

America and Canada: Two Different Countries or One Continent?

American and Canadian Ideas on School Shootings
Through the Representation of Newspaper Articles

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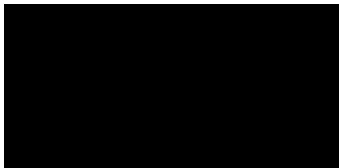
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Abstract

School shootings happen in many countries all over the world but America is by far the country where they happen the most. After a shooting, newspapers write extensively about the incident. The manner in which they present the news indicates what is found important and what not. This is why it is interesting to compare American newspaper articles to articles from another country. This thesis analyses and compares newspaper articles from The United States and Canada about four different American school shootings that happened between 1999 and 2012. Three returning topics at all four shootings are: popular culture, guns, and warning signs. Looking at these three topics this thesis discusses the differences between The United States and Canada, the newspapers within one country, and the shootings themselves. Popular culture is something that the American newspapers write more extensively about than the Canadian newspapers. The topic of guns is more divided within The United States than between Canada and America. Warning signs, which include mental illness, admiration for Hitler, and being an outcast, are a topic of high concern in both the nations and in every newspaper. It appears that national borders are not always the reason that people are divided.

Keywords: School shootings; American/Canadian differences; newspaper article analyses

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Introduction

“We are not the only country on earth that has people with mental illnesses, or want to do harm to other people. We are the only advanced country on earth that sees these kinds of mass shootings. Every few months. It cannot be this easy for someone who wants to inflict harm on other people to get his or her hands on a gun. Right now, I can imagine the press releases being cranked out: we need more guns, they argue, fewer safety laws.”

- Obama in a speech on Oregon shooting (2012)

America is a very divided country when talking about guns and gun regulation. Every time an incident with guns leaves many casualties, for example a mass shooting, the debate heats up again. One form of a mass shooting is a school shooting. The quote from Obama above is taken from a speech he gave after a school shooting in Oregon. He refers to the different opinions that the Americans have regarded gun legislation and he specifically points to the press. It is interesting to look at the press because they carry out the many opinions people have.

In the period between November 1991 and June 2013 there were fifty-five school shootings in the United States. School shootings are defined as incidents in schools with at least one fatality but more than one intended victim. Comparing this to other countries, this number of fifty-five is extremely high. For example, in Canada and Germany there were three school shootings in the same period. Australia, France and Finland only counted two and many other countries such as England and Wales, Mexico, Russia, China, and Brazil only counted one (Gupta). These numbers show that school shootings are a considerable problem in the United States. The fact that America stands out with regard to school shootings makes it a very interesting subject to look at. When a school shooting takes place, media is very important to inform people about what happened. Most of the Americans' knowledge and opinions on crime and justice are based on what they read in newspapers or see on the television (Lawrence & Mueller 331). This shows that the media is really important for people to form their opinions and therefore it is very interesting to compare American media coverage to media coverage of the same events in a different country.

Media plays an important role during and after school shootings. Public's perception of school shootings as a social problem depends a lot on media. Sometimes journalists are found to highlight the dramatic elements of school shootings to garner the attention (Muschert 65). The Columbine shooting at Littleton was one of the first to get a lot of media attention. A

school shooting was not something that had never happened before, but because of the media attention this time, many people had the information rather quickly.

By analyzing newspapers from two countries we get to know the difference in values linked to school shootings. Not only can we see possible differences and similarities between the countries but also within one country. The country to which we will compare America is Canada. America and Canada are English speaking neighboring countries where guns are not completely illegal. Because in Canada people are also able to own guns it is interesting to see what their opinion is on the American school shootings. When looking at two neighboring countries, we can discuss whether the border that divides these countries really matters. My final purpose is to answer the research question:

How are school shootings depicted in American and Canadian newspapers looking at gun legislation, popular culture, and the warning signs that maybe predicted the shooting (for example mental illness), what are the differences and similarities between these two countries and within the countries itself and what do they tell us about the ideas regarding school shootings?

By way of content analysis, I look at the differences and similarities between media coverage of school shootings in these two countries. To answer the research question, newspaper articles are analyzed from three different newspapers in both America and Canada. The newspaper articles come from four shootings between the years 1999 and 2012. These four shootings are: The Columbine High School massacre on April 20, 1999; The Red Lake Shootings on March 21, 2005; The Virginia Tech shooting on April 16, 2007; and The Sandy Hook Elementary shooting on December 14, 2012.

The reason for choosing these four shootings is because they are, unfortunately, in the top 10 of deadliest school massacres in United States history (Avon). This means that they got a lot of media attention and therefore there will be many newspaper articles about these shootings in both America and Canada.

Even though Canada and America are neighbors, they have their differences. One of those differences concerns guns and specifically gun legislation. In Canada gun legislation is much stricter than in America, which means that there are fewer guns. The difference in gun legislation between the two countries will be further explained in the first chapter. One important academic in the field of differences between Canada and America is Seymour Martin Lipset. In my analysis of American and Canadian newspaper I will therefore use, among others, his concepts. By analyzing the articles from this perspective it can be seen

what the big differences are in media coverage and if these coincide with the general differences between Canada and America. In chapter one Lipset's concepts will be discussed.

It is almost impossible to include every newspaper article written about the shootings which is why I will only look at three different papers per country. The newspapers that I will be looking at are the American newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, and *The Washington Post*. The Canadian newspapers that I will analyze are: *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The National Post*. The reason for choosing those three American papers is because they are all very well read papers. They are all in the top 10 if you look at the circulation of the papers. Not only are those three papers chosen because of their circulation, the political alignment of the papers is also important. Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are liberal newspapers but *The New York Post* is a conservative newspaper. It is important to include both because by doing this a big part of America is represented. Choosing the Canadian newspapers happened in the same way. All three newspapers are very well read papers. In this case *The Toronto Star* is a liberal newspaper, *The National Post* a conservative newspaper, and *The Globe and Mail* is a centrist newspaper. When choosing the Canadian newspapers, it was important to only choose from the English papers because French is not a language that I can read sufficiently.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, we must both look at the academic debate that is going on regarding the differences between Canada and The United States, and the discussions on the matters of gun control, popular culture, and warning signs such as mental illness. In chapter one we will discuss the differences of gun culture, gun control, and gun legislation between the two countries. The ideas of both the opponents and proponents of gun control will be discussed between Canada and America and within the countries. Lipset's research about Canada and America will be comprehensively discussed along with other research on the same matter. Questions that will be answered in this chapter are: What is the difference in gun control between America and Canada? From a historical perspective, why is it that differences between these two countries ever originated?

In chapter two the matter of popular culture will be discussed. Violent video games, music, and movies are a highly debated subject when we talk about school shootings. It is a very controversial subject especially when talking about such horrible events. What differences and similarities are there between Canada and America regarding popular culture representation in the newspapers? Are there differences between the newspapers within one of

the countries regarding the representation of popular culture in newspapers? Are there differences to be seen between the different shootings or are there changes in time regarding the representation of popular culture in the newspapers? My hypothesis here is that there will not be a significant difference in the representation of popular culture between Canada and America but that there will be between the shootings because every shooting is a story on its own.

In chapter three we discuss the most debated subject when talking about school shootings: guns. Guns are a subject that people are debating about for ages and can never agree on. The same three questions will be asked in this chapter as were asked in chapter two; whether there are differences between the two countries, the newspapers within the countries, and between the shootings. My hypothesis for this is that there will be differences between the two countries because the ideology about guns differs greatly between Canada and America. The same I expect when looking at the different newspapers themselves. The conservatives, who are pro-gun, have a very different opinion about guns than the liberals do, who are pro-gun legislation. I therefore expect that the liberal newspapers will talk about guns in a much more negative way than the conservatives do.

In chapter four we will discuss warning signs, signs that the shooters gave to for example parents, teachers, or other students that could have predicted that something was wrong. As well as in chapter two and three, we will again focus on the differences and similarities between Canada and America, the newspapers themselves, and the shootings themselves. Besides the idea that the conservative newspapers will write more about mental illness because they do not focus on guns, I cannot say much about what the differences and similarities will be between the countries, papers, or shootings but hopefully some interesting things will be noted while reading the newspaper articles.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework and academic debate

Guns and the debate about them is an ongoing and, arguably, eternal point of discussion in America. When another school shooting happens, the debate about guns and gun control heats up. On the one hand you have the pro-gun rights group and on the other hand the pro-gun control group. The first one claims that it is, according to the second amendment, their right to defend themselves and their family. There are several organizations that fight for these rights. The *NRA (National Rifle Association)* is the most widely known organization but *Gun Owners of America* and *National Associations for Gun Rights* are also two of those organizations (GOA; NAGR). The opponents take a stand against gun violence to create a safer America. *The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence* is an example of a group trying to reduce guns and gun violence in America (CSGV). In Canada you have the *NFA, the National Firearms Association* that wants to repeal and replace the firearms act. On the gun-control side there is *Coalition for Gun Control* in Canada.

Because a change in gun regulation would have direct consequences to individuals, the subject of gun control has been such a difficult and controversial subject. There are many things where the opponents and proponents of gun control disagree about. They do not agree on for example the interpretation of court cases and laws about guns or about the validity of comparison between the United States and other democratic countries, even though almost all of these countries have stricter gun regulations than the United States. They cannot even agree on the effects of gun control on a basic level. It can be said that people on opposing sides of the gun debate cannot even agree on the basics (Spitzer 3-7). Spitzer says that the reason why there is so much discussion about guns is first and foremost because more than 30.000 people get killed every year because of the homicidal, accidental, and suicidal use of guns (9). The absence of guns would obviously not end violence in America but the easy availability of guns enlarges the violent character of America. This large number of casualties can be explained by the 300 million civilian guns in the United States, which is about one gun for every person (Birnbaum 7). According to Spitzer, American gun culture is a second reason why guns are such a controversial subject. There is a history of sentimental attachment of many Americans to guns (13).

There is not only a debate about gun legislation but also about guns on campus. In 2012 there were 200 public campuses, in six states, where guns were allowed (Birnbaum 7). School shootings and the newspaper articles that follow because of them give the impression that the American college campus is not safe for students nor staff. In response to this

impression the debate about guns on campuses originated. In this debate the opponents of guns say that campuses will be safer when guns are prohibited. They say that permitting students to own firearms will cause fear and paranoia among fellow students because no one will know if another one is carrying a gun or not. The supporters of guns on campuses say that campus violence can be prevented by increasing the number of guns so that students and staff can protect themselves. They say that places where guns are banned are easy targets because of the lack of protection. If more people are carrying guns on campuses, criminals would be less likely to go there (7-8).

For both the opponents and the proponents of guns, the constitution is indispensable. The part that wants gun control knows that any sort of gun law must be consistent with both the US Constitution and the constitutions and laws of the states (8). But the US Constitution is also one of the biggest argument that the gun supporters have. The Second Amendment is where the right to bear arms was defined many years ago. The second amendment states: *A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed* (Constitution). The gun supporters say that this part of the Constitution gives them the right to have guns and rifles.

Capturing American gun laws in a quick overview is almost impossible because almost all gun laws are subject to federal licensing and registration. Meaning that in one state something is completely legal and in the next state it is illegal. However, private possession of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons is permitted without a license in almost all jurisdictions (GunPolicy). In Canada firearms are, as is in America, not forbidden but the rules are a lot stricter. In 1976 Canadian gun laws were tightened considerably. Before getting a handgun permit, an investigation to determine crime-free status must be done (Lipset 1990; 98). Canada has a system in where they subdivide guns in three groups. The first group are the non-restricted firearms. Ordinary rifles and shotguns fall in this category. The second category is called restricted firearms and includes handguns that are not prohibited, semi-automatic weapons, and specific rifles and shotguns. The third category is the prohibited category. Full automatic weapons, converted automatics, altered rifles and shotguns, and also specific handguns are categorized in here. A firearms license is necessary for all three classes of firearms but you only need a registration certificate for a restricted and prohibited gun (Royal Canadian Mounted Police).

Lipset is an American political sociologist who has written extensively about the differences and similarities between America and Canada. He says that the debate about the differences between those two nations has two sides. The first one brings the differences

between the two nations down to the distinction in values and the ways they affect behavior, beliefs, and institutional arrangements. The second one emphasizes the importance on various structural factors, particularly geographic, economic, and political differences. It however does not mean that one of those explanations is the absolute right one. The two sides of the debate can be combined to find answers to why American and Canada differ (Lipset 1990; 17). In almost every article or book Lipset wrote about these two nations he says that the American Revolution was most certainly crucial for establishing significant differences between the two nations and its inhabitants (Baer et al. 374). In one of his papers Lipset says: “Canada has been a more elitist, law-abiding, statist, collectivity-oriented, and particularistic (group-oriented) society than the United States, and these fundamental distinctions stem in large part from the defining event which gave birth to both countries, the American Revolution.” (Lipset 1986; 114).

One of the differences created by the American revolution is the way in which law and order and government operate in the two nations. Because Canada had to protect itself against the expansionist tendencies of the United States, they had to protect their frontier communities. They could not leave them unprotected or autonomous. This is when a form of centrally controlled law and order, in the form of the North West Mounted Police, moved into the country. Lipset states that this led to a tradition of great respect for the institutions of law and order in Canada, this respect was much smaller in America. Another reason for Canada always being a more statist society than the United States is because of the British provision of economic assistance to some Canadian colonials. This argument is however taken into consideration by Grabb, Curtis and Baer. They say that the British government aid to the Canadian colonists were not given to everyone. British help was often only given irregularly to the frontier area. When Britain wanted to improve their relationship with the United States, Canada was their way in. Britain was not as concerned about Canada as they used to be and support for Canada became weaker. Because of the irregular, belated, and indifferent help from Britain, Canadians did not have feelings of loyalty or gratitude toward British authority, it rather weakened their feelings about Britain. They argue that because of the irregular help from Britain to Canada this was not the reason for state dependency and government paternalism in Canada. They do not deny that Canadians experience more government intervention than Americans, they however say that these differences emerged many years later. They say that it was not until World War II that Canada’s welfare state began to surpass that of the Americans (Grabb, Curtis, Baer 404-405).

According to Lipset the differences in the role of law in both countries can be traced back to the very beginning of the two nations. The main differences can be seen when looking at the importance of the rights and obligations of the community as compared to those of the individual. The explicit care of the Canadian founding fathers was “peace, order, and good government”, which implies control and protection. The American founding fathers emphasize “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, which suggests upholding the rights of the individual. The two nations do not only differ in the way of respecting the police or what the role of law is in their country, the amount and degree of crimes also differs. Americans are much more likely to commit violent offenses like murder than Canadians do. National opinion surveys show that the lower rates of crime and violence in Canada are attended by not only greater respect for police but also a higher level of support for gun control legislation than in America. Lipset says that the difference between America and Canada is that the Americans see gun ownership as a right where Canadians see it as a privilege. Because of this believe that has been there since the founding fathers, it is not a surprise that Canadians are more supportive about gun control legislation and are less eager to own guns than American. The American founding fathers were also fighting against a centralized monarchical state, Britain. Because of this they distrusted a strong centralized government (Lipset 1986; 128-131).

Lipset gives yet another reason for the differences between Canada and America. He says that Canada has direct government involvement because of the different climate. Canada is a lot bigger than America but much less hospitable to human habitation in terms of climate and resources. Canada’s geographical immensity and relatively weak population base are one of the reasons that Canada needed and therefore has a direct government. South of the border, in America, there was simply no need for government interference (Lipset 1990; 17-18). Grabb, Curtis, and Baer have some difficulties with this idea. They have a problem with the implication that Canadians are less self-reliant and independent as Americans because of the weather, smaller population, and more scattered communities and therefore needed the government more for protection and aid than the Americans did. They say that it is arguable that the people, who live in the difficult conditions Northern Canada has, became more independent than Americans. They also say that the small Canadian population may have meant that Canada’s inhabitants had to be even more self-reliant than their American counterparts because the Canadians had less local community members to turn to. Lastly they mention that even though the two countries have different climates, the majority of the Canadian population lives near the American border meaning that many of them share the same climate as many Americans (405-407).

Grabb, Curtis and Baer have a point by saying that most Canadians live near the American border and therefore do not have a very different climate as the Americans do. The rest of their arguments seem to be more speculation than truth. They say that things might have been, or that it is arguable. Also, Lipset did not say that all the Canadians live in the rural parts of Canada he only said that because of its geographical immensity, they needed more government intervention than America. To me this sounds logical and believable and not at all humiliating against the Canadians, as Grabb, Curtins and Bear imply.

It can be concluded that the differences between Canada and the United states can be traced back to the founding fathers, the American revolution, and the geography and climate of Canada. The founding fathers had different ideas and these ideas can nowadays still be seen in for example the way Americans and Canadians look at gun control. Where guns are a right for Americans, they are a privilege for Canadians. Perhaps these ideas, originally brought in by the founding fathers, can explain the big difference in violence such as homicides, and thus school shootings. During the American revolution, Canada was forced to protect its frontiers and they did this by introducing a centrally controlled system. This system not only led to a tradition of great respect towards the institutions of law and order, it also makes it easier to change laws. The American system works entirely different. Every state can make their own laws about guns, the government cannot decide what every state can and cannot do. This makes it very difficult to tighten American gun laws. Canadians are also more supportive of gun control, which might explain the lower level of crimes in Canada. It can also be said that this direct government involvement can also be a result of the geographical differences between the two countries. Whichever way you look at it, I think that it can be said that the differences in the opinion about guns and the handling of guns can be explained by the differences in government and ideologies about the right to have guns.

Chapter 2: Violent video games, movies, and music

Popular culture is something that is hard to clarify. It changes over time and it can vary in meaning between groups of people. In this chapter the differences and similarities between how American and Canadian newspapers talk about popular culture and specifically violent video games, movies, and music in regard to the shootings will be discussed. Do they blame these forms of media for the shootings or not, and are there differences or similarities in the way they connect popular culture to the shootings? As mentioned before, according to Lipset, Canada is more collectivity-orientated than the United States is. After comparing the two nations on how they talk about violent popular culture concerning school shootings it will be clear whether this is also visible in the coverage of news in newspapers.

Popular culture in American newspapers

The first shooting looked at is the Columbine High School Shooting. On April 20, 1999 two heavily armed men stormed into Columbine High school and killed 12 students and one faculty member. The two men, named Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were students at this high school.

Many journalists blame media for the violent acts of these young people. In the case of the shooting at Columbine High many wrote that the shooters played the violent video game Doom, a first-person shooter video game, and listened to the music of Marilyn Manson. These facts are used to explain why the young boys turned violent. One of the articles published in *The New York Post* said: “Klebold and Harris grew closer, latching on to a confused identity that was a mishmash of the darkest philosophies they could find: Adolf Hitler's Final Solution, industrial music, ultra-violent video games and the "Goth" subculture's obsession with death.” (Danis and Alvarez 2) It is obvious that the main goal of the articles is to give readers answers to the questions they have. These articles are written days or even hours after the shooting when much is unsure but the shooters preference for specific music and certain video games is a quick answer to many questions.

Ferguson examined the relationship between video game violence and aggression. He used studies published between 1995 and 2007 and compared them to find out what is actually true. He concluded that a relationship between violent video game playing and aggressive behavior is not supported by these studies (313).

The observation that newspapers try to find an explanation for the horrible crimes the shooters committed can be seen in the many references to Marilyn Manson when talking

about the Columbine shooting. Kiilakoski and Oksanen say that it was unsure if Harris and Klebold listened to his music. The two did listen to a band called KMFDM but because this band was not very known by many journalists they focus on Manson who had already been criticizing and shocking the American public (Kiilakoski and Oksanen 253). This statement is supported by looking at the newspaper articles used in this research. More than ten articles talk about Marilyn Manson while only two articles mention the band KMFDM, one of those two articles also mentions Marilyn Manson in the same sentence.

In the other three shootings, violent video games and certain types of music are not mentioned as much as with the Columbine shooting. This can be explained by the fact that the shooters did not play these games and listened to these types of music. Other explanations can be that research was done after the Columbine shooting which concluded that video games and music are not just an explanation for violence or because other possible subjects were considered to be more newsworthy.

The first of these three shootings is the Red Lake shooting. On March 20, 2005, Jeff Weise killed his grandfather and grandfather's companion before driving to his school, Red Lake Senior High School, to shoot and kill seven people. After the police arrived Weise committed suicide. The articles covering this shooting were hardly about the effects the media might have had on Weise. Two articles briefly mention that the boy listened to heavy metal music but they leave it at that.

Contrary to Columbine, when fierce criticism and scapegoating of media and youth culture erupted, this was hardly the case in the Virginia Tech shooting. This shooting is the deadliest of all four shootings looked at. Except from a school massacre that took place in 1927, the shooting at Virginia Tech has been the deadliest of all times. On the morning of April 16, 2007, Seung Hui Cho shot and killed two people in one of the residential halls of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. After changing his clothes in his own residence hall he mailed several writings and videotapes to the NBC network. After returning back to campus he shot and killed another 30 students and faculty members. Almost immediately after the police entered the building, Cho committed suicide.

When looking at the newspapers about Virginia Tech, there is only one article that mentions violent media. This article discusses the similarity between two photos that Cho sent to NBC news and scenes from the South Korean revenge movie "Oldboy". Cho watched this violent movie several times before his killing spree (Musetto 13). It does not necessarily mean that because only one newspaper mentions this similarity that it is not true that Cho was inspired by this movie. The fact that only one article mentions this similarity could be

explained by the fact that this Korean movie was largely unknown in the United States, journalists had simply never heard of the movie (Kellner 509).

The last shooting looked at is a shooting that took place at an elementary school. On December 14, 2012, the 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot and killed twenty children, aged between six and seven, and six staff members at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. Before doing this he shot and killed his mother at their home in Newtown. The big difference in this shooting is the relationship between the shooter and the school. Lanza was not a student or employee at the school and neither were any of his family members. Why Lanza chose this school is still not clear.

Something worth noting regarding this shooting is that violent video games and movies are only mentioned in articles in *The New York Post* and not in any other newspaper. The two other newspapers talked about guns as the cause of this event but *The New York Post* published more about other causes such as violent media and the American culture, the shooter's autism, and the fact that his mother gave him access to guns. The Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza however did not play violent video games or watch violent movies. It must however be noted that *The New York Post* did talk about changing gun laws after the Sandy Hook shooting. This was done considerably more than after the other shootings but less than the other newspapers did. After the shooting at the elementary school, many people said that things had to change regarding guns. This can be seen in the articles published in the other two newspapers. The differences between the newspapers are that one of them is considered conservative and two are considered liberal. *The New York Post* can be considered as a conservative newspaper. The paper is owned by Rupert Murdoch who also owns *Fox News* and the British newspapers, *The Times*, *The Sun*, and *News of the World*. Many of the readers and writers of *The New York Post* are pro-gun, or at least not in favor of getting strict gun laws. *The New York Post* does not immediately think that guns are the main reason for this shooting. They say that guns are not the problem but that there are other reasons for these shootings. They say that violence in the media is the problem. One of the articles quotes visitors at the Sandy Hook memorial: "They [the shooters] are taught that values are subjective and that their self-esteem is more important than responsibility. They are exposed to Hollywood, which glorifies violence. They often play extremely violent video games for hours, which desensitize them to violence." Someone else at the memorial said: "What these mass murders show, if anything, is that law enforcement is often incapable of protecting civilians. People have the right to defend themselves, and politicians shouldn't deny or limit law-abiding citizens from protecting their families" (Visitors 30). The difference in

newspapers in America is clearly visible here. *The New York Post* is a conservative newspaper while *The New York Times* is mainly seen as a liberal newspaper. The Washington Post, or just Post, is also considered a liberal newspaper.

When leaving the differences between the newspapers out of sight and looking at it from a different perspective it is clearly visible that the articles about the shooting at Columbine High talk a lot more about violent video-games and music than the later ones do. As stated before, the last shooting (Sandy Hook) was not at all about popular culture but more about guns and the Virginia Tech shooting was more about mental illness than about popular culture. The subjects that the journalists write about change over time. This could be because popular culture is not seen as a primary cause for violence anymore or because the above mentioned guns and mental illness are more important. In the case of the Virginia Tech shooting there was no indication that Cho liked violent popular culture. He did write some disturbing stories but these were likely not inspired by factors such as video games, music or movies. This means that without violent video games, music, or movies there are still school shooters. In the reports of the last shooting the subject of violent popular culture is mentioned even less. Adam Lanza (the Sandy Hook shooter) did not play violent video games or listened to music that is assumed to provoke violence. The media could not in any way 'blame' popular culture for what happened here. At the same time there are other subjects that get more attention, meaning that the popular culture part is not very often the main subject of the article anymore. The debate about mental illness and the Virginia gun laws are the main subject in the articles about this shooting. The same can be said about the Sandy Hook shooting but in this case it is mostly the gun debate that is discussed. Popular culture is more something that is mentioned briefly rather than being the main subject of the articles. It is not that articles mention why media does not play a role, it simply becomes less of an important subject. Taking these two things in consideration, it appears that other subjects are considered to be more important when writing and talking about the shootings and are therefore more newsworthy.

Popular culture in Canadian newspapers; comparing America and Canada

The subject of media as a cause of a shooting is something that Canadian newspapers also write about but on a very different level than the Americans do. In many cases they merely mention it but there are hardly any articles that solely blame the media for the event. This can be compared with how the Americans talk about popular culture when writing about the later shootings. The journalists summarize the many explanations people have for the terrible

events that happened on the schools of their southern neighbors. Violent video games, movies, and music are only some of the causes mentioned.

Geoff Pevere, a Canadian movie critic, teacher, author, and broadcaster wrote for *The Toronto Star* from 1998 to 2011. After the shooting at Columbine High he wrote an article in *The Toronto Star* named: “Time to look for real links between media and violence shooting prompts usual finger pointing”. In this article he points out that the media is really fast to come up with potential media influences that might caused this tragedy. Many newspapers name different movies, games, or artists that are a potential cause of the shooting. Pevere says that because all the newspapers are so determined to find a popular cultural culprit it looks like there has to be a connection. This is however not the case, he states that it is a natural thing to blame popular culture because otherwise there has to be another explanation, maybe something closer to home. This rush to point fingers is in a way an act of denial. Society tries to believe that this unthinkable happened because of a freak rupture of an otherwise intact social fabric. Pevere also says that by now it is really common to blame movies, or popular culture in general, we want to make causative connections between the culture teenagers consume and the horrors they commit. These popular cultural culprits change however. In the 50’s it was Elvis and horror comics, in the 60’s people worried about West Side Story, The Stones, and Bonnie and Clyde. This changes every time until now, when Marilyn Manson is blamed for the shooting that Klebold and Harris committed. He ends his article with saying that he does think that there is a connection between popular culture and the event that happened on Columbine High but that the connections that are made are not the right ones. Questions that should be asked are ones concerning why these boys did what they did and why they picked this specific data and time. Pevere discusses the way in which popular culture is used to explain the terrible event that happened at Columbine High and explains that it is not strange that people rush to finger-point to this but that it might not be the actual cause (Pevere 1st ed.)

The opinion given by Pevere that media is often an easy target when trying to explain how this shooting happened is shared by the Canadian media. As stated before, popular culture as a possible cause of the shootings is only mentioned briefly but is not discussed in great detail. In the case of Sandy Hook, some journalists wrote about the NRA, who blamed violent video games and not guns for shootings. One person wrote in *The Globe and Mail*: “We have tried to blame video games, but that hasn't stuck” (Reist A15). Another journalist wrote in *The National Post* that she agrees on the fact that exposure to virtual violence

desensitizes participants to real violence but doubts that the government can do anything to stop that (Kheiriddin A14).

Compared to the American newspapers, Canadian newspapers hardly ever mention Marilyn Manson. Pevere mentions Manson when he sums up all the movies and artists that have ever been blamed for causing violence. One article in *The Toronto Star* named “Don’t blame pop culture for massacre” states that banning Marilyn Manson is bad because all it does is run over the rights of adolescents and it won’t let people be different. American writers are far more critical about Manson. One of the articles in *The New York Times* written about the Red Lake shooting starts with the sentence: “He is said to have worn a trench coat and listened to Marilyn Manson, the Goth icon” (Wilgoren A12). The writer clearly chose this sentence to be the first one everyone reads. The tone of the article is definitely set because of these few words. The writer thought that this a very important feature of the shooter. In none of the Canadian articles is the shooter’s preference for music or any other kind of popular culture stated in the first sentence of an article.

“A pop musician who caters to dark fantasies, Marilyn Manson, always seems to turn up on the list of child shooter tastes.” is another quote from an article published in *The New York Times* (Egan 1). Even though the writers of these two articles do not explicitly say that Manson’s music is a direct cause of the shootings, the articles in the American newspapers imply something completely different than the ones in the Canadian newspapers.

Compared to the articles that appeared in the American newspapers, the Canadians are in a way far more distanced. The fact that video games, movies, and other forms of media are a highly debated subject is absolutely not ignored but they do not quite interfere in the debate. The Americans have a stronger opinion about this matter than the Canadians do. They express their opinions in a very different way. Where Americans state that “For several reasons, suspicion points to video games” (The Gaming of Violence A30), Canadian newspapers do not link the games directly to the perpetrators. They mention that video games and movies are seen as one of the possible causes but they do not report “[shooter] liked to play violent video games” which is something that the American newspaper do. The debate about video games is clearly not as important for the Canadians as it is for the Americans. A striking observation that supports this is that none of the Canadian articles read mentioned the video game Doom when talking about the Columbine shooting while many American newspapers talked about this violent game.

When looking at Lipset’s ideas about America being individually-oriented and Canada being more collectivity-oriented, the differences observed between the newspapers can be

interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand it can be said that it is strange that the Canadian newspapers do not focus that much on popular culture compared to the Americans because popular culture can be seen as something that affects a large group of society. Popular culture can be seen as something collectively and not something individually. Lipset stated that America is more individually-oriented and Canada more collectivity-oriented which is something that is not seen in the newspapers by means of popular culture as a possible cause for the shootings. On the other hand, American newspapers often use the characteristics of listening to certain music and playing specific video games as something to define a shooter and not only to explain why they did this. When looking at it in this way, it can be said that it is individual-oriented because the American newspapers often focus on the part of violent video games, music, or films to give the reader an impression of who committed these crimes. After reading Lipset's ideas about the differences and reading the newspaper articles I find it striking that Canada does not talk more about popular culture especially because Canadians often find that their popular culture is threatened by American popular culture (Flaherty and Manning 5). Knowing this, the expectation was that there would be more negative writing about American popular culture influencing people. However, the difference between the two nations is not the only one. When looking at the American newspapers, there is a lot more written about popular culture in the first shooting than in the later ones. The shooting at Columbine High was the first shooting that had so much media attention and in the articles about this shooting violent video games and music is very present. When compared with the later shooting a big difference can be seen. The newspapers mention the possible effects of violent video games less and less. It is not the case that this part of the discussion completely disappears, however violent popular culture is no longer named as the prime cause of the shooting. Subjects such as guns and mental illness play a much bigger role. Because Columbine is the first shooting used here, it is not possible to find out whether Canada talked more about popular culture in earlier shootings. If this is the case it can be said that Canada was ahead of The United States in shifting from popular culture as the main cause of a shooting to guns and mental illness. Looking at the four shootings used here it can only be concluded that Canadian newspapers talked less about popular culture than American newspapers and that American newspapers talked less and less about it as time went by.

Chapter 3: Guns as the problem and the difference between newspapers

Guns are, as stated earlier, a very controversial subject in many countries. Opinions about this subject vary between countries but also between people in the same country. In this chapter the differences and similarities between the representation of guns in American and Canadian newspapers will be discussed. There will not only be attention for the differences between these two nations but also for the differences between newspapers in the same country. In his work, Lipset tried to name and explain the differences between The United States and Canada. One of the things that he mentions is that Canada sees guns as a privilege but America sees this as a right. This substantial difference between the two nations might also be visible in the newspaper articles. The debate about guns heats up every time a school shooting occurs and many try to explain the shootings through this angle. As mentioned earlier, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* devote more attention to guns as a problem in America than *The New York Post* does. Guns and the laws that should or should not be created is a returning and controversial topic in the discussion about all of the four shootings.

Guns in American newspapers

In the case of the Columbine shooting the fascination that the boys had for guns is emphasized numerous times. The way the two shooters managed to get the guns is not the main priority. Authorities said the two gunmen had prepared a total of more than fifty explosives for their assault, and that two of the four guns they used in storming the school had been purchased by Klebold's girlfriend (Kenworthy and Priest A10). Columbine was one of the first school shootings that received a lot of media attention. Because of this, the entire country knew and saw a lot about the shooting very shortly after the incident. It is interesting to see that gun control is mentioned a lot in the articles about Columbine. Statements such as “Guns are why, of course”, “Nobody made the inescapable point that without guns, Columbine's Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were creeps. With guns, they were monsters” and “It's not a gun control problem, it's a cultural control problem” are all over the papers. It is very clearly visible that the opinion about guns being the problem in school shootings has always been divided. Even though the papers were full of gun related statements, the debate is not as fierce as in the later shootings and most of the times the articles also mention another cause such as popular culture.

When reading about the Red Lake shooting, the way in which Weise obtained the gun is not discussed in depth. His grandfather was a tribal police officer who owned a gun and Weise used that gun to kill the people in his high school. There is not much discussion about the fact that he managed to lay his hands on a gun.

The way Cho, the shooter of the Virginia Tech shooting, gained access to guns received much more attention than in the Red Lake shooting. He bought his first gun through the internet on a website called thegunsources.com and paid for it with a credit card. One month later he bought the second handgun at a full-service gun dealer. He offered his driver's license, a checkbook that showed a matching address and an immigration card. Cho was able to buy the weapon because his background check came back clear. A few months before the shooting Cho was almost hospitalized in a mental hospital, he was eventually declared to be not an immediate threat. His background check would not have come back clear if this he was involuntarily hospitalized. This is why the way Cho bought his guns is so important. Cho was diagnosed as mentally ill but he was still able to buy a gun. Journalists wonder why this is even possible. It is interesting to see that *The New York Post* is also asking many questions about how it was possible for Cho to buy these guns. The difference is however that they do not say that the easy accessibility of the guns is the problem but that fact that the background check came back clear was.

Adam Lanza used his mother's guns to shoot and kill her, and 26 children and staff members of the Sandy Hook Elementary School. It can be seen that journalists are fiercer in their writing about guns and gun legislation when writing about this shooting. Even though the victims in the first three shootings were also defenseless and innocent, the fact that these children were only 6 and 7 years old made an even bigger impact. The topic of guns is discussed more extensively in this shooting than it is compared to the first shooting at Columbine High. It can be said that with every shooting the debate about guns becomes more important. The newspapers begin to write more about it and especially the tone of the articles becomes fiercer.

In all these four cases the different political standpoint about guns in the United States is clearly visible through the newspapers. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are supporting the anti-gun group where *The New York Post* supports the pro gun group. When reading these articles this cannot be missed. *The New York Post* writes about different possible ways to prevent a shooting in the future than the other two papers do. *The New York Post* quotes the Executive Vice President of the NRA saying: "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." (Miller 4), and people on the street who say things

such as: “In analyzing this tragedy, we should start with the person who gave the killer access to the weapons, and that was his mother, not the nation or the gun lobby.” (Killer's Access to Arsenal: A Mother's Fatal Mistake? 36). The other two papers quote very different things. When talking about Asperger syndrome as a possible cause one article said that experts say that there is no evidence that people with this syndrome are more likely than any other group to commit violent crimes, and a CBS news poll says that “A conducted in the aftermath of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., finds a significant increase in the number of Americans supporting stricter gun control laws.” (Susmann 2012). The difference in what the newspaper quote show the difference in interest and political affiliation.

Guns in Canadian newspapers; comparing America and Canada

The four shootings discussed previously all happened in the United States and not in Canada, this is something that can clearly be noticed when reading the Canadian newspaper articles. Because these shootings did not take place in Canada they are not the country that is undergoing the tragedy but it is reporting about another country. When talking about someone else it is easier to form a critical opinion about the subject and it is also easier to criticize possible negative aspects or characteristics of, in this case, the country. A quote from one article in *The Toronto Star* is a good example of how this can be seen. “It's one of the most violent places on the planet.” (Kenna ed. 1). It is easy to say something like this when it is not your own country or your own people that you are talking about.

Contrary to the debate about violent popular culture, two out of three Canadian newspapers do interfere into the gun debate. *The Globe and Mail* is the one paper that hardly does this and stays almost always neutral. *The Globe and Mail* is a Canadian newspaper written in English and nationally distributed. This newspaper is Canada's most read newspaper on weekdays and on Saturday. *The Globe and Mail* is considered centrist when looking at political alignment. This can definitely be seen when reading the articles published in *The Globe and Mail*. The paper focuses on facts and does not speculate very often. Compared to the other two papers, *The Globe and Mail* has a lot of quotes from, for example, experts in the field they are talking about, students that went to the schools that were hit, the NRA, or the president. One very clear example of this centrist standing can be seen in the following quote: “A top U.S. Justice Department official said yesterday the school shootings in Littleton, Colo., demonstrate the need to restrict youngsters' access to guns, while the National Rifle Association believes more prosecutions of gun offences could prevent such

incidents” (Associated Press 10). They address both the pro-gun and anti-gun groups and they quote instead of formulating their own opinion.

The Toronto Star on the other hand does display their opinion on the gun matter. *The Toronto Star* is also a Canadian daily newspaper written in English. It ranks second in weekly and Saturday circulation but if the Sunday papers are included they rank first. Looking at political alignment, *The Toronto Star* is considered Social Liberalism. This political alignment explains their aversion for guns. Some quotes that give a very good impression of this aversion are: “The single most wacko thing in U.S. society is that millions of Americans buy guns every year” (Kids who are different are all suspects now), “This is a country where 15 youngsters die from gunshot wounds every day. Gun-related deaths of children in the United States are 16 times higher than in 25 other countries combined, including Canada, Britain and most of Europe” (Kenna ed. 1), “In America's gun-centric culture, any school in any town in any state is wide open to the same sudden explosion of horror” (Taylor ed. 1). Because of this dislike for guns they are also very supportive of stricter gun laws. One interviewed person said in *The Toronto Star*: “As long as Americans ignore the first part of the Second Amendment, and glorify the second part, there will never be any meaningful gun control in the United States.” (Shanoff A16). These quotes clearly display the political opinion *The Toronto Star* has about guns and gun laws in America.

The third newspaper is *The National Post*. The first thing that should be taken in mind when talking about *The National Post* and comparing them with the other newspapers is that there was no way to access articles published in *The National Post* before 2000. This means that there are no articles accessed and used regarding the Columbine shooting in 1999. The reason for not choosing another paper is that *The National Post* is a conservative newspaper. Because conservative newspapers often have a different opinion about certain matters than liberal newspapers have it is important to include one. There are other conservative newspapers in Canada but it was not possible to collect articles from these papers either.

Both *The National Post* and *The New York Post* are conservative newspapers but there are many differences to be found between these two papers. One quote from an article in *The National Post* is “While it is hard for most of us to imagine why anyone needs to own an assault rifle, many Americans have no problem coming up with lots of reasons. For some, guns represent freedom, and the right to challenge an authoritarian state through force if necessary” (Kheirridin A14). This quote resembles the idea that Americans feel that owning guns is a right which is not the case for the Canadians. The Canadians have a hard time understanding this and see it as a privilege instead of as a right. Which is one of the main

differences between Canada and America pointed out by Lipset. It is interesting to see that this quote, which so clearly indicates the difference between Canada and America, is from the conservative paper. This shows that there is a great difference between a conservative newspaper in America and one in Canada.

There are however differences between the liberal newspaper articles and the ones in *The National Post*. One journalist writes that it is easy to talk about guns as the problem but that it is time to look at mental illness. *The National Post* addresses both sides of the argument where *The New York Post* and *The Toronto Star* are more inclined to only address one side of the argument, being pro-gun for *The New York Post* and pro-gun control for *The Toronto Star*.

The Canadians mostly write about guns as something that is an American problem which is hard to solve. One quote from an article in *The Toronto Star* shows what is meant with that. "What's even more tragic is the fact that nothing will be done. There'll be an avalanche of fine talk, a deluge of public soul-searching, and America's gun culture will continue as before" (Taylor ed. 1.). The Canadians, and especially *The Toronto Star*, are not very positive about American gun culture and about how they are dealing with the problems this might cause. They dissociate themselves from the problem, which is self-evident because these events happened in America and not in Canada.

It can be concluded that there are many points of views that are shared between both nations. In both The United States as well as in Canada guns are a high priority subject in the newspapers and in both countries there is a group that is against guns and a group that wants guns to be fully legal. This ideology is shared in both nations, meaning that on the level of pro-gun policy they are not that different. The way of expressing it in the newspapers is somehow different because Canada looks at the situation from a different perspective, meaning that they are more in an observing role where America is in the role of the victim. This results in a more judging way of reporting about America and guns from the Canadians. There are also some differences between the two nations regarding the pro-gun part of the debate. The United States is clearly more pro-gun than Canada and the conservative newspaper *The New York Post* is a lot more conservative than the Canadian *The National Post* when looking at gun-culture. On the matter of pro-guns, the biggest differences are not necessarily between the two nations but between the conservative American newspaper and the rest of the newspapers. In this case the difference in opinion has nothing to do with a border that divides two nations but with political disagreements. It was interesting to see that sometimes differences between groups of people are bigger than the differences between two different countries. Something that was not expected before reading the newspaper articles is

that the Canadian conservative newspaper *The National Post* can not be compared to the American conservative newspaper *The New York Post*. *The National Post* is not as conservative as expected before, especially not when compared to the American equivalent. The difference that can be observed when comparing the different shootings is that in America the debate about guns becomes bigger with every shooting. After the Columbine shooting not only guns were discussed but many topics were. After the Sandy Hook shooting many of the articles solely talked about guns. In Canada the debate about guns was big from the beginning. The increase that can be observed in the American newspapers is not as big in the Canadian newspapers because they already talked a lot about guns after the first shooting.

Chapter 4: Warning signs: Outcasts, admiration for Hitler, and mental problems

A question that is very important is “Could this shooting been avoided?” When reading the articles, it is very clear that the focus lies on why something like this could have happened and if there was any indication beforehand that these persons would do this. In this chapter we will discuss warning signs. Journalists use this word to define characteristics of the shooters which were a possible sign that something was wrong. Sometimes characteristics are a sign that something is wrong, for example the fact that someone seems to be an outcast but also the admiration for Hitler or Nazi’s can be seen as troubling. Mental problems are also something that is referred to as a warning sign in the articles published about the school shootings. We will not try to answer the question about why these shootings happened but we will discuss the different views on warning signs. These different views from several newspapers and journalists show what their attitude towards school shootings is.

Warning signs in America

The journalists look at possible signs given by the shooters which would indicate that they were planning something horrible. All shooters are described as outcasts, odd or strange persons by the people who are acquainted with them. Odd or strange is a very broad term to describe someone so the journalists use quotes from for example students or teachers who knew the shooters. Jeff Weise was described as antisocial (Alpert). A loner, shy, brilliant, interested in gaming and computers, were the words used to describe Adam Lanza (Hermann, Rosenwald 19). Cho’s classmates and teachers called him brooding, withdrawn and silent (Ruane and Jenkins A01). Klebold and Harris were called outcasts in many different articles. The fact that these people were ‘different’ is emphasized many times in many articles. These people were never part of the ‘popular group’, did not have many friends, or were even bullied in school. These signs of being quiet, not having any friends, and behaving differently than others is sometimes referred to as a warning. One of the warning signs mentioned is the interest that some of the shooters had in Hitler and Nazism. This example of a warning sign only applies to the shooting at Columbine High and on the Red Lake shooting. Both times the shooters were openly admiring Hitler. Students at Columbine High said that Harris and Klebold spoke German to each other and talked a lot about Hitler, World War II, and the Nazis. This admiration for Hitler is confirmed by the fact that the two performed their plans on the birthday of Adolf Hitler. The admiration for Hitler and the Nazis is clearly very

important for the American newspapers and they often call it a warning sign that maybe teachers or their parents should have seen. In the case of the Red Lake shooting the admiration for Hitler is also mentioned a lot, especially because it is surprising that a Native American man identifies himself with Nazis.

Another warning sign that is considered very important is the mental health of the shooters. If anything, even really small, can be said about the mental health of the shooter the newspapers will mention it. Together with playing violent video games and listening to certain music, mental health is what the journalists point to when they explain why the shooters did what they did. The shooting that is mostly explained by the mental state of the shooter is the one at Virginia Tech. The shooter, Cho, had been accused of stalking or harassing two women two years prior to the shooting. Cho had sent the two women several emails which were considered annoying but none of the women actually pressed charges. A mental evaluation showed that there was sufficient cause to believe that he's mentally ill, but he did not represent any imminent danger to himself or others. Because no actual charges were pressed or crimes were committed, the university had no choice but to let him stay on campus. The police never heard any complains about him after that, until the shooting.

The part about the mental evaluation is, according to many journalists, a big warning sign for the university. Because Cho lived on campus and not with his parents and because Cho's mental evaluation was not shared with them because of privacy reasons, the parents are not mentioned as persons who should have raised the alarm. The university however should have taken action to prevent this from happening. Before the mental evaluation a judge did conclude that Cho presented an imminent danger. After the actual evaluation the judge changed his conclusion and did not involuntarily lock him up in a mental institution. Journalists use this event to say that the shooting could have been avoided if he was locked up.

It are not only the journalists who try to 'blame' someone for what has happened. The parents of the victims also want answers and want to know how this could have happened. Of course the shooter is the one to blame but in all four cases the shooter killed himself and no one could ask them why they did this. In the case of the Virginia Tech shooting the victims' families claimed that the university, and especially the counseling center that performed the mental evaluation, had been negligent and had failed to help Cho with the necessary medical attention (Dumitriu 466).

Warning signs in Canada; comparing America and Canada

Warning signs are also very important to the Canadians. Even though the shootings did not happen in their country, they do want to know why this happened and why this specific person chose to shoot and kill many people. This can be seen by the fact that Canadian newspapers also mention that the shooters from Columbine High were fascinated with Hitler and were outcasts. Some also mention the Gothic subculture the boys were part of. Comparing the American and Canadian newspaper articles regarding the Columbine shooting it can be said that all the aspects that the Americans talk about are also discussed by the Canadians. However, they are all discussed to a lesser extent than in the American newspapers. What is meant with this is slightly the same as with the popular culture issue. The Canadians talk about all the same things as the Americans do but it is not as often the main subject of the article. Again, guns are more often the main focus of the article. It is not the case that Americans do not write about gun control, for them it is also a very important issue but the Canadians simply devote less attention to warning signs.

Unfortunately, the newspapers in Canada wrote very little on the Red Lake shooting, this little that there are not enough articles written to say anything about the differences on warning signs between Canadian and American newspapers.

In the case of the Virginia Tech shooting, the American newspapers pay more attention to mental health than the Canadians do. The Canadians do mention his mental health problems occasionally and the fact that Cho wrote some disturbing stories is also a point of interest for some journalists but overall they are not as interested as the Americans. Contrary to the American newspapers, the Canadian newspapers do not blame one or a few specific people for the shooting. The lax gun laws that Virginia maintains is something that appears to be far more interesting to the Canadian newspapers. This can be explained by the earlier mentioned idea by Lipset that Canadians are more collectivity-orientated and not individually-oriented as the Americans are. Mental illness is namely something that the Americans use to define the shooter. In the case of Red Lake, the shooter was troubled because of his youth, the Virginia Tech shooter wrote disturbing stories and was almost hospitalized, and the Sandy Hook shooter had Asperger's. These are very specific personal characteristics that only apply to the shooter himself. This corresponds with Lipset's idea that Canada is more collectivity-oriented and America more individually-oriented. The Americans focus more on the shooter and on one or a few specific people that could be held responsible

for this. An example of this is the judge or teachers in the Virginia Tech case. Canadians focus less on these individuals and more on the entire picture.

In the case of Sandy Hook, journalists are in the dark about why Adam Lanza did what he did. In all four cases the shooters died, meaning that no one can ever be sure why these specific men turned into shooters. In the case of Adam Lanza there is however hardly any information. The shooter did not have any connections whatsoever to the school and there were no warning signs that something was wrong. The only thing that the newspapers know is that he might have had Asperger's syndrome and that he was a very quiet person in high school. This Asperger's, which is a form of autism, is automatically used as something that can function as an explanation. The media wants to give the reader answers to why this happened. When reading the Canadian and American newspapers it seems that certain American newspapers really want to explain why Adam Lanza shot all those kids but other papers are not afraid to say that in this case it is hard to say why it happened. The American conservative newspaper *The New York Post* uses Asperger's as a possible cause for the shootings where all the other newspapers mostly post articles stating that Asperger's or autism is not a mental disease that normally leads to violence. The reason why *The New York Post* might do this is to draw the attention away from the gun debate. After the Sandy Hook shooting many people said that something really had to change but *The New York Post* is a paper that supports guns and many of their readers do to. After the Sandy Hook shooting the NRA stayed silent for a week before they came with a statement. Before this statement many newspapers wrote about guns and the fact that the NRA did not respond. *The New York Post* however cannot stay silent for a week, meaning that they needed something else to explain the shooting to their readers.

It can be concluded that American newspapers find it very important to give the reader a clear image of the shooter. They do this by describing the shooter through certain characteristics, for example the fact that they were outcasts or had Hitler admirations, and as we saw earlier, by mentioning that they like to play violent video games. The Canadian newspapers do this as well but to a lesser extent, less explicitly. This means that the American newspapers describe the shooters more specifically and extensively than the Canadian newspapers do. Besides that, there is not a clear difference to be noted between these two countries. This is however not strange because the two nations share many of the same values and are not two completely different countries. There is a small difference on how the American and Canadian newspapers report regarding the warning signs of a shooter but it is not a remarkable difference. This difference in reporting is just a nuance. *The New York Post*

uses some of these characteristics more often than the other newspapers do but besides this difference the other newspapers report approximately the same.

All these shooters have different characteristics. One is a so called outcast, the other one admires Hitler and a third one has mental problems. Some of these shooters have more than one of these characteristics but all of these shooters are different people with different backgrounds. This is why the topic of warning signs is different every time a school shooting takes place. If the shooter had mental problems, this was the topic of many articles. There is no other reason for newspapers to report differently about warning signs at every shooting besides the fact that the shooters themselves are different. This shows that many topics are controversial and causes division.

Conclusion

After reading the many articles from three different American and three different Canadian newspapers about four different school shootings that happened in America, there a few things that can be concluded.

First of all, the differences between the two countries, America and Canada. When looking at the matter of popular culture it turned out that the American newspapers write more about popular culture than the Canadian newspapers do. Subjects such as violent video games, movies, and music are more present in the American newspapers. This is considered to be odd because Lipset said that Canadians are more collectivity-oriented than the Americans are, and popular culture is something collectively. Besides that, Canadians are often threatened by the American popular culture. These two would indicate that Canada focuses on popular culture at least as much as the Americans do but this was not the case. My hypothesis saying that there will be no significant differences turned out to be not completely true. There is a difference found in the quantity of attention for popular culture between the two nations. A specific explanation for this could not be found, meaning that further research has to be done to find out why it is that Canada does not focus that much on popular culture. Both The United States and Canada write a lot about guns, gun legislation, and the part that the guns played in the shooting. Overall there are many ideas about guns in school shootings that are shared between both nations. Both nations have a group that is pro-gun and a group that is pro-gun legislation. The pro-gun legislation part can be seen in the newspapers of both countries but the pro-gun group is bigger in America. In Canada there are way less articles about pro-guns than in America. This supports Lipset's ideas about America seeing gun ownership as a right and Canada seeing it as a privilege. My hypothesis about guns being something that divides the country came true to fact that Americans write more about pro-guns than Canadians do. The difference is however smaller than expected because the ideas about gun legislation are primarily the same. Canada is however fiercer when talking about guns, they are clearly talking about a country that is not their own. In the case of warning signs the same appeared as with the popular culture part; America devoted more attention to possible warning signs than the Canadian newspapers did. The American newspapers find it more important to describe the shooter more extensively. Besides this difference there are no noteworthy differences found between the two countries when looking at warning signs. This means that the Americans and Canadians are not distinctively different on this part. Beforehand it was not possible to give a hypothesis that was supported by an academic. It

turned out that there were not many differences found between the two countries besides the fact that American newspapers talk slightly more extensively about warning signs.

Secondly, there were not only differences noted between the two countries but also within the countries themselves. These discrepancies can be seen between the newspapers. Especially the way newspapers talk about guns is different. The biggest differences are seen between the liberal and the conservative newspapers in America. The liberal newspapers *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were more in favor of gun legislation and were more eager to name guns as the primary cause of the shootings. There are also differences between the Canadian newspapers. *The Globe and Mail* is a newspaper that does not have very strong views about guns, they focus on the facts and they do not interfere much in the debate. The conservative newspaper in Canada turned out to be not very conservative compared to the American conservative newspaper but there were however small differences between the Canadian conservative and liberal newspaper. The conservative *The National Post* is less resistant to guns than the liberal *The Toronto Star*. As said before, the biggest difference is between the conservative and liberal newspapers in America. This means that there are bigger differences within a country than between two countries. This either means that Canada and America are not very different and that borders are not very important or that America is so divided that the differences between nations do not weigh up against the differences between the countries themselves. The only difference about warning signs between newspapers is found in *The New York Post*. This newspaper talks about Asperger's being a possible explanation for the Sandy Hook shooting. Other newspapers try to convince people that Asperger's normally does not lead to extensive violence.

Lastly, there were also differences between the shootings themselves. The time between the first shooting at Columbine high (1999) and the last shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012) is more than thirteen years. In thirteen years many things have change and this can also be seen in the newspapers. Video games for instance were mentioned the most in the articles about the first shooting and it became less every shooting. This is especially visible in the American newspapers and less in the Canadian newspapers because the Canadian newspapers already talk less about popular culture than the American newspapers do. Guns have always been a high priority subject from the start, it is present in every shooting, in every newspaper. In the American newspapers it can be seen that the debate that resolves around guns becomes bigger with every shooting. More and more people are tired of the many casualties every year because of gun violence. In Canada this increase in the debate about guns is not that visible. This can be explained by the fact that the gun debate

was already big from the start. The differences between shootings regarding warning signs is not something that has a specific cause. There are many differences found between these shootings but this can simply be explained by the fact that there were different circumstances at every shooting. The Red Lake shooter had a very troubled youth and the Virginia Tech shooter had been in contact with a mental health facility. These circumstances are the reason for the debate. If there is no indication of mental problems the newspapers will not write about it, this is the same with an admiration for Hitler or for the shooter being a so called 'outcast'. The differences between shootings can be explained by this and cannot be connected to any other specific reason.

There are important differences found between the two countries America and Canada but the differences within the nation of America itself were sometimes bigger. This concludes that America is a very divided country on many aspects and that it is not always a border that divides people.

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