal altercations and bullying to assault, robbery, and murder (DeVoe et al., 2004). Considerable attention has been given to bullying, which is often seen as a precursor to the more violent forms of aggression, school shootings (Greif & Furlong, 2006; O’Toole, 1999). Bullying at school is believed to be the most commonly accepted explanation for school shootings (Newman et al., 2004). Olweus (1993) defines the term bullying as repeated negative actions on the part of one or more students perpetrated on one or more other students. Keeping this definition in mind, the current literature on school shootings reveal that school-aged males have the highest victimization rates for bullying (Reuter-Rice, 2008). Similarly Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton and Scheidt (2001) found that those who were bullied demonstrated poor social and emotional adjustment skills, and experienced greater difficulty making friends, and maintaining relationships with peers, ultimately leading to increased loneliness. As a result, children who lacked social skills and were isolated had an increased risk of being targets for bullies (Reuter-Rice, 2008; Lebrun, 2008). Subsequently, some commentators may argue that bullying is positively correlated to school shootings. Perhaps a logical explanation for this idea would be that students, particularly youths, would want to attack their fellow classmates simply because they have been ruthlessly tormented, teased and taunted by their peers (Rocque, 2012; Langman, 2009a; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

Previous research sheds light on the fact that a vast majority of school shooters were victims of bullying and mistreatment (Newman et al., 2004; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Vossekuil and colleagues (2002) further argued that bullying and constant harassment may lead to feelings of frustration, which in turn may lead to incidents of school shootings. To further support this idea, the following quote was said by a 16-year old, Mississippi, honor student, who was constantly teased and bullied:

“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).

The above narrative vividly demonstrates the anger that can develop inside an individual who has been a constant victim of bullying. The anecdote illustrates why some students resort to murder (school shooting) as a means of proving their masculinity. Showing those who mistreated them, they are anything but weak, and can commit something so daring and shocking might reduce the constant harassment they experience.

Masculinity: Questions of one’s masculinity have only recently been the center of discussion among researchers and scholars alike. Researchers have recently started to associate and identify masculine identity with school shootings (Rocque, 2012). Often times, school shooters have been denied their traditional male status, and thus turn to violence as a way of demonstrating their masculinity (Rocque, 2012; Kimmel & Mahler, 2008). Homosexuality is often called into question among adolescent males in school settings (Reuter-Rice, 2008; Langman, 2009a). This area of bullying (i.e., homosexuality or suspected homosexuality) places individuals at greater risk of victimization. The mere fact of teens being thought to be gay or defined themselves as

homosexuals significantly makes them more susceptible to be teased or bullied at school (Reuter-Rice, 2008; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Authors Kimmel and Mahler (2003) argue that constantly being threatened and bullied “*as if you are gay*” (pg. 1449) coupled with the homophobic desire to ensure others know you are a ‘real man’ – plays a pivotal role in school shootings.

Class Avenger: In an attempt to study school shooters, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) developed a profile for what they call the “classroom avengers.” While examining the profiles of 14 adolescent mass murderers, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) coined the term to describe a Caucasian male adolescent who is raised in an urban or rural middle-class family, with no history of mental illness, disability, and/ or retardation. This individual is often described by his peers as being a loner, not belonging to any particular social group (Reuters-Rice, 2008), and has an interest in violence, but no history of violent behaviour (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Langman, 2009b, Reuters-Rice, 2008). The avenger fantasizes about revenge and mass murder and seeks vengeance in response to peer rejection and/or school disciplinary action (Reuters-Rice, 2008; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999).

The Fascination with Firearms: Firearms by far are the most effective means of mass destruction (Duwe, 2007). These types of weapons have become an increasingly popular tool in the execution of school-related homicides, largely due to the level of difficulty to kill or inflict harm on a lot of people when knives are the only weapon available (Duwe, 2007, Newman et al., 2004). The use of firearms in school-related homicides often raises questions about how the shooter obtained the weapon to carry out such acts, and whether or not the weapon was obtained in an illegal manner.

Across the literature, there is a general agreement that the availability of guns play a significant role in school shootings (Rocque, 2012; Langman, 2009a; Reuter-Rice, 2008). Undoubtedly, the ease of access to guns and other firearms by youths contributes to the rapid increase in firearms-related homicides on school property. The existing literature on school shooters unveil that many, if not most, shooters grew up in homes where firearms were present (Shon, 2012; Cao, Zhang, & He, 2008; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Therefore, gaining access to a firearm can be done with ease and little difficulty. In fact, many of the gunmen who carried out deadly school attacks had previous experience using weapons. Some school shooters gained experience from family hunting trips, while others were simply preoccupied and fascinated with weapons (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Langman, 2009b; Weisbrot, 2008).

Psychological Variables: Researchers have been able to classify school shooters into three distinct categories: (1) traumatized, (2) psychotic, and (3) psychopathic (Langman, 2009b). Traumatized shooters are those who came from broken homes, and had endured multiple traumas. In other words, these individuals come from backgrounds that are similar to those of juvenile delinquents, meaning that these individuals have been victims of emotional, physical and sexual abuse (Langman, 2009a). In addition to undergoing multiple traumas at home, this type of shooter has experienced ongoing stresses and significant losses in his or her life. The life of a traumatized shooter is unpredictable. These individuals have no stability, and are likely depressed, teased at school, and most importantly, these individuals tend to be angry at life (Langman, 2009a; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

Psychotic shooters are characterized as individuals who come from intact families, but tend to suffer from various mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, paranoia, and possible delusions of grandeur (Langman, 2009a). These individuals experience auditory hallucinations,

social detachment and varying levels of social impairment, which create a sense of alienation and desperation (Langman, 2009a). Although psychosis is rarely discussed in the media, as it pertains to school shooters, the fact of the matter is that it remains a significant factor in many school attacks.

Quite often, school shooters have been marginalized and labelled as psychopaths; however, this view could not be any more inaccurate. Psychopathic shooters also come from intact families, but these individuals are narcissistic, feel entitled to special treatment due their perceived superiority, exhibit sadistic behaviour, a lack of empathy, and a lack of conscience (Langman, 2009a; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

Cultural Marginalization: Cultural marginalization and school shootings are interrelated. This idea is consistent across the literature on school shootings, as striking patterns from narratives were discovered from boys who committed violence (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Based on their stories, almost all of the males were constantly bullied, beat up, mercilessly and constantly teased, picked on, and threatened (Rocque, 2012; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). These actions directed toward the males were not a result of them being gay, but simply because they looked and acted different from the other boys in the school (Newman et al., 2004). Kimmel and Mahler (2003) describes these males as being – “shy, bookish, honor students, artistic, musical, theatrical, nonathletic, “geekish,” or weird” (p. 1445), and therefore suffer from painful marginalization (Newman et al., 2004; Knoll, 2012). Thus, it is a safe explanation to say that culturally marginalized males essentially felt they had no other recourse: According to Kimmel & Mahler, 2003, individuals who are culturally marginalized often feel as though they have no other friends to validate their fragile and threatened identities, which leads them to believe that

school authorities and parents would be unresponsive to their plight, thereby eliminating all access to other methods of self-affirmation.

Perceptions of School Safety: Students' perceptions of unsafe schools have been a growing concern for parents, teachers, school officials and policy makers following the aftermath of school shootings in recent years (Hong & Eamon, 2012; Reuter-Rice, 2008). Primarily, school safety is of great concern because unsafe school environments are frequently associated with multiple problems. Some of negative effects of an unsafe school environment include, but are not limited to: decrease in school attendance, decline in school grades, less participation in school activities, increased negative attitudes toward school, school avoidance, posttraumatic stress, and misbehaviour (Hong & Eamon, 2012) are just a few of the problems that could result from student's perception of an unsafe school environment. Interestingly, Hong and Eamon (2012) conducted a study using a nationally representative sample of 10- to 15-year old youths in the United States, and found that students who were older, male, and come from a lower socioeconomic status, had a greater risk of perceiving higher levels of unsafe school environments. In addition, the researchers also found that males were 30% more likely to perceive their schools as being unsafe, compared to their female counterparts (Hong & Eamon, 2012). However, not surprising, students who saw another student carrying a weapon at school were 70% more likely to view schools as being unsafe. This percentage is fairly high because youths are accessing weapons easily and bring them onto school grounds (Reuter-Rice, 2008).

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

From this review it is evident that there are several gaps in the school shooting literature. First, one of the obvious gaps in the literature is that it focuses primarily on attacks that occur in

the United States (Duwe, 2007; Muschert, 2007). As a result, there is an apparent lack of attention given to incidences of mass murders and school shootings in Canada. This lack of analysis in the Canadian context warrants an in-depth exploration into the occurrences of these violent gun-related attacks, since it is important to understand why mass murders, particularly school shootings, occur in a nation that has stricter gun control laws and regulations than the United States of America, a country that encodes the right to own firearms in its national law.

Second, there is insufficient analysis of the significance of the incident that occurred on May 28, 1975 when 16-year old Michael Slobodian carried out the nation's first ever firearm-related homicide on school property at Brampton Centennial Secondary School (Ontario, Canada) (Platiel, 1975b). Slobodian, a 16-year-old student at the school shot and killed a teacher and a fellow student, wounded 13 others and then turned the gun on himself (Platiel, 1975b; Ford, 1995a; Davis, 2006; Lawrence, 2006). Previous works on school shootings have failed to examine why this incident, not just the first Canadian school shooting, but the first in North America, unfolded in a small town, such as Brampton, Ontario. Yet, more importantly, since the incident occurred back in 1975, way before the Internet and Goth culture became popular (Davis, 2006), existing literature neglects to identify the factor(s) that influenced this young man to commit such a deadly attack. It is important to understand the very first incident of school shooting in Canada because this event paved the way for similar attacks to follow soon after (e.g. Robert Poulin's 1975 attack at St. Pius X High School in Ottawa, and the 1978 attack at Sturgeon Creek Regional Secondary School in Winnipeg, Manitoba) (Howells, 2012).

Canada, a country that has been recognized for its authoritarian approach to gun violence, has stricter gun control laws than the United States; yet, the occurrence of mass murders and school shootings in Canada is perplexing. Why has the Slobodian shooting been omitted from

any type of analysis? Although no one wants to be reminded of that horrifying day when someone walks into a school and begins shooting, an in-depth analysis is needed to understand what triggers this deadly event but more importantly, a comprehensive evaluation will allow society to understand and come to grips with such heinous crimes (Davis, 2006).

While Shon's model of mass murder and lethality of outcomes have been applied to Asian American school shooters, that model has not been used to explain the outcomes in Canadian shootings. Shon's three criteria, (1) Weapon procurement, (2) weapon deployment, and (3) tactical deployment strategies, has not been adopted by researchers when examining the shooter's behaviours and explaining the variations in lethal outcomes (Shon, 2012). These three criteria when applied to the Slobodian case should enable researchers to gain a better understanding and explanation for the occurrence of this type of gun-related homicide. Gaining a better understanding of the shooter's pre-attack and attack behaviours will allow scholars and academics to develop preventative measures as a means of reducing the occurrence of future incidents alike.

Again, if we use the Slobodian case as an example, previous literature fails to examine the school shooting using Shon's three key principles. Identifying how the shooter (Michael Slobodian) acquired his weapons prior to his attack at Brampton Centennial high school is fundamental to understanding whether the shooter acquired his weapons in an illegal manner. The shooter's method of weapons procurement is important to know because the findings will reveal whether mass murderers and school shooters are taking unusual steps to acquire and/or purchase firearms and if they are able to do so without difficulty (Petee et al., 1999).

Aside from weapons procurement, the method in which shooters deploy their weapons, the amount of time spent on scene, and the tactics and manoeuvres carried out are all aspects that should be taken into consideration when mass murderers and school shooters are examined (Shon, 2012, p. 261). Weapons and tactical deployment strategies are essential elements to analyze in incidents where firearms are used to commit homicides simply because it will help reveal why some gunmen allowed potential victims to seek cover and concealment, and time to escape from the shooter's field of fire (Shon, 2012). At this point, it is also important to understand how a gunman selects his targets. This selection process can be explained using the idea - vector of aggression.

According to the literature, it is generally agreed that mass murderers and school shooters are not individuals who just snap or simply "go berserk" (Palermo, 1997; Levin & Madfis, 2009; Shon, 2012). Very often, the drastic outer destructive behaviour of these individuals are a direct result from their wounded narcissism causing them to look for notoriety at the conscious or subconscious level, and eventually lead the individual to engage in what is known as "payback" (Palermo, 1997). Very often, gunmen will experience radical transformations in their social circumstances prior to carrying out their deadly acts of violence (Dutton, White & Fogarty, 2013; Shon, 2012; Langman, 2009a; Reuter-Rice, 2008; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Palermo, 1997). Experiencing the loss of a loved one(s), difficulties or failure in school, rejection from dominant social groups and/or from significant others (Langman, 2009a; Newman et al., 2004) are some of the elements that may cause one to develop feelings of powerlessness, worthlessness, lack of self-fulfillment and social impotence, thereby creating a reaction formation similar to Alfred Adler's idea of will to power (Palermo, 1997). As a result of undergoing such experiences, there are two possible outcomes in which individuals can direct aggression – vertically or horizontally.

However, previous works on school shootings neglect to analyze the vector of aggression these individuals take when they perceive themselves to be the victims of injustice.

School shooters who direct their aggression vertically generally target teachers and principals, that is, persons recognized as being a symbol of the school. These individuals are often targets due to their level of power and/or authority they possess. In other words, being viewed as superiors and higher ups often shapes the gunman's target selection, while shooters who target their peers are often believed to direct their aggression horizontally (Shon, 2012). These individuals are often classmates and can therefore be viewed as being equals along the same continuum as the shooter. It is important to analyze a shooter's vector of aggression because it will help explain why some gunmen target people who are symbols of the school while others attack their peers.

Michael Slobodian's school shooting is a prime example of a gunman directing his anger both vertically and horizontally. One of the individuals killed in the shooting rampage was an English teacher at Brampton Centennial Secondary School (Platiel, 1975b; Beaufoy, 1975). Since teachers are recognized as symbols of the institution, it is important to examine why Slobodian targeted these individuals, although one of them was fortunate not to have been in Michael's line of fire during the attack (Beaufoy, 1975). With this being said, the existing literature fails to address why Slobodian's vector of aggression did not remain along the same continuum, but rather jumped between being directed vertically and horizontally.

Before Slobodian began his shooting rampage inside the hallway of his Brampton high school, he fatally wounded a male student in the men's washroom, right after loading his guns, and then proceeded to move from one end of the hallway, firing at anyone who got into his way,

while making his way to the art room where he shot and killed his English teacher who was one of his intended targets (Platiel, 1975b). Seeing as there was variation in the targets it is important for vector of aggression in shooters to be analyzed in order to comprehend why there is a variation in target selection. In other words, researchers would better be able to provide an explanation for why some shooters only attack their targeted individuals while others will shoot anyone who gets in their way.

Critically analyzing the first Canadian school shooting has several benefits. First, it is important to dissect this particular event because it will allow researchers and academics to comprehend why this form of deadly school violence started and why it began in Brampton, Ontario, as to other suburban areas in Canada? Second, examining Canada's first school shooting will assist criminologists in explaining why no earlier attempts or incidents of school shootings occurred prior to 1975? And third, Slobodian's ferocious school shooting can be used as a stepping stone to help researchers and theorists reveal why incidents of school shootings that proceeded Slobodian's violent school outburst were executed by students and not teachers or other stakeholders working at the institution. In simpler terms, why did Slobodian's incident not spark episodes of school shootings perpetrated by teachers? Uncovering the answers to these critical questions will be a giant step forward in addressing issues surrounding mass murders and school shootings.

SLOBODIAN, FIRST SCHOOL SHOOTER

Average in almost every way, Michael Peter Slobodian was described as a student who was quiet, kept to himself almost all the time, had few close friends and never really attracted attention to himself (Globe and Mail, 1975a, Herring, 1975). Michael and his family lived just

minutes away, merely four blocks from Brampton Centennial Secondary School after having moved to Brampton from Montreal 12 years prior when his father, Peter Slobodian was transferred by his employer, Northern Electric (Sallot, 1975). Michael was the youngest of four children; his two older brothers, Mark and Gary had dropped out of school before graduation while his older sister, Dona, had also dropped out of school but eventually returned and was expected to graduate at the end of the school year (Sallot, 1975).

Slobodian was a young man who possessed high ideals. According to Gary, Michael's older brother, "[Michael] was the last one of the kids and maybe he felt he had to do better" (Sallot, 1975, p. 4). Some teachers described Michael as being a hard working student, but felt he would never be the top student in the class (Sallot, 1975). Having set high goals for himself, Michael Slobodian talked about becoming a surgeon after his father had suffered a second heart attack a few months prior (Sallot, 1975; Beaufoy, 1975). He began reading books about the functions of the heart which eventually led him to an experiment on frog hearts, a project that was soon rejected from entry in the school's science fair (Sallot, 1975; Beaufoy, 1975; Fraught, 1999). Slobodian's experiment entailed dissecting 13 live frogs and stimulating their hearts with chemicals and electricity (Fraught, 1999).

Weeks prior to Slobodian's deadly school shooting, there were certain events that could be indicative triggers leading up to his violent school attack. On May 1, 1975, Michael's grandfather had passed away and he was apparently having difficulty with the recent loss of someone close to him (Fraught, 1999). A week prior to the shooting, Slobodian approached his sister, Dona, and asked how he could go about dropping out of school (Sallot, 1975). During the month of May, Slobodian's attendance in English class began to decrease and on the morning of the tragic incident, Slobodian had skipped class which prompted the English teacher to call

Michael's home to let his parents know he had missed class (Sallot, 1975). Although the actual events that triggered such hostility remain unclear, Slobodian's handwritten note found inside his home indicate he was fed up with life and wanted to eliminate some people, particularly his English and physics teacher presumably for their written and verbal correspondence to his parents about his poor attendance in school (Bend, 1975).

On May 28, 1975, Michael Slobodian became Canada's first adolescent school shooter (Platiel, 1975b; Beaufoy, 1975; Ford, 1995a; Davis, 2006; Lawrence, 2006; Howells, 2012) and arguably the first ever school shooter in North America. This young man, at the age of 16, was the first student in Canada to walk onto school property and open fire killing two fellow students and wounding several others during his deadly school attack (Platiel, 1975b; Beaufoy, 1975; Ford, 1995a; Davis, 2006; Lawrence, 2006). According to Slobodian's father, Michael knew how to handle his weapons, he was never careless and had a respect for them (Sallot, 1975). His knowledge of hunting rifles not only facilitated his deadly mission, but also assisted in inflicting maximum harm. With two targets in mind, Slobodian loaded his weapons in the men's washroom on the first floor, and fired his weapon at anyone who came in his way as he walked down the crowded school corridor to the Art room where one of his intended targets was located. Upon fatally shooting his intended target, Slobodian turned the gun on himself taking his own life in the process (Sallot, 1975; Globe and Mail, 1975a). The actions of this individual not only left many people – law enforcement officers and the nation as a whole – astonished and in disbelief, but the occurrence of this deadly form of school violence created fear and raised several questions to why and how this form of violence began, some of which still remain unanswered to this day.

There was no way the shooting rampage at Brampton's Centennial Secondary School could have been foreseen or predicted. The 1970s was a fundamental decade in Canadian history. This time period was significant as Canada underwent numerous changes, including becoming the first Western nation to implement a Multiculturalism Act, thereby solidifying the legitimacy of cultural pluralism within the Canadian mosaic (Reitz, 2009), the abolition of capital punishment (Chandler, 1976), the invention of the compact disc (Eiswerth, 1992), and the completion of the CN Tower, the world's tallest free standing structure (Greene, 2004). Prior to the 1970s, Brampton was commonly identified as a small town in the province of Ontario (Leonard, 2003). However, during the modern era, specifically in 1974, Brampton became classified as a City after the Region of Peel was created (Leonard, 2003). This was the emergence of a culturally diverse and vibrant city. Now considering the fact that Brampton was in its infancy at the time - newly developed and just recognized as a City in the province (Brampton Guardian, 2012), what triggers someone to walk onto school property carrying two concealed weapons and ammunition to perpetrate such a heinous crime? Slobodian, while walking the hallways of Brampton Centennial Secondary School on a killing spree, some people may propose factors such as the popularity of the Internet and Goth culture as explanations for what prompted his deadly school shooting, but the fact of the matter remains, these factors were not present in society at the time the incident occurred (Davis, 2006).

AN EXAMINATION OF SLOBODIAN'S PRE-ATTACK AND ON-SCENE ATTACK BEHAVIOURS

The method in which a school shooter obtains his or her weapon(s) prior to carrying out an attack is essential knowledge in the process of understanding the shooter's pre-attack behaviour. In essence, a shooter's pre-attack behaviour is important to comprehend and analyze in all cases of mass murder and school shootings as this information will shed light on whether

the shooter obtained and/or purchased the weapon(s) in an illegal manner (Shon, 2012). The case of a violent school shooting that occurred on May 28, 1975 at Brampton Centennial Secondary School (Platiel, 1975b, and Beaufoy, 1975), how did 16-year-old Slobodian acquire the weapons needed to perpetrate his deadly attack? To address this question, it is important to consider Shon's (2012) first criteria, weapon procurement.

Weapon Procurement

Similar to other cases of mass murders and school shootings, Michael Slobodian did not secure the weapons he used to carry out his deadly mission at Brampton Secondary school in an illegal manner (Sallot, 1975). The day of the shooting, Slobodian walked home with his sister Dona from school during a morning break, "...packed his two hunting rifles in a guitar case" and returned to school (Sallot, 1975, p.4; Beaufoy, 1975). In other words, Slobodian acquired his weapons with no difficulty as the rifles were already present in his home due to the family's expressed interest with hunting. According to Dona Slobodian, "...My father and [Michael] go on hunting trips all the time," and there were "...at least three riffles in the basement" of their bungalow home (Beaufoy, 1975, p. 4).

Therefore, the manner in which Slobodian acquired his weapons was by no means illegal, nor did he face any difficulty obtaining them. This finding is consistent with previous literature on mass murder and school shooters, as Slobodian - an individual under the age of 18 - procured his firearm from what was already in his home (Petee & Padgett, 1999). In fact, the .22 calibre semi-automatic rifle that was used in the attack was a gift from his father, Peter Slobodian, who gave the rifle to Michael for his 15th birthday, even though the legal age of owning a gun at the time was 16 (Faight, 1999; Platiel, 1975b; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). The second rifle used

in the attack, a .444 calibre lever action rifle, was purchased two months prior to the attack in March, by Slobodian and his father, to be used on their hunting trips (Platiel, 1975b).

During the post-war period, it was not unusual for there to be firearm(s) present in the home (Brown, 2012). Hunting rifles and shotguns being easily accessible was a common practice in the 1950s and 1960s as the number of Canadian hunters increased substantially (Brown, 2012). Hunting rifles and shotguns were classified under legislation as unrestricted weapons and therefore were viewed as “safe” firearms (Brown, 2012). This categorization of firearms meant that both long guns and shotgun firearms can be sold in any department or sporting goods store, essentially where persons with unsound mind and serious criminal records have easy access to them (Brown, 2012; Remy, 2012). In other words, during this time period almost anyone could walk into a Canadian Tire or sporting goods store and purchase a rifle or shot gun (Remy, 2012).

Weapon Deployment

The manner in which a shooter deploys his weapon is Shon’s (2012) second criterion for assessing incidents of firearm-related mass murder and school shootings. Examining the length of time the shooter spent on scene is largely determinant upon the number of rounds fired and the amount of ammunition available (Shon, 2012). This is valuable information to observe simply because weapon deployment is pivotal to understanding why there is a divergence of victims and fatalities in cases of mass murders and school shootings.

While analyzing the shooting that occurred at Brampton Secondary, we know that Slobodian walked onto school property carrying two rifles concealed in his black guitar case (Beafof, 1975; Sallot, 1975; Platiel, 1975a; Bourdeau, 1975), a .444-calibre Marlin sporting rifle which Michael and his father used for hunting deer, and a .22-calibre semi-automatic rifle –

the gift he received from his father for his last birthday (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a; Platiel, 1975a; Faught, 1999). After walking back to school with his guitar case in hand, Slobodian made his way to the boy's washroom on the first floor of the building where he proceeded to load his weapons (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a; Faught, 1999). Mike Gibeault, victim and eyewitness to Slobodian's evolving rampage, remembers clearly what happened in the washroom:

"[Michael] was in the end cubicle with the door ajar, standing on top of the toilet. He was loading two rifles and had a bullet vest or bandillero thing around him, and a green beret on. John [Slinger] and I just stood there. We didn't believe what we were seeing. We thought they were toy guns." Michael then shouted, "Get out of here. I don't want to shoot you" (Faught, 1999, p. 3)

When the initial shooting started in the boy's washroom, Slobodian shot John Slinger twice in the back – the grade 11 student was one of the victims who succumbed to his injuries. Slobodian then directed his fire at Mike Gibeault, who was hit four times (Faught, 1999; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). Richard Shadrach was hit next, the 16-year-old student happened to walk into the boy's washroom in the midst of everything and was shot in the chest (Faught, 1999; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). At this point in time, students were starting to pile in the hallway as they were just released from class for the lunch break. Slobodian made his way down the first floor hallway in Brampton Centennial Secondary School, "...shooting wildly, hitting and missing indiscriminately" (Faught, 1999, p. 3). Slobodian then stopped by the school cafeteria, stood at the swinging doors and opened fire into the crowd of early lunchers who were in the vicinity, and wounding six in the process (Faught, 1999; Bourdeau, 1975).

As Slobodian made his way from one end of the school's hallway to the next, there is a possibility that he stopped to reload his rifles, said Deputy Chief Teggart (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). This assertion is based on the fact that roughly 15 shots were fired from Slobodian's

.444-calibre Marlin rifle, a lever-action rifle, and from his .22-calibre semi-automatic rifle (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). It is believed that Slobodian's .444 Marlin rifle held four bullets in the magazine with one bullet in the breech, while some .22 calibre can hold as many as 21 (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a).

En route to find English teacher, Mrs. Margaret Evelyn Wright, Slobodian saw her standing at the front of an open classroom door, as she looked at him Mrs. Wright called out his name, "Michael," immediately after, Slobodian shot her in the chest (Platiel, 1975a; Faught, 1999). Shortly after fatally wounding Mrs. Wright, who was one of his intended targets, Slobodian took his final suicidal shot, killing himself with his .444-calibre gun, a single gunshot wound to the head (Platiel, 1975a; Faught, 1999; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). Despite the fact of not knowing the exact amount of rounds fired from his assault rifles and the total amount of ammunition Slobodian took to the scene, one thing is clear for sure, Slobodian fired at least 15 rounds during his terror-filled incident which lasted a little over five minutes (Faught, 1999).

Using two high-powered rifles Slobodian managed to open fire on school property killing two individuals and wounding several others in the process. However, this was not the first time he had used a rifle. According to Slobodian's father, they both had an interest in firearms which stemmed from their admiration of the workmanship, however, "[Michael] knew how to handle his weapons. He was never careless. He had respect for them," (Sallot, 1975, p. 4). In addition, Slobodian's experience with rifles goes well beyond the hunting trips him and his father have ventured on. A month prior to the deadly rampage, Michael signed up for the Lorne Scots Peel Dufferin and Halton Regiment local militia (Beaufoy, 1975; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a; Sallot, 1975).

Michael got the idea of joining the local militia after seeing his sister get paid for office work she did at the armoury (Sallot, 1975). Although he was not interested in the military as a career, Slobodian joined the militia. According to his parents, his main purpose for joining the militia was for the opportunity to get outdoors with the unit and earn some extra money (Sallot, 1975). Besides having some background experience using a rifle on hunting trips with his father (Madden, 1975), Slobodian also took a training course on gun safety (Sallot, 1975; Faight, 1999). His knowledge, training and admiration for firearms ultimately served to his advantage on the morning of the deadly school shooting. These factors in combination with a straightforward tactical strategy lead to a deadly ambush with numerous fatalities.

Tactical Deployment Strategies

When examining mass murders and school shootings, researchers often observe a variety of tactical deployment strategies used by shooters. For example, some assailants may confine their targets to an enclosed location (e.g., a room) in order to ensure the maximum amount of victim fatalities; other shooters may limit their target's escape routes by creating barricades such as chaining doors shut in an effort to optimize victims' contact with line of fire. Needless to say, the manoeuvres school shooters employ to carry out their violent attack are intended to maximize target accessibility and target confinement.

On the day of Slobodian's violent school shooting, Michael left a suicide note addressed to his parents and family in his home, on his dresser, as if this could somehow explain what he was about to do (Beaufoy, 1975; Sallot, 1975; Faight, 1999; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a), before walking five blocks back to Brampton Centennial Secondary from his family's bungalow to carry out his seamless attack. In his brief handwritten letter, Michael wrote:

“To whom it may concern:

My life is now gone to pot. I am going to eliminate certain people from this world. Those people are: Mrs. Wright, Mr. Bronson, and any other sucker who gets in my way. I am then going to kill myself so as not to be imprisoned. I am not insane, but just strictly fed up of life. I am not getting anywhere and it's my fault. I love my parents and my family and I know that they love me” (Faight, 1999, p. 4; Hakala, 1975, p. A1; Sallot, 1975; Beaufoy, 1975).

In the note, Slobodian articulately identifies who his targets were, the approach he will take in order to attain his goal and his final course of action in order to avoid the consequences of his violent attack. Slobodian's word choices – eliminate – reveal his intention of committing murder prior to leaving his home. Also, by stating he would *eliminate* anyone who gets in his way suggests that Slobodian would not let anyone or anything stop him from killing his targets, in addition to revealing how determined he was to assassinate his selected targets.

Initially firing his first shot in the boy's washroom (Sallot, 1975; Beaufoy, 1975), Slobodian prematurely opened fire hitting any and every one in his line of sight. This tactical deployment strategy allowed potential victims to seek cover and concealment while allowing others to escape from his field of fire. According to Slobodian's note, he intended on *eliminating* two of his high school teachers: his Art and English teacher, Mrs. Wright and Physics teacher, Mr. Bronson (Beaufoy, 1975). However, during his violent shootout, Slobodian managed to execute only one of the two people in his planned attack before turning the gun on himself (Beaufoy, 1975; Sallot, 1975; Platiel, 1975a). So, why were these two individuals – well known teachers of the school – the primary targets in Slobodian's attack? Scholars from a variety of disciplines have examined how shooters select their targets, and one explanation derives from the shooter's source of anger, which then transpires into a vector of aggression.

TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION

What explanation is there for Slobodian's actions? One possible explanation lies in the application of the concept of *vector of aggression*. The preceding term can be used to describe the general directionality of the attacks. For example, an adolescent's attacks against superordinates such as teachers, principals, parents, and religious figures represent violence that is directed upward while attacks against subordinates such as younger kids and infants represent violence that is directed downward, against those with less power than the attacker. Similarly, an adolescent's attacks against one's peers reflect violence that is horizontal, for violence is directed at one's equals and peers. Those who perceive themselves to be victims of injustice will often pinpoint their attacks towards individuals or specific groups of individuals as a means to exact revenge for a perceived or actual wrong (Welch, 2013). These sources of anger, often transmitted into a vector of aggression, are fundamental in shaping how a shooter selects his or her target(s). These types of attack, commonly referred to as a targeted attack, are not similar to other forms of violence that occur on school property. Targeted attacks are motivated by revenge and are generally not directed toward the entire school or institution as a whole. Rather, this form of attack is carried out by individuals who want to bring attention to a cause or problem that is important to them (Vossekuil et al., 2002). As a result, this view supports the findings from previous studies of mass murderers and school shooters, that these individuals do not "just snap" or suffer from a mental illness (Fein & Vossekuil, 1999; Palermo, 1997; Shon & Roberts, 2010). The assaults carried out by these individuals are directly a result of the transformations in their life prior to the rampages (Shon, 2012) and is not because they simply go "berserk" (Palermo, 1997).

Sources of Anger

Several months prior to the killing rampage, the Slobodian family had experienced its share of misfortunes. First, Mrs. Slobodian left her job after six years as an equipment tester at an industrial plant due to back and hip problems (Sallot, 1975). Second, Peter Slobodian, Michael's father, suffered his second heart attack and was forced to leave his job as an equipment design manager (Sallot, 1975; Beaufoy, 1975; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). In fact, Peter Slobodian was scheduled to undergo open heart surgery in June, less than a month from when his son carried out the nation's first ever school shooting (Beaufoy, 1975; Faught, 1999). Even though Peter Slobodian had to leave his job, the company he worked for kept him on paid sick leave which meant the family did not experience a financial strain as a result (Beaufoy, 1975). Third, Slobodian's 83-year-old grandfather, Nicolas Slobodian, whom he was very close with when they lived in Montreal, moved in with the family earlier on in the year due to his poor health.

However, on May 1, 1975, Slobodian's grandfather was admitted to Peel Memorial Hospital and unfortunately passed away on the same day (Beaufoy, 1975; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). Although Slobodian appeared to have coped with the loss of his grandfather within a few days after the funeral (Beaufoy, 1975), he went to see Mrs. Wright after school one day and burst into tears. Slobodian was unhappy about the recent death of his grandfather (Faught, 1999). According to David Wright, Margaret Wright's husband, Slobodian not only burst into tears but he also poured out his personal problems to the high school teacher (Faught, 1999). Slobodian's "fed-up" with life attitude is not only a result from the recent events he underwent at home, but also a combination of the ramifications of his poor attendance at school that can characterize the source of his anger.

Michael Slobodian was considered an average student in almost every way (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). Not only were his grades average in high school, Slobodian did not exhibit any signs of unusual behaviour while attending Brampton Centennial Secondary School, said Peel County school superintendent Kenneth Foster (Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a). Prior to his shooting rampage, Slobodian worked on an ‘above average’ science project with physics teacher, Ross Bronson (Faught, 1999). His physics project involved dissecting frogs, taking their hearts out and stimulating them with electrical currents – a process which had been banned by the Animals for Research Act, a year prior (Faught, 1999). As a result, Slobodian’s entry into the science fair competition had been rejected because it involved experiments on live specimens, namely frogs (Beaufoy, 1975; Sallot, 1975). Slobodian, quite proud of his project, was disappointed at this decision and began to develop a growing propensity for skipping classes, mainly Physics and English to be precise (Beaufoy, 1975; Faught, 1999; Sallot, 1975). He then began to hand in fake and increasingly far-fetched excuse notes that were allegedly written by his parents all in an attempt to excuse his absences from missed classes (Faught, 1999; Sallot, 1975; Platiel, 1975b). One day before the violent rampage, Slobodian handed in a note which read:

“Please excuse Michael’s absence from your classes...He has contracted a blood disease which causes fever and blistering on his hands. If you notice he is in an unusual state, please advise him to return home” (Faught, 1999, p. 2).

Slobodian’s forged excuse note, supposedly written by his parents, clearly explains the cause of his recent absence from class, thereby allowing him to evade all possible consequences for his recent absence. Following Michael Slobodian’s unruly death, school officials found approximately 30 notes that were forged and used to cover his absences from classes (Platiel, 1975b). One of these documents in particular included a medical certificate; it was forged by

Slobodian, in the writing of a family physician giving him a ‘good health’ clearance following a medical checkup (Platiel, 1975b).

Ross Bronson - physics teacher at Brampton Centennial Secondary School – is known for reprimanding students for skipping his class (Beaufoy, 1975). Bronson claims he “had nailed” Slobodian for ditching physics class, while English teacher, Margaret Wright, was becoming skeptical about the excuses Slobodian was providing, and was also concerned about his poor attendance in her English class (Faught, 1999). According to Bronson “*What Margaret Wright and I had in common was that we got after kids if they skipped class or weren’t doing their work*” (Sallot, 1975, p. 4). For this reason, both teachers had contacted Slobodian’s parents for an explanation regarding his recent absences (Beaufoy, 1975).

On the morning of the deadly school shooting, Mrs. Wright called Slobodian’s home to inquire why Michael had failed to attend several English classes (Faught, 1999; Beaufoy, 1975; Platiel, 1975b). When Slobodian and his sister arrived home, during the mid-morning break, at approximately 10:40am, his mother inquired why he had been skipping English classes, stating that his English teacher, Mrs. Wright, had called her (Beaufoy, 1975; Faught, 1999). Slobodian explained that he was not going to Mrs. Wright’s English class simply because he had lost an essay assignment and was scared to go to class (Sallot, 1975; Platiel, 1975b). After hearing his reasoning, Slobodian’s mother offered to call the English teacher to explain the situation, however, she claims that her son calmly responded by saying, “*...it’s was ok, he would take care of it*” (Sallot, 1975, p. 4). A short time after the conversation about his unexcused absence from Mrs. Wright’s English class - sometime between 10:40am and 11:30am - Slobodian made his plans to kill Mrs. Wright, Mr. Bronson and himself (Beaufoy, 1975).

The radical transformations in Slobodian's social life over a period of one year must have been the trigger for his deadly act of violence. His identity of being a competent student began to dissipate following the rejection of his science project entry in to the science fair competition (Sallot, 1975). Slobodian had high goals for himself. According to Mr. Slobodian, Michael's father, Michael always talked about becoming a surgeon (Sallot, 1975). However, when his father suffered a second heart attack, Michael took greater interest in the field of medicine and started reading medical books about the functions of the heart (Sallot, 1975). This interest in the functionality of the heart is what led him to create a science experiment on frog hearts. His proposed experiment, prohibited by science fair regulations, could have triggered the source of his distress. Adding to this, Mr. Slobodian's poor health condition - having suffered his second heart attack and was about to undergo open heart surgery - can create a sense of suppressed anger (Beaufoy, 1975). Fostering a close relationship with his father, Michael Slobodian must have bottled-up his emotions and concerns for his father's upcoming heart operation that he was about to undergo in less than a month. According to one of Slobodian's classmates, Daryl Street, "*Mike could hold his feelings in. He could give sympathy, but never asked for it*" (Sallot, 1975, p. 4). Adding this to the recent death of his grandfather - to whom Slobodian was very close with, and the first death in the family Slobodian had known (Sallot, 1975) - while adding to this constantly being "nailed" for his increasingly poor attendance in English and Physics may have contributed to the pressures that caused him to break (Faught, 1999). "*Strictly fed-up [with] life,*" Slobodian was a kid who sought revenge (Beaufoy, 1975; Ford, 1995b).

However, one of the bitter ironies of this tragedy is that prior to his shooting rampage, Slobodian had recently completed studying Arthur Miller's (1949) award-winning play, *Death of Salesman* (Sallot, 1975). In the oral class reading, Slobodian played the role of Willy Loman, a

salesman who failed to live up to his own high expectations and kills himself in the end (Sallot, 1975). Aside from his leading role as Willy, Michael Slobodian wrote an essay about the character, Willy, for English class for which it reads in part:

“One defines a tragic hero as a person who we would admire and yet pity, (has) strong values, is a person who undergoes a catastrophe and achieves self-awareness. I cannot say Willy Loman is a tragic hero for I did not admire him and certainly had no pity for him. Willy Loman was a victim of his own mind: what he did or said usually affected everyone around him and in the end eventually destroyed him. His strong values were not very healthy and the catastrophe he underwent was brought on by himself... One can plainly see that Willy’s lying to himself and others will finally put him in a hole so deep he won’t be able to get out. Willy eventually broke down and committed suicide. He died the death of a deluded fool and not that of a tragic hero,” (Sallot, 1975, p. 4).

Visibly articulated in his writing, Slobodian asserts that Willy Loman died as a “deluded fool” rather than a “tragic hero” (Sallot, 1975). Slobodian’s choice of words used to describe the failing salesman’s death exemplifies his stance on what it takes to achieve the “American Dream.”

Trajectories

Shooters who experience radical transformations in their social circumstances prior to carrying out their deadly act of violence will often direct their aggression vertically - toward teachers, those who possess high levels of authority at the institution - or horizontally, targeting peers and fellow classmates. When school shooters target persons recognized as being a symbol of the school (such as, teachers, principals, the Dean, faculty and committee members), it is more often than not a result of a perceived or actual wrong the shooter has experienced or felt. As a result, school shooters will often classify themselves to be the victims of injustice and thereby seek revenge for all those who have wronged them.

The school shooting inside of Brampton Centennial Secondary School can be classified as being a product of revenge, simply because Slobodian's intended targets were the two individuals who were on his case about missing classes, and in turn, sought an explanation from Mrs. Slobodian, the shooter's mother, regarding his poor attendance at school (Faught, 1999; Beaufoy, 1975). In essence, Slobodian's lack of punctuality for not attending Physics and English class can fall under the category of failure in school, which Langman (2009) and Newman et al. (2004) identify as one of the key factors that help shape a school shooter's target selection. Since Mrs. Wright, and more so, Mr. Bronson "nailed" Slobodian for not attending their classes, Michael Slobodian must have used his built up anger and transferred them into a vector of aggression toward the two high school teachers.

Michael Slobodian's intended targets are a prime example of a gunman directing his aggression vertically. Wright and Bronson, both marked for death (Platiel, 1975b), were believed to be favourable among students in high school. Ross Bronson - an individual who maintained high standards in his physics class - had been a teacher for 24 years prior to the shooting (Sallot, 1975), while Margaret Wright, a 25 year-old Art and English teacher, was one of the new, younger teachers working at the high school (Faught, 1999). Prior to the shooting, Slobodian must have felt trapped with no place to go and targeted those he believed were responsible or may have contributed to his misery: Margaret Wright and Ross Bronson, both served as symbols of the school. Although Shon (2012) suggested that shooters often target persons recognized as being a symbol of the school due to their level of power and/ or authority they possess, there is no known evidence of this type of thinking in Michael Slobodian. This may be the reason why Slobodian did not remain along the same continuum and attacked his peers in the process. The fact that Slobodian expressed his intentions to *eliminate* anyone who gets in his way (Sallot,

1975; Beaufoy, 1975) suggests his feelings were rooted in his frustration and his lack of success in school, and not based on his target's level of power or authority at the institution.

DISCUSSION

School shootings have become an increasing social problem plaguing North American societies over the past few decades (Duwe, 2004; Duwe, 2007). Gun-related school shootings have occurred across history, however, it is the widespread media coverage of famous incidents, such as Columbine, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook, that has shaped the public's perception of school shootings as an emergent and growing social problem (Muschert, 2007; Knoll, 2012). Although school shootings are rare events, this form of homicidal violence receives intense media attention immediately after an event, and very little academic attention afterwards (Muschert, 2007; Howells, 2012; Welch, 2013). In other words, although school shootings garner widespread media attention, the duration and intensity discussing these rare events is fairly brief (Muschert, 2007). Scholars across various disciplines have studied school crime and safety; however, researchers fail to focus on the constellation of dynamics surrounding individual events of school shootings.

Findings from this research study revealed that shooters' weapon familiarity and socialization play a vital role in mass murders and school shootings. Slobodian gained vast amount of experience with the use of hunting rifles during the countless hunting trips he attended with his father. However, growing up in an environment and community where owning a firearm was not uncommon contributed significantly to Slobodian's familiarity and socialization with lethal weapons. This was evident given that any individual could walk into a local department store or sporting goods store and purchase a rifle or shotgun during the 1970s. As a result, these

findings are consistent with previous literature as Slobodian's case shares parallels to the US in that gun accessibility, gun intimacy, and socialization all worked to "produce" a school shooter. The available literature on school shootings is primarily Americanized. Most, if not all, of the research and analyses conducted to examine and increase understanding of school shootings, predominantly focuses on incidents that occurred in the United States. School shootings in Canada have not been examined extensively as those in our neighbour country below (Howells, 2012). Although the rate of mass murders and school shootings in the United States far exceeds that of any other country in North America (Duwe, 2007), the low level of attention devoted to Canadian school shootings need not be ignored. Public and academic understanding of this catastrophic phenomenon from the Canadian context requires continued research contributing to the field of knowledge about school shootings. Continued research on the study of Canadian school shooting incidents would most likely contribute to effective policy responses, which in turn could prevent these incidents from occurring. Muschert (2007) claimed that a long-term, more-balanced approach to the study of school shootings, in various settings, is essential for developing a complex and even-handed understanding, leading to the emergence of more sophisticated and proactive prevention and response strategies. However, unless gun laws and accessibility is absolute there will continue to be bases like Slobodian in Canada.

Next, the use of Shon's (2012) three criteria for examining shooter's behaviours and explaining the variations in lethal outcomes are absent from the current mass murder and school shooting literature. Using these three criteria, (1) weapon procurement, (2) weapon deployment, and (3) tactical deployment strategies (Shon, 2012), this research study revealed that vector of aggression and target selection: primary targets and collateral targets, significantly contributed to the outcome of Slobodian's deadly attack. Data indicates that Michael Slobodian

did not want to kill his peers. In fact, Slobodian told his peers to leave while he was loading his weapons in the washroom and then shot them as they were walking away. This is a clear indication that his decision to kill was made only after his initial intention of letting them live. To put in other words, if Slobodian wanted to eliminate these individuals he would have shot them face to face during their initial interaction. This finding is contrary to that of Shon (2012), since the two boys who were killed in the washroom were incidental victims and not intended targets.

Given the particular circumstances of each shooter is distinct from the last, it is enough to warrant that Shon's proposed three criteria be used in future research studies to shed light on shooter's pre-attack and attack behaviours following each incident of school shooting. Weapons procurement (a prerequisite for the ability to kill) is critical and plays a central role in the process of executing a school shooting. Previous studies on mass murders and school shootings reveal that shooters generally obtain their weapons in a legit manner (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002); and with this in mind, it is imperative to examine the lengths these individuals will go to acquiring the weapon(s). The fact that Slobodian obtained his weapons to carry out his attack in a legit manner, a gift from his father for his last birthday, is a finding that is consistent with previous studies (Faught, 1999; Platiel, 1975b; Globe and Mail Staff, 1975a).

As equally important, researchers and scholars who are studying firearms-related homicide must examine the shooter's method of weapon(s) deployment during each incident of mass murder and school shootings. Ideally, the amount of time a shooter spends at the scene of the shooting, as well as the tactics and manoeuvres they execute are all key factors that will help illustrate and explain the step-by-step process of how the incident took place. The shooter's weapon deployment strategy is fundamental to understanding the overall shooting incident as a whole, while it also sheds light on the shooter's decision making process during the attack. The

information gathered while examining each shooting incident using this criterion enables researchers as well as other stakeholders in the epistemology of school shootings to gain valuable insight into the tactics and manoeuvres shooters employ, and thereby contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to mass murder and school shootings.

In addition, a thorough examination of the shooter's weapons and tactical deployment strategies are needed in order to comprehend the shooter's target selection. In this process, researchers will uncover why some school shooters allow potential victims to seek cover and concealment, as well as given them enough time to escape the field of fire (Shon, 2012). This criterion proposed by Shon (2012) also sheds light into the decision making process shooters engage in, thereby allowing social scientists to comprehend why some incidents of mass murder and school shootings yield more victims than others. Again, analysis of Slobodian's school shooting revealed that his victim selection was not random as he made his way down the hallway to the Art room where he found his first target.

Findings into Slobodian's school shooting also revealed that he had experience in the use of firearms. This means that even if his weapon had jammed, he would have been able to fix it quickly and start fire again, unlike some other school shooters (Shon, 2012). In addition, the process in which shooters permit potential victims to seek cover and concealment is crucial to investigate when dissecting incidents of school shootings and mass murders, mainly because it has the potential to reveal the thought process of these individuals, as well as pinpoint key factors that may deter one from inflicting harm on a larger group of people. Gaining a better understanding of the thought process of shooters in general, is essential as it will provide citizens with a glimpse into why some shooters inflict more harm than others.

Although research into the decision making process of school shooters can be limited to gaining insight of the tactics, manoeuvres, and strategies each shooter used during the tragic event, it is also of great value to analyze the trajectories of each shooter's aggression. The direction of the attack: primary targets versus collateral/ incidental targets must be examined as it plays an imperial role in understanding the shooter's target selection. School shooters who target people with high levels of authority at the institution (e.g. teachers, principals, Deans, faculty, committee member, as well as other key staff who works at the institution) are directing their aggression vertically, while shooters' who target their peers, fellow classmates, and other students at the school are precisely projecting their aggression horizontally. It is crucial to examine this variation in directionality as it will draw attention to the reasons why some school shooters, and even mass murders, carry out their deadly attack against one group of individuals (e.g. higher ups or equals), or mobilize between both groups of targets during their shootout, similar to Slobodian's school shooting.

Moreover, previous research on school shootings has revealed on countless accounts that school shooters will often target their peers for many of the same reasons. Explanations such as perceived failure of manhood, mental illness, bullying, and the culture of violence have all been presented as reasons that overwhelmingly influence shooters to engage in school shootings (Newman et al., 2004; Langman, 2009a; Reuter-Rice, 2008; Leary, Kowalski, Smith and Phillips. 2003). Whereas, shooters who direct their aggression vertically, towards people who are recognized as being a symbol of the school, often carry out their attack due to feelings of being actual or perceived victims of injustice. With these explanations in mind, it is necessary to investigate the correlation between them and their effect on shooters' vector of aggression. Uncovering shooters rationale for projecting their aggression vertically and/or horizontally will

allow researchers to delve deeper into the phenomenon of school shootings while providing insightful explanations into these rare and deadly events.

Overall, analyzing school shootings and mass murders from a Canadian context provided valuable insight and contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to mass murders and school shootings. Examinations of these rare events from a Canadian context generate various comparisons regarding the occurrence of school shootings. Then, researchers and social scientists can construct countless explanations as to why the rate of school shootings and mass murder is greater in the US compared to Canada. In addition, an analysis of school shootings from this frame of reference stresses the need for several policy implications. For example, researchers studying how Canada's regulations on gun control impacts the occurrence of school shootings may lead to the development and implementation of various policy measures to help curb and potentially prevent these events from occurring in the future. However, an in-depth analysis of Slobodian's shooting revealed that gun culture and socialization is the same in Canada and the US. We see that when gun control did not occur following Slobodian's deadly school shooting, it led to more events of deadly school violence, such as the shooting that occurred in Montreal a short while after.

Moreover, examining school shootings from a Canadian perspective by applying Shon's (2012) three criteria allows researchers to gain a better understanding of the vectors of aggression that lead to deadly outcomes. Previous research on mass murders and school shootings suggest that shooters select symbols of the institution as targets of their outrage; however findings from this study revealed that when symbols are targets, peers die incidentally because they simply got in the way. All of these gaps that are current in the literature on mass

murders and school shootings must be addressed in order to fully comprehend this growing phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Mass murders and school shootings have become an emerging social problem in North America over the last two decades (Muschert, 2007; Knoll, 2012). Although rare, these terrifying events elicit horror, shock and fear across the nation (O'Toole, 1999). Social scientists and scholars across various disciplines have examined school shootings, focusing primarily on key factors such as family histories, psychological pathologies and cultural explanations in attempt to provide social, political and scientific commentaries on the occurrence of firearms-related homicide on school property (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). While the available literature on school shootings may provide a wealth of knowledge about the subject at hand, including explanations for the shooter's motive, typologies, social and psychological variables, certain key element have been inadequately discussed while others remain unaddressed.

Slobodian, a deeply disturbed high school student, went on a rampage shootout killing two people, and wounding 13 others during his attack before ending his own life. This story of course shocked the nation as it was the first ever school shooting to occur in Canada. The use of newspaper clippings as sources of data is not without limitations (Shon, 2012). Current research on newsworthy homicide events reveal that newsworthiness of these events are more often than not, influenced by the age of victims, race, and gender typifications of the actors involved (Lundman, 2003). Stories about murders frequently lead news broadcasts (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996), while stories of local murders are frequently published in newspapers - some of which lead by appearing as the front page news. However, not all cases of homicide are

selected for news media coverage (Weis & Chermak, 1998). Researchers have found that atypical forms of homicide events, such as mass murders and school shootings, are exploited in order to garner reader's attention in a profit-oriented industry (Muschert, 2007). In other words, "*If it bleeds, it leads*" (Lundman, 2003, p.358). According to Pritchard and Hughes (1997), research findings indicate there is more focus on the victims of a homicide event in news coverage rather than on the offender or the offense itself. This finding supports the idea that journalists and publishers highlight the dramatic elements of school shootings, and undermine the long-term examination of the phenomena as a whole (Muschert, 2007). As result, scholars have agreed that information published in newspapers are likely a result of what is deemed "newsworthy" by the journalists (Jacobs, 2000; Oliver and Meyers, 1999), mainly due to the fact that newsworthiness is a subjective concept (Hunt, 1999). Consequently, journalists and publishers may misrepresent, twist, and underreport information about a particular event – such as school shootings - in newspapers, to generate sensational headlines to capture their audience's attention (Duwe, 2000; Howells, 2012). As a result, the credibility of data drawn from these sources can be questioned. However, newspaper articles leave researchable tracks, allowing researchers to comb through various historical and narrative-rich articles of an event, such as mass murders and school shootings, through publically available archives. Media coverage through this medium – newspapers - provides a historical record and glimpse into the social interaction during the reported period. For this reason, and the connotations described therein, makes the use of newspaper articles a valid source of data.

In addition, when shooters commit suicide following their deadly school attack, it often leaves scholars, researchers, crime investigators, as well as those related to the shooter, with unanswered questions. One of these main questions that are constantly left unanswered is: why

did the shooter commit suicide before carrying out his attack on all of the intended targets? In regards to Michael Slobodian's deadly school shooting, Slobodian took his own life before making his way to his second intended target (Faught, 1999; Hakala, 1975; Sallot, 1975; Beaufoy, 1975). In doing so, this leaves room for speculations regarding his decision to commit suicide before completing his deadly mission. This question is not only difficult to answer, but it also prevents researchers from completely understanding each case of school shooting through the shooter's frame of mind and their decision making process.

Moreover, this paper lacks the use of concrete data or evidence which can only be obtained through a coroner's report of the shooter and/or a police report of the shooting incident. Using data obtained in these two reports will give researchers the access to vital information, such as the type of firearm used, the number of bullets or rounds carried and fired on scene, toxicology for the shooter, apparel the gunmen wore (e.g. bullet proof vest), and other details that may not be disclosed to the general public. The information obtained from these reports will give researchers a more in-depth look at each incident of school shooting, especially when compiled and organized using Shon's (2012) three criterions for understanding the shooter's pre-attack and attack behaviours following the deadly attack.

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