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Volume 12

Washington University
Undergraduate Research Digest

Spring 2017

Shooting for Answers: Bullying, Masculinity, and School Massacres

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Recommended Citation

Simonoff, Bonnie, "Shooting for Answers: Bullying, Masculinity, and School Massacres" (2017). *Volume 12*. 179.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wuurd_vol12/179

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SHOOTING FOR ANSWERS:
BULLYING, MASCULINITY, AND SCHOOL MASSACRES
Bonnie Simonoff

Mentor: Greg Ott

This work examines the complicity of various factors in incidents of gun violence, particularly school shootings, through psychological character analysis of Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes* and investigation of real-world case studies. Specifically, I evaluate the role of hegemonic masculinity in perpetuating a culture of violence. Amidst escalating rates of school shootings in the U.S., understanding the root causes of this violence becomes increasingly important. With a psychosocial approach, I found that past bullying of the perpetrator remains relevant when it comes to school shootings. However, exploring merely this connection to interpersonal bullying interactions—and to commonly-considered influences of the media and mental illness—fails to encompass a more fundamental correlation; interwoven within the majority identities of the overwhelmingly young, white male perpetrators is their masculinity. In making sense of this contemporary, complex issue, these other factors become more telling when we acknowledge a pervasive, practiced ideal of masculinity as an often-overlooked yet closely associated contributor. Through review of pertinent sociological, psychological, and legal positions and an interview with a gender studies expert, I localized my research to Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL) positions regarding gun violence. I concluded that WUSTL violence-prevention programming should include discussions of how violence and masculinity intersect in order to prioritize student and community well-being, preparedness, and safety.