'THE AGE OF SCHOOL SHOOTINGS':
A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION ON MASCULINITY
'LA ERA DE LAS MASACRES EN LAS ESCUELAS':
UNA INTERPRETACIÓN SOCIOLÓGICA SOBRE LA MASCULINIDAD

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Abstract: *Over the past two decades there has been a growing interest in the study of the horrendous massacres perpetrated by students at school premises. These massacres, known as school shootings, haven been predominantly analyzed by employing psychological approaches. Despite the fact that empirical research clearly reveals that school shooters tend not to present life-long histories of mental illness, these approaches usually put a strong emphasis on the perpetrator's individual pathologies, ignoring the influence that social values such as masculinity exert on perpetrators' actions. Consequently, perpetrators are viewed as lone wolf shooters and school shootings as isolated cases. Based on data derived from scholarly works published mainly in peer-review journals and the sociological theory of P. Berger and T. Luckmann, the aim of this essay is to offer a sociological interpretation on school shootings by explaining why school shooters commit violent actions against teachers and classmates as a form of retrieving their masculinity. In this regard, the essay finds that male rather than female students commit school shootings. At the same time, the majority of perpetrators have had parents who were gun collectors. It is no coincide that shooters mostly use family guns to commit the massacres. Additionally, shooters see school as a social entity that has diminished their masculinity, and the way to reaffirm their masculinity is to attack randomly students and teachers in full view of the rest of school members during school hours.*

Key words: *SCHOOL SHOOTINGS, MASCULINITY, SOCIALIZATION, SCHOOL*

Resumen: *En las dos últimas décadas se ha presentado un interés creciente por el estudio de las horrendas masacres cometidas por estudiantes en las escuelas. Estas masacres conocidas como "tiroteos en la escuela" han sido analizadas utilizando enfoques psicológicos. A pesar de que la investigación revela que los perpetrados no presentan historias de enfermedades mentales, estos enfoques enfatizan en las patologías de los perpetrados ignorando la influencia que los valores tienen sobre sus acciones. En consecuencia, los perpetradores son vistos como lobos solitarios y las masacres escolares como casos aislados. Con base en información obtenida de trabajos académicos publicados, en su gran mayoría, en revistas científicas, y además, con la teoría sociológica de P. Berger y T. Luckmann, el propósito de este ensayo es presentar una interpretación sociológica sobre las masacres ocurridas en las escuelas al explicar por qué los perpetradores cometen actos violentos contra sus profesores y compañeros como una forma de recuperar su masculinidad. El ensayo encuentra que los hombres más que las mujeres cometen tiroteos en las escuelas. Por lo general, los perpetrados provienen de padres quienes han sido coleccionistas de armas. No es coincidencia que los perpetrados utilicen las armas de sus familias para llevar a cabo las masacres. Aunado a ello, los perpetrados perciben la escuela como una entidad social que disminuye su masculinidad, y la manera de reafirmarla es mediante el ataque azaroso a estudiantes y profesores en frente del resto de los miembros de la comunidad educativa durante la jornada escolar.*

Palabras clave: *TIROTEOS ESCOLARES, MASCULINIDAD, SOCIALIZACIÓN, ESCUELA*

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1   Introduction

In January of 2014, at a gym in a New Mexico middle school, an 11-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl were severely wounded as result of a shooting perpetrated by another 12-year-old male student. In the aftermath of the fierce attack, "school officials and teachers, who had long prepared for such a moment, locked down the school as police officers and parents rushed to the scene" (Healy 2014, p. A1). As New York Times journalist Jack Healy asserts, New Mexico's incident should be regarded as another example of the age of school shootings (Healy, 2014). In response to two of the more catastrophic school massacres carried out in the United States, at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012, the journalist remarks that lockdowns, collaboration with police departments, closed-circuit cameras, doors that lock automatically, police officers at school, and identification badges have increasingly become distinctive features that properly describe an age of school shootings. It is evident that these security changes have been reshaping *the social ecology of school* (Flannery, Modzeleski, & Kretschmar, 2012) and schools' agendas. Discussing how to improve students' learning outcomes is as important as adopting the most effective measures for facing shooters' fierce attacks.

Furthermore, the age of school shootings has led to the shift in the conception of the school as a social institution. It is widely accepted that schools potentially engender school shooters whose horrendous motive is to brutally exterminate their peers and teachers at school. This concept directly contradicts the idea that school is a fundamental institution for the formation of future citizens who attend at school to internalize universally shared and accepted social values –such as respect for life of others, inter alia, tolerance, openness to diversity and difference- that enable human beings to live peaceably. Consequently, the age of school shootings raises doubts about school's social function of preventing students from transgressing social values that make it possible to maintain the social order (Durkheim, 2001). In the age of school shootings, it could be said that school has emerged as an institution incapable of suppressing the barbaric impulse of individuals to kill their classmates.

However, the number of school shootings that have occurred in the last century is very low. Likewise, it is unlikely that such events take places at school. After the first documented school shooting in Germany in 1913, which resulted in five girls killed (Schlott, 2013), some studies have found that between 120 and 160 total school shootings have happened around the world from the 1920s to 2013 (Böckler, Seeger, Sitzer, & Heitmeyer, 2013; Dumitriu,

2013). This means that no more than two fatal incidents per year have passed in this span of time. In the United States, school shootings are not statically representative as they represent about less than 2 percent of the total of homicides of youth ages 5-18 per year (Daniels & Page, 2013; Flannery et al., 2012). Additionally, it is unlikely that a student homicide could be committed at school. Flannery *et al* (2013) conclude that "any individual school can expect to experience a student homicide about once every 6,000 years" (p. 3) by considering that there was an average of 21 student homicides per year during the 1996-2006 period and the United States roughly has 125,000 elementary and secondary schools.

Notwithstanding these figures demonstrate that school shootings are virtually infrequent events, newspaper articles in *the Washington Post* and *the Guardian* state that the occurrence of school shootings has steadily increased by the year 2013 in the United States (Pilkington, 2014; Strauss, 2014). From December 2012, when Connecticut's massacre was committed, to January 2014, 44 school shootings have been reported, amounting to an average of three events per month. It is worth noting that 13 out of 44 cases have occurred in "the first six weeks of 2014 alone" (Pilkington, 2014, p. A1). However, 21 cases in total were strictly school shootings. To consider an event as a school shooting, at least a fatal victim has been resulted in after perpetrating the attack (Böckler et al., 2013; Dumitriu, 2013). If fatalities were not taken into account from 2000 to 2010, the total number of school shootings would be about 445: these amount to saying 3 events per month (De Venanzi, 2012).

In this framework, a question is posed: Why do some middle and high school students deliberately decide to commit school shootings aimed against their classmates and teachers while all of them are at school premises?

1.1   Aims and objectives of the essay

The aim of this essay is to offer a sociological interpretation on school shootings. The starting point of this interpretation consists in understanding school shootings as violent actions committed by students with the interest of recovering perpetrators' masculinity (Heitmeyer, Böckler, & Seeger, 2013). At the societal level, these individual actions contribute to the reinforcement of masculinity as social value (Giddens, 1984). It is no a coincidence that all but eight of the 163 school shooters were males and all of them used fire weapons to attack their school's community at school premises (Dumitriu, 2013). Sociological theory convincingly argues that actions carried out by individuals are instrumental for the society's reproduction and invigoration of social values over time (Berger & Luckmann, 2011; Bourdieu,

1984; Giddens, 1984; Parsons, 1991; Weber, 1964) regardless of whether the result of actions is benevolent or lethal.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 1.2 points out that school shooters' mental health is an insufficient perspective for explaining why perpetrators commit massacres at school. Conversely, viewing school shootings as a sort of mechanism for exacerbating masculinity presupposes that these events are not a mere consequence of the shooter's mental disorder. Defining school shootings as isolated actions and school shooters as lone wolf perpetrators overshadows the substantial influence that family and school have on the structuration of school shooters' behavior and the actions that they take to reaffirm their masculinity. Section 1.3 begins by mentioning that data on school shootings committed by women are not available to know at which extent masculinity plays a pivotal role in the perpetration of women's actions. This Section additionally recommends that future studies on school shootings must analyze how political and economic aspects reinforce masculinity in order to complement the sociological interpretation on school shootings. Section 1.4 succinctly describes the methodology used to elaborate the present essay. Section 2 provides a definition on school shootings by discussing how school is a social entity that reproduces masculinity. Section 3 highlights that school shootings predominantly occur in developed countries and the majority of school shooters were students between 13 and 19 years of age. Based on the sociological theory of Berger and Luckmann (2011), Section 4 explains how the primary and secondary socialization shape the individuals' actions and the effects that such socialization have on school shooters. The Section 5 discusses those social values associated with masculinity that explain partially why perpetrators commit school shootings. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the centrality of considering social values and masculinity when doing future research on school shootings in the field of education.

1.2 Significance of the paper

School shootings have been predominantly analyzed by employing psychological approaches, considering school shootings as result of the perpetrators' mental health state (Dumitriu, 2013; Flannery et al., 2012; Langman, 2009, 2013). Data available on school shooters are virtually scarce, making it difficult to construct an appropriate mental diagnosis. In spite of this, studies with strong emphasis on psychological aspects usually tend to create perpetrators' profiles in order to provide an explanation how individual motives provoke school shootings (Langman, 2009, 2013). The conclusions derived from these studies are

problematic at least for two reasons. Firstly, there are more differences than similarities between school shooters' pathologies, and the profiles are not robust enough to generalize why individuals with the same pathologies are not more likely to commit school shootings in comparison to those who finally perpetrate them (Flannery et al., 2012). Besides, some studies have found that few school shooters present "life-long histories of mental illness" (Dumitriu, 2013, p. 303). Secondly, in focusing heavily on perpetrators' individual pathologies, this approach ignores the influence that social values such masculinity exert on school shootings (Daniels & Page, 2013; De Venanzi, 2012; Heitmeyer et al., 2013; Newman, 2013; Vuori, Oksanen, & Räsänen, 2013). The most problematic implication of this approach is that perpetrators are lone wolf shooters and school shootings are isolated cases (Malkki, 2013); shooters and shooting virtually appear as if they were empty of any social content. Heitmeyer *et al.* (2013) expose a more extreme view by asserting that this psychological approach leads to "exonerate society and create detachment in order to downplay the social causes and to return to 'normally' as soon as possible" (p. 27).

Some authors find that sociological theory is instrumental in interpreting different social phenomena that challenge the school's social role. From this standpoint, societal factors (Daniels & Page, 2013) have considerable impact on school shootings, and sociological theory has defined some conceptual categories, such as socialization, to identify and analyze scholarly these factors (Celis & Guatame, 2003). Therefore, the significance of this paper lies in applying sociological theory to school shootings to prove how school shootings harden masculinity at the social level and allow students who lack the recognition of their masculinity to recovery it.

1.3   Limitations of the essay

Despite the fact that male students have perpetrated the majority of school shootings (Dumitriu, 2013), none of the examined papers on this issue has collected data on female students who have perpetrated violent actions at school. Due to the lack of research on the involvement of females in school shootings, this essay cannot demonstrate to what extent masculinity has a critical effect on females' decisions to attack a school's community or what other social values are intrinsically connected with school shootings. A direct consequence of this limitation is that it is impossible to trace meaningful differences between those social values that males allegedly invoke when carrying out attacks with respect to those of females.

This essay gives special attention to the reinforcement of masculinity. From Parsons' theory about social systems (Parsons, 1991), economic and political subsystems significantly influence the individuals' process of internalization of social values as well. This entails that both subsystems are of critical importance to the reproduction and perpetuation of masculinity in any society. In this regard, not considering economic and political aspects is a limitation that future studies have to overcome to expand understanding on the effect of political and economic factors on school shootings.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology comprised the following steps. Firstly, a set of categories was selected from sociological theory to understand how individuals internalize social values and individuals undertake actions aimed to reaffirm their social identity as members of a determined social group. The theory of Berger and Luckmann demonstrates that individuals' worldviews and behaviors are the product of a long process of socialization by which individuals internalize social values that they posteriorly perceive as natural and normal. However, this process occurs in specific social groups that transmit and reinforce social values.

Secondly, a search through Springer, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect databases was made to identify peer-reviewed papers on school shootings. Major attention was given to those papers that found a direct relation between masculinity and school shootings. The following keywords and thesaurus descriptors were used: school shootings, socialization, masculinity, and adolescent culture.

Finally, the data collected by the selected papers include family and mental health records, court documents, police records, videos, media accounts, and student journals. These materials were central to conduct research on school shootings because of it is very difficult to interview surviving perpetrators (Flannery et al., 2013). It is relevant to mention that the common feature in all papers is that they only take into consideration well-documented cases in order to derive consistent conclusions. In addition, school shootings analyzed occurred in different countries and took place between 1920's and 2010's. A final feature is that some papers mainly focused on two or three school shooting cases because of their interest to test a hypothesis.

2.   A sociological definition of school shootings

This essay defines school shootings as violent actions perpetrated by a current or former male student in full view of others with the aim of getting recognition from the school that has previously excluded him from such recognition because of he was unable to perform behaviors, meet profiles, and adopt styles associated with his masculinity (Heitmeyer et al., 2013). Empirical research reveals that only a student tends to commit school shootings, with the exception of Columbine's massacre executed by two school shooters (Böckler et al., 2013; Dumitriu 2013). Additionally, the student carries out the act on school premises during school hours and uses fire weapons against school's community to achieve his own aim (Böckler et al., 2013). This essay considers that school shootings not only result in casualties, but also reinforce masculinity as a social value.

Figure 1 graphically represents the principal features of school shootings.

**Figure 1 Principal features of school shootings: a sociological definition**
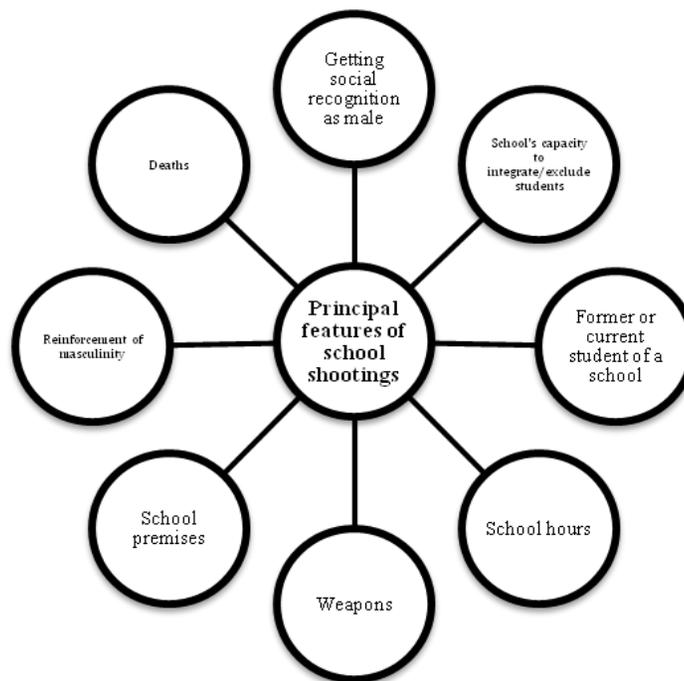
Source: Author's figure

In order to understand school shootings as a sociological phenomenon, it is important to discuss the three features displayed in Figure 1, to wit*: integrate/exclude students*, *weapons*, and *reinforcement of masculinity*.

This essay assumes that school can be seen as a social entity responsible for the internalization of social values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1995; Durkheim, 2001) as masculinity. This role is vital for the reproduction and preservation of masculinity over time. From Durkheim's perspective, this entity excludes those individuals who do not exteriorize their masculinity according to prescribed values because its function is preserve the social values that contributes to the social integration (Durkheim, 2001). A potential consequence of the exclusion of individuals is the lack of recognition that indisputably predisposes individuals to react angrily toward school (Heitmeyer et al., 2013). When a school shooter commits his violent action aimed against his school, he actually is attacking the entity that socially embodies masculinity and systematically eroded his masculinity as a male (De Venanzi, 2012). Since the principal target of school shootings is the school, the school shooter perpetrates his action on school premises and during school hours in front of the school's community (Böckler et al., 2013). Two irrefutable facts support this argument. The need for an audience can be corroborated through the monthly distribution of school shootings. As is shown in Illustration 1, few school shooting events have occurred in June and July because during these months schools are regularly closed. Secondly, the victims of school shootings are commonly random (Böckler et al., 2013; Malkki, 2014), demonstrating that school shooter's action is not addressed at members of the school; it is addressed to the school as a social entity.

Illustration 1 Monthly distribution of school shootings
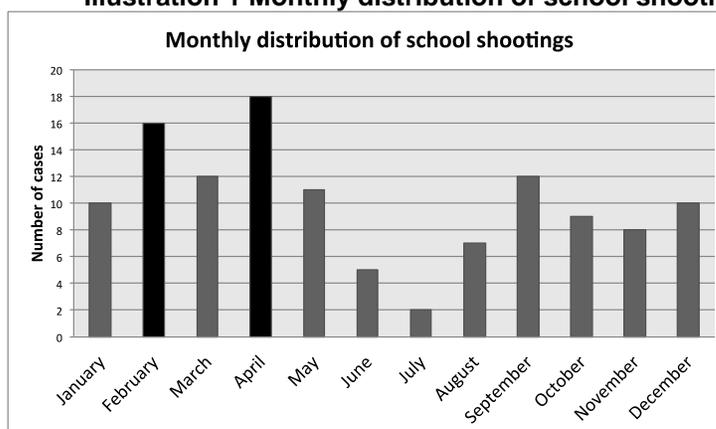
Source: Böckler et al., 2013

The use of weapons can be seen as an expression of masculinity. In terms of Bourdieu, weapons are part of the symbolic capital of masculinity (Bourdieu, 2000). Taking into

consideration that school shooter's interest is to recovery his masculinity and reaffirm it in front of the school's community, it is no coincidence that the school shooter has a preference for weapons, as will be showed later. But Malkki (2014) indicates that bringing the gun to school and showing it off is not sufficient to demonstrate masculinity. The school shooter thus opens fire on the school's community because of demonstrating masculinity entails shooting somebody. Consequently, the school shooter employs a masculine symbol to attack the entity that was eroding his masculinity. He needs to demonstrate to this entity that he is a male who is able to appropriately exteriorize masculine symbols.

Finally, school shootings are means by which masculinity is reinforced. According to Giddens (1984), all intentional action leads to unintended consequences, and this relationship between the intentional and the unintentional makes it possible that society maintains the social order. While the school shooter seeks to externalize his masculinity by committing school shootings, an unintended consequence of his act is the hardening of masculinity in society. Put differently, the school shooter perpetrates an intentional action that is not considered as an isolated occurrence. This action invigorates masculinity at the social level. This assumption contradicts the widely accepted vision that school shootings are considered as isolated actions.

3.   School shootings in figures

3.1   Frequency of school shootings

At looking globally the number of school shootings from 1925 to 2011, it is found that the year in which the largest number of cases occurred was 2008 when 9 cases were reported (see Illustration 2). It is instructive to note that since 1985 school shootings have taken place every year. From a sociological perspective, it is inferred that these iterative events could resulted in a process of naturalization by which individuals consider school shootings as part of the school's social ecology (Berger & Luckmann, 2011).

Illustration 2 School shootings incidents worldwide: 1925-2011
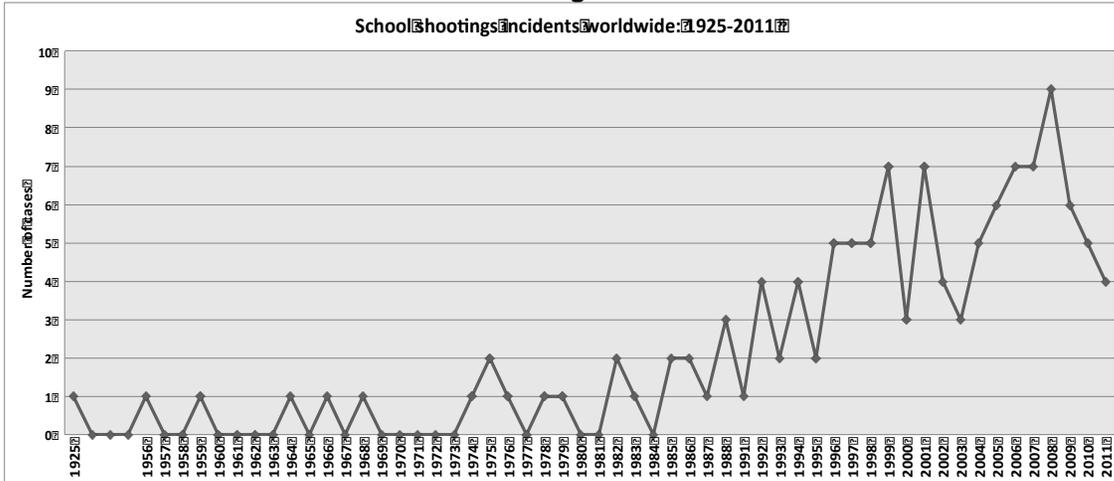
The frequency of school shootings has increased in the last two decades by comparing it with that of the previous decades (see Illustration 3). In the 1920-2000 period, 49 percent of school shootings took place in the 2000s. This percentage is correlated with post-Columbine school shooting happened in 1999.

**Illustration 3 School shootings worldwide by decade: 1920s-2000s**
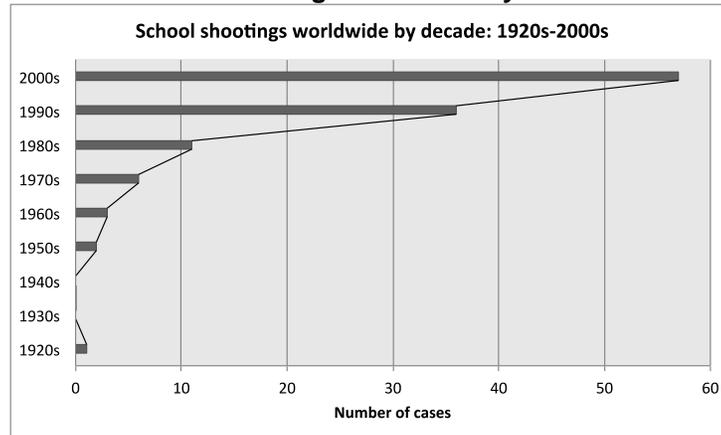
3.2 Places of school shootings

Over the last three decades, 67 percent of the total of school shootings have occurred in the United States (see Illustration 4); this country is more susceptible to experience school shootings than the rest of the countries. Regarding this situation, some authors mention that

the Columbine massacre was a milestone that has inspired many students to commit school shootings in the United States (Böckler et al., 2013).

Illustration 4 School shootings in the United States and the rest of the world since 1981

School shootings in the United States and the rest of the world since 1981
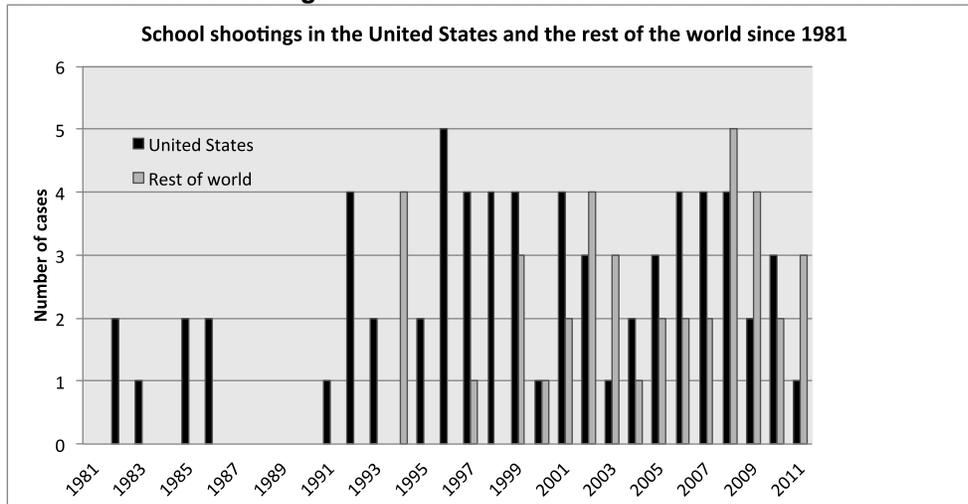
Source: Böckler et al. (2013)

A large number of school shootings has been happened in developed countries, particularly in the United States, Germany, and Canada where 76, 8, and 7 cases were reported, respectively (see Table 1). According to Heitmeyer *et al.* (2013), 'intense interpersonal competition' characterizes Western industrial nations, and school shooters experience "[sic] fierce competition for jobs, status, and prestige, and the risk of losing and failure is very high for the individual" (Heitmeyer et al., 2013, p. 43). These type of values are strongly related to masculinity (Bourdieu, 2000).

Table 1 Geographical distribution of school shootings

| Country	Number of incidents
Argentina	1
Australia	1
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1
Brazil	1
Canada	7
China	2
Denmark	1
Finland	2
France	2
Germany	8
Greece	1
Hungry	1
Japan	2
Netherlands	1
Northern Ireland	1
Poland	1
Puerto Rico	1
Russia	1
Saudi Arabia	1
South Africa	3
Sweden	1
Thailand	1
Ukraine	1
United States	76

Source: Böckler et al. (2013)

Finally, schools shootings are committed in towns, suburbs, and cities. However, it has been found that "cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and other major population centers have not experienced rampage school shootings" (Langman, 2013, p. 135).

3.3 Age and race of school shooters

Illustration 5 proves that 76 percent of total of school shooters were between 12 and 21 years when committing the massacres. Children and adolescents are more involved in school shootings than adults. Childhood and adolescence are two critical stages at which individuals define their personality as males, and the influence of school on these periods is critical for individuals.

Illustration 5 Age of school shooters
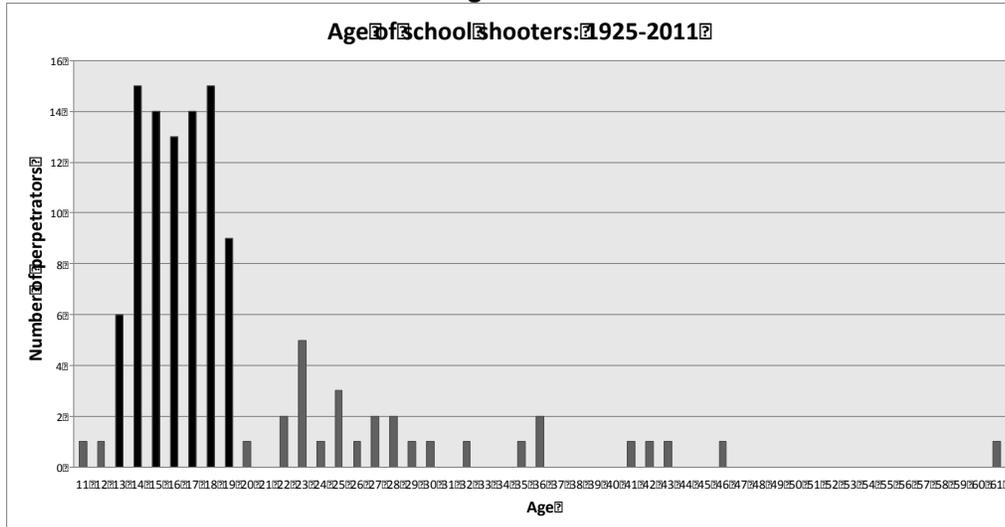
Source: Böckler et al. (2013)

Langman (2013) discovers a correlation between perpetrators' age and the number of casualties registered after perpetrating the attack. As Illustration 6 displays, perpetrators who are 19 years old and up have caused more victims than those who are 15-18 years and 11-14. Adittionally, the oldest perpetrators are more lethal by observing the number of victims that they have killed or wounded.

Illustration 6 Average number of casualties by age group
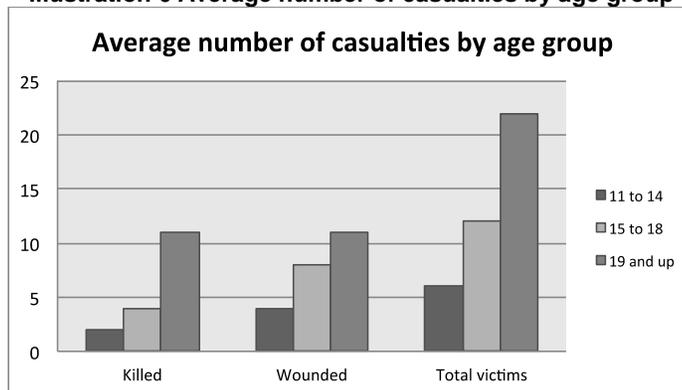
Source: Langman (2013)

3.4   Academic performance of school shooters

School shooters are generally considered good students because they obtain good grades. However, there are some differences regarding school shooters' academic performance according to two profiles of students defined by Dumitriu (2003). Firstly, the "lost

in the downward spiral" profile classifies students whose grades considerably decreased before opening fire on the school's community. Secondly, the "perfect student" profile means that students who had an outstanding performance and high social recognition from the school's community (see Table 2).

Table 2 School shooters: academic performance/individual work performance

| Profile 1: the "Lost in the downward spiral" student	Profile 2: the "Perfect student"
Usually, student "in good academic standing" (B/C grades).	Described as an "honors student"; "genius"; "high achiever"; "very intelligent"; "the perfect student".
Exposed to specific stressors and for a long period of time.	Obtain numerous honors in scientific competitions.
Just prior to the shooting, declining grades and academic failure; in some cases, he or she is expelled from school (decision perceived as unjust by him or her).	Has a keen interest in a specific science in which he excels: biology, physics, mathematics, actuarial sciences, sociology, anthropology, or chemistry.

Source: Dumitriu (2013)

Evidence gathered on school shooters shows that prior to the attack a small group of them had discipline problems, criminal records or had exerted violence against school members (Dumitriu, 2013). School shooters were regular students who did not exteriorize misbehavior nor obtained low grades.

4. The process of socialization

As Berger & Luckmann (2011) mentions, society is both an objective and subjective reality. Society is objective because it consists of social values on which individuals' actions and behaviors are based. As a social construction, social values exist beyond individuals' consciousness (Durkheim, 2005), and this unique quality makes it possible for individuals to apprehend these values as legitimate. Individuals must interact among themselves –they do not have any option- according to pre-established social values to enable them to participate in society. An extreme inference of this statement is that if individuals' actions are not based on widely accepted and shared social values, individuals would not interact with others, and therefore chaos would be the rule, not the exception. Creating and legitimizing social values is a highly complex process and it takes a long time until they become a quintessential part of the social system (Giddens, 1984; Parsons, 1991).

Society takes its subjective form when individuals interiorize social values and posteriorly externalize them by interacting with others. The process by which individuals internalize and exteriorize social values is known as socialization (Berger & Luckmann, 2011). Socialization permits individuals to accept social values as an objective reality (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Basic aspects of socialization
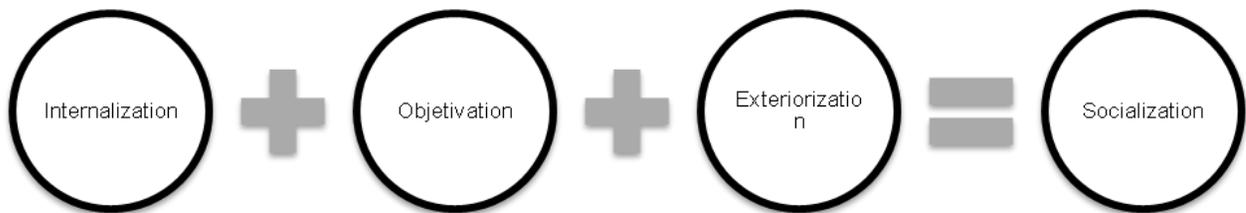
Source: Berger & Luckmann (2011)

Individuals' socialization takes place in social groups who transmit social values that shape individuals' behaviors. As a general rule, family and school are the most important groups. Family is responsible for primary socialization while school is for secondary socialization (see Figure 3). According to Berger and Luckmann (2011), "primary socialization is the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society. Secondary socialization is any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society" (p. 120).

Figure 3 Primary and secondary socialization and individual behavior
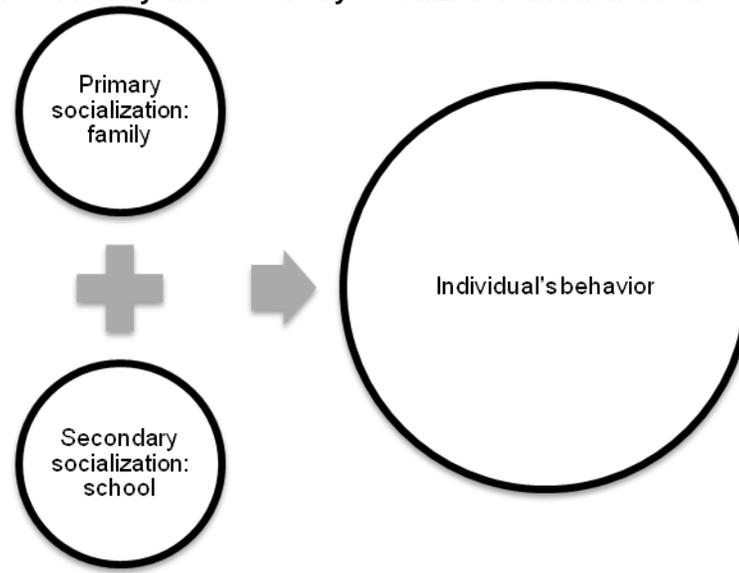
Source: Berger & Luckmann (2011)

It is possible that individuals develop a negative perception about social groups. And the way to express their disappointment is to do violent actions against this group. It means that the result of socialization is not necessarily individuals who accept the established order; individuals can react aggressively by killing members who are part of family and school.

5.   School shootings as a expression of masculinity

This essay regards that masculinity is a host of beliefs by which individuals are socially recognized as males. These beliefs are embodied in real and palpable objects. By way of example, handling weapons and having a strong body have historically represented virility (Bourdieu, 2001). The interesting point here is that individuals can use these objects to get recognition as males in order to reaffirm their masculinity. Drawing on data gathered by peer-reviewed papers, this Section discusses those beliefs that could structure masculinity as a social value, and the role that guns play in the recovery of perpetrators' masculinity.

5.1   The omnipresence of guns in primary socialization

School shooters' parents generally were 'gun collectors' and some of them went hunting with their sons since they were children. It is no coincidence that school shooters mostly employed family guns to perpetrate their horrendous attacks (Dumitriu, 2013;

Pilkington, 2014). This preference for guns was accompanied with the constant interaction with military groups. Several school shooters had relatives working for the army or they belonged to related-military groups prior to attack. Evidence suggests that school shooters were familiar with guns what supposed that they had enough knowledge on how to handle weapons. Hence, the likelihood to kill their school's community was high. In sociological terms, guns were *naturalized* into school shooters' life.

Guns have an impressive symbolic power. Since the origins of humanity, men have used guns to hunt and defend their territories (Bourdieu, 2001). As an objective reality, guns are full of masculinity. Understanding school shootings are a violent action that reaffirms perpetrators' masculinity, it is obvious that they decide to employ guns. Although this inference can be seen as a problematic causal relation, it should be noted that perpetrators usually employ guns. It means that guns are fundamental instrument for the reaffirmation of masculinity.

5.2 Code of silence and social hierarchy in secondary socialization

Some works have identified various behaviors that characterize the social ecology of those schools where school shootings have occurred -i.e., inequitable discipline, tolerance for disrespectful behavior, and code of silence (Daniels & Page, 2013). About code of silence, research reports that school shooters had previously communicated their plan to attack school to other classmates. However, classmates have preferred not to share this information with their teachers or parents (Flannery et al., 2013). This code is strongly rooted in the students' minds as they avoid disclosing issues related to their classmates' privacy to adults. Otherwise, they would betray their classmates and would face the consequence of social exclusion by taking these acts.

School shooters feel that they do not have 'equal rights' in comparison with those that the rest of students have (Heitmeyer et al., 2013). Furthermore, the code of silence has a negative effect on school shooters. Some of them have been victims of verbal and physical violence, but their classmates have refused to denounce this rampant situation. In the logic of masculinization, exerting violence against the weakest is an acceptable and tolerable action because it is indispensable for 'attaining masculinity' (Heitmeyer et al., 2013). The combination between the unfair and hostile treatment and the lack of support of their classmates can result in a negative vision of school. School shooters seek to harm the school that enables others to harm them. School shootings appear to be a sort of the Law of

Retaliation: school shooters committed harmful actions that they considered proportional to those that were carried out by the school.

As in any other institution, school has its own social hierarchy and students usually aspire to occupy higher positions or at least avoid being at the bottom. Some studies have identified some prerequisites that students have to meet if they seek to be at the top (De Venanzi, 2012; Heitmeyer et al., 2013). It is important to note that the prerequisites are not exclusively related to social symbols, but also to body appearance or what Bourdieu (1984) denominates as 'biological capital'. It is not sufficient that individuals wear certain clothes, use or have taste for specific food to demonstrate high social status in the social space. Individuals' bodies have to achieve precise features correlated with status that individuals possess. Having a strong body and belonging to sport teams are two of the most distinctive prerequisites. Additionally, students register a high level of consumption to maintain their lifestyle. De Venanzi (2012) found that "[sic] the teen market [amounted] to $200 billion in 2012. The most popular consumer items among teens [were] clothes and accessories, music, and entertainment, in that order" (p. 268).

School shooters were usually not regarded in the category of males because they did not have the required social and biological capital to be recognized as such. Some of them intentionally refused participating in sport groups partly because of their bodies were not virile enough (Dumitriu, 2013). For this reason, they were frequently called 'gay'. Although the epithet encloses negative meanings such as weakness (Newman, 2013), the real meaning was that the student was a 'social failure' and he was unable to meet the basic prerequisites to be recognized as male.

6. Conclusions

This paper provided a sociological interpretation on school shootings in order to demonstrate how these violent actions aim to reinforce and invigorate masculinity. Masculinity must be considered as a value that has accompanied the foundation and development of social groups. Its prevalence can be determined by analyzing different social values that the family and school inculcate in individuals, so they internalize such values to become members of the society.

Unlike the mental health approach, sociological theory asserts that individuals' actions are mainly addressed to reproduce social values that are crucial to maintaining the social order, regardless of the benevolence or harm produced by those actions. From this

perspective, individuals' actions are full of social content, and school shooter's attack is correlated with prevalent social values. Evidence gathered from academic papers concludes that male rather than female students mainly commit schools shootings. These perpetrations could be understood as the shooter's action to reclaim his masculinity in front of a community that has stripped him from such social value. Therefore, the use of lethal weapons as exterior symbols of masculinity function as the main mechanism for the shooter to enact this reclaiming.

A sociological analysis of school shootings is relevant for the field of education since this evolving phenomenon, which has become more recurrent since the late 1990s, is challenging the social role of schools. Sociological theory states that school is a central social institution that contributes to the internalization of the social values. Therefore, school shootings are a part of the dynamic of internalization and the social reproduction of masculinity. It could be forecasted that school will continue to experience school shootings in the time to come because masculinity is one of the most widespread social values, and school tends to exacerbate it by means of school's social ecology.

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