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Terror in Our Schools:  
An Examination of the Recent School Shootings

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Abstract

Examines into the recent phenomena of suburban and rural school shootings in Moses Lake, WA, Littleton, CO, Jonesboro, AR, Santee, CA, Springfield, OR, and others.

Included is an in-depth description of the Columbine high school shooting. Focuses on the personalities of the shooters, attempts to figure the causes behind the shootings, and examines some of the potential solutions.

*Introduction:*

Moses Lake, Washington. Pearl, Mississippi. West Paducah, Kentucky. Jonesboro, Arkansas. Springfield, Oregon. Littleton, Colorado. Santee, California. There was no reason why anybody outside of their local vicinities should have ever heard of these towns, and until a few years ago, very few people had. But all these towns have something in common, something that made these towns household names. They have all been the sites of recent school shootings (Infoplease.com, 2003).

The names are fairly well known, as well. Barry Loukaitis, Luke Woodham, Michael Carneal, Mitchell Johnson, Andrew Golden, Kip Kinkel, Andy Williams, and most of all, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris.

Violence at schools is nothing new. Inner-city schools have been affected by gangs, drugs, and fights for years. For students at urban schools, dealing with the violent deaths of their peers is a fact of life. But there are numerous differences between what occurs in urban schools and this new plague of violence.

These schools are suburban or rural. The killers are white, middle or upper-middle class. They frequently come from intact, stable families (Cornell, 1999). The killings have not happened after school, in parks and alleys or on the street, but rather in the school buildings themselves, in classrooms and libraries and cafeterias, in the areas that are supposed to be the safest locations for our children to be. (Mulvey & Coffman, 2001; Knickerbocker, 1999).

In fact, the school shootings do not appear to be like any other form of teen violence at all. Most teen violence tends to occur without a great deal of premeditation,

tends to have one or two people targeted (even if innocent bystanders are killed in the process), and is generally done secretly, such as a drive-by shooting or sneaking up on someone to attack him or her. The recent school shootings, on the other hand, were premeditated high-profile affairs in which victims were more or less chosen at random.

Teen violence is down overall (Kleck, 1999; Knickerbocker, 1999; Streisand et al, 2001), indicating perhaps that some of our prevention and security measures are working. However, this new form of teen crime is increasing at a staggering rate as copy-cat violence and displaced hero worship occurs (searching the internet for Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold, the Columbine shooters, will show, among other things, tribute sites and sites vowing to "carry on their legacy. ").

As such, it is necessary that we examine the differences between the school shootings and other forms of teen violence and develop differing means of dealing with and preventing it.

#### *Selected Cases:*

Moses Lake, Washington, February 2, 1996:

The first recent high profile school shooting saw Barry Loukaitis, 14 years old, dress up like a gunslinger, wearing two pistols and carrying a rifle and 78 rounds of ammunition. He walked into his algebra class at Frontier Junior High School, killed two students and a teacher and wounded two other students. He attempted to take hostages, but another teacher was able to wrestle him down and subdue him.

Loukaitis was described as an angry child who came from a family that had some mental health issues and had undergone a fairly recent divorce. He often dealt with his anger through writing poetry, some of which foreshadowed his violent action.

Murder. It s 'my first murder

I m' at the point of no return

I look at his body on the floor

Killing a bastard that deserves to die

Ain t huthin' like it in the world But he sure did bleed a lot ( 'Youth s Poems ,' 1998).

West Paducah, Kentucky, December 1, 1997:

Some students were participating in a prayer circle when freshman Michael Carneal, 14, opened fire on them. Three were killed, five wounded. Carneal s family was described as very prominent and stable. Carneal, however, was beginning to have minor discipline problems and declining grades, and was beginning to hang out with the Gothic crowd at school (Porter, 2002).

Jonesboro, Arkansas, March 24, 1998.

A fire alarm was pulled at Westside Middle School, and as students and teachers evacuated the building, they were shot at by 13-year old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year old Andrew Golden, both of whom were dressed in military fatigues and hiding in the woods. Four students and one teacher were killed and ten others were wounded.

The two boys, in contrast to other school shootings, were described as bullies. Johnson was also known for bragging and was quoted as saying "Everyone that hates me, everyone that I don't like is going to die." (Preston, 1998).

Like many children in the rural south, they had access to weapons because they liked to go hunting after school. There is no law against children in Arkansas possessing firearms, though it is illegal to bring them to a school. In that area of Arkansas, people are not alarmed when they see young children with guns ("After school shooting," 1998).

Springfield, Oregon, May 21, 1998.

Kip Kinkel, 15, killed his parents, then went to school and opened fire in the cafeteria, killing two and wounding 22. He had been arrested the previous day for bringing a gun to school, yet was released to his parents.

Kinkel's family was stable, but they had to devote an inordinate amount of energy into dealing with his problems, which almost certainly had to put a strain on them. Kinkel frequently spoke of murderous desires, once saying "I want to have all the firepower I can so I can kill as many people as I can." (Jacoby, 1998). His writings were equally disturbing: "Every single person I know means nothing to me. I hate every person on this earth. I wish they could all go away. You all make me sick. I wish I was dead." ("An Excerpt," 1999). He reported hearing voices and psychologists suggested he may have been bipolar or schizophrenic, though they could not make a clear diagnosis because of his age (Psychops.com, 1999).

Littleton, Colorado. April 20, 1999.

Columbine high school was the site of the largest high school shooting in U.S. history, and it should have been a lot worse. Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, wandered the halls, cafeteria, and library of the school, shooting whoever they saw. The rampage lasted nearly an hour, left 12 students and one teacher dead and 23 injured, most critically. Finally, Klebold and Harris shot themselves in the library.

It should have been a lot worse. They had placed several bombs in the school building, and Harris was an expert bomb maker who had detonated several in practice (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Yet none of them exploded and surveillance cameras clearly show Klebold firing at one in frustration. Klebold and Harris had planned this incident for at least a year and had intended to kill at least 500 students, even expecting to be standing outside the school shooting people as they escaped.

This incident will be covered more in depth later in this paper.

Santee, California. March 5, 2001.

Charles Andrew Andy Williams, 15, fired from a bathroom at Santana High School, killing two students and injuring 13. On the surface, Williams was a friendly, quiet kid. But he was also a troubled kid, still dealing with the effects of his mother leaving the family 10 years earlier. He was rather small, seemingly insignificant, and easy to ignore when he bragged about his ideas to shoot up the school (Streisand et al, 2001).

*Surviving the Shootings:*

Without a doubt, these incidents are the most traumatic events that have happened to the survivors in their young lives. It seems unlikely that anybody who watched the news footage of the students running from Columbine high school could be unaffected by it. It would be unfathomable to picture what it would have been like to be in the library, under a table, pretending to be dead, covered in the blood of two dead friends lying next to you, waiting for a bullet to enter your body, as Craig Scott did. In addition to dealing with that trauma, he had to discover, upon leaving the school, that his older sister Rachel was among the dead, having been shot while she sat outside having lunch. So, of course, were several of his close friends, including the two that died under the table with him.

The families have had to cope in their own ways, and some have been able to better than others. The Scotts have published their daughter's journals and declarations of her religious faith, including their own comments and interpretations (Nimmo, Scott, & Rabey, 2000; Scott, Nimmo, & Klingsporn, 2001; Scott & Rabey, 2002). In addition, Darrell Scott, Rachel and Craig's father, tours the country speaking out against violence and for prayer in schools. Cassie Bernall's mother, Misty, wrote a biography of her daughter entitled *She Said Yes*, referring to the question reportedly asked by one of the killers as to whether she believed in God (Bernall, 2000). Incidentally, the same question was reportedly asked of Rachel Scott and of Valeen Schnurr, who was injured but survived.

Natalie Hintz was one of the victims of Barry Loukaitis in Moses Lake, WA. She survived, but has lost the use of her right hand and most of the arm. She had been an



athlete and pianist, but unable to do either now, she has started acting and studying drama (Zornes, 2000).

Alice Fritz, whose son Arnie was killed by Loukaitis, says for several weeks she had to refer to the incident as an "accident," as she could not bring herself to accept that her son was murdered. When she went to court, she was surprised to see that she could not harbor any hatred for Loukaitis —she could see that he was suffering and that his many cries for help had been ignored. She speaks out for better handling of student threats and counseling (Fritz, n.d.).

Andy Williams, the killer at Santana high school in Santee, California, and his father have developed a website, <http://www.andyspeaks.com>, to allow Andy to communicate with the outside world and foster discussion of youth violence prevention and also to give outsiders a view of the juvenile justice system from a first hand perspective.

Some, unfortunately, have not coped. Anne Marie Hochholter, a Columbine student, was shot in the spine and partially paralyzed, but survived. Six months later, while she and her father were at a local elementary school thanking students who had raised funds for victims, her mother Carla walked into a pawn shop, asked to see a gun, loaded it, and shot herself (Keene-Osborn, et al, 1999).

Jennie Luiten, an eyewitness to the Loukaitis killings, silently contemplated suicide for two years. It wasn't until she was overheard by her father mentioning it to a reporter that she got help. She mentioned that Moses Lake school officials have overestimated the resiliency of the students and as such have not been willing or able to help them cope with it. The incident occurred at the middle school and the high school

had been acting as though nothing had happened. The principal stated that he was not aware of any students still having any problems (only two years later). Counseling through Grant County Mental Health was only made available for a few months — anybody needing more needed to seek help privately. And in a final move by the school system seen as insensitive, a memorial that had been placed in the classroom where the shootings had occurred was torn down during a renovation and never replaced (Lombard, n.d.).

*A Look at Columbine:*

April 20. Adolf Hitler's birthday. The day that marijuana smokers celebrate as their pro-legalization holiday. The day Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold attempted to completely destroy a school and every life in it.

Eric Harris was a military child whose family had moved around several times throughout his childhood. He reportedly struggled greatly with each move, with leaving friends behind. He never considered anyplace home, especially not Littleton, Colorado and Columbine high school. Harris' brother was the kicker for the Columbine football team, and Harris could have played on the soccer team but chose not to. Instead, he was heavily into computers and fantasy sports leagues.

Dylan Klebold had lived in Littleton almost his whole life. He was a gifted child, chosen to participate in a special gifted program throughout his elementary years. There, rather than finding support for his intelligence, he found competition to the point of classmates sabotaging his work to get ahead. A quiet, introverted child, he internalized

his feelings rather than deal with them. He was also a scout, a musician, and later the high school drama club's audiovisual expert.

Columbine high school was very much an athletic powerhouse. The various sports teams had won 32 state championships in the 1990s (Pooley & Cloud, 1999). Several members of the administration coached teams, and athletes were held on a pedestal. The result of that was that students who did not get involved with athletics were generally shunned, while athletes were treated to a double standard, allowed to violate rules that other students were not.

In 1995, the internet was still a brand new phenomenon, and Klebold and Harris were part of a group of friends who would go to the school library and surf the net during their free time. This branded them in the eyes of others as stereotypical freshman computer geeks, and at Columbine, treatment for such was particularly harsh. In addition to such routine bullying as kicking chairs out from under them or pushing them into lockers, the athletes would beat them up in the locker room at gym class, throw food at them, and even go bowling with them, pouring baby oil on the floor, then throwing them into it and watching them slide out of control. Despite the particularly heinous nature of this treatment, the administration did nothing (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Harris was especially a target for this treatment, as in addition to being a computer geek, he was short and had a slight chest deformity which was immediately apparent when he would take his shirt off in the locker room at gym class. Klebold was also a natural target, as he was tall, skinny, awkward, and shy, always looking at the floor and rarely doing anything to defend himself.

In 1995, the most popular computer game was probably DOOM. Violent video games were becoming popular at about this time. Mortal Kombat had come out in the video arcades a couple years earlier, as did several other one-on-one combat games. However, the home computer games that were popular were based on the idea first seen in Castle Wolfenstein –the first person shooter. In these games, the screen is shown from the perspective of the character, and the goal is to walk through corridors and shoot everything in sight without being killed yourself. DOOM was considered the greatest of these –not only was it the most violent, it had the greatest availability of weapons, from flame-throwers to bombs, and it was customizable. There was an internet subculture that designed and traded custom DOOM levels, and Harris soon became popular for his particularly violent and elaborate ones.

DOOM and games like it can be accurately described as murder simulators. Just as airline pilots gain proficiency through the use of a flight simulator, and driving instructors now frequently use computerized simulators before having their students get behind the wheel of a car, DOOM allows one to become proficient in the act of killing with no real risk of harm (Dvorak, 1999). While the vast majority of children who play DOOM will never actually murder someone in the halls of a school, those who play DOOM are more likely to be highly skilled in that act.

Harris and Klebold began working on the DOOM levels together and spending more and more time playing them together. They also began to fantasize about DOOM becoming real life, and they learned how to make bombs, giving them names and detonating them in fields. They also began other forms of mischief, and were arrested once for breaking in a car and stealing electronic equipment.

They also began to identify with a small group of students known as the Trenchcoat Mafia. These students wore trenchcoats, listened to German punk music like Rammstein and KMFDM, and fancied themselves a gang of sorts. They were seen as outcasts by most in the Columbine clique, and as such Harris and Klebold were naturally attracted to them. For the most part, photos of the Trenchcoat Mafia have never included Harris and Klebold, however, and members have been quick to point out that they were never accepted into the group, but rather just cultivated the image. Hence, the outcasts were not even accepted by the outcasts (Brown & Merritt, 2002; -@- 4-20 , '2003).

By 1997, Eric Harris had his own website, in which he posted violent rantings against people in general and Columbine high school in specific. With the exception of a specific death threat towards Brooks Brown, he did not name people specifically. On the site, he always referred to himself as *Reb ör Rebdomine änd Klebold as VoDKa* ” (Klebold s favorite drink, with his initials capitalized; Pooley & Cloud, 1999).

Harris was definitely the more expressive of the two, and at times Klebold would express alarm over Harris statements, even giving Brown the website address when he was mentioned in the death threat. Brown and his parents reported it to the police, but they took no action and later even denied receiving any information until presented with a copy of the police report (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

While in 1998, anybody who paid attention could have seen that Harris was building up to a violent outburst, by 1999 all the signs were gone. Harris took his website offline, and suddenly became more outgoing. He put to an end his longstanding feud with Brown. Klebold also became more positive, talking about looking forward to graduating and attending Arizona State University in the fall.

It was all a façade. While things were going well on the surface, Harris and Klebold were in Harris' basement recording what has become known as the Columbine Tapes, videotapes in which Harris and Klebold, armed and drinking whiskey, discuss their plans to destroy Columbine.

Harris says "Do not think we're trying to copy anyone. [We had the idea long ago] before the first one ever happened. He rails against blacks, Hispanics, Jews, gays, and whites, and also the enemies who abused them and the friends who did not defend them.

Klebold adds "I hope we kill 250 of you ... [It will be] the most nerve-racking 15 minutes of my life, after the bombs are set and we're waiting to charge through the school. Seconds will be like hours. I can't wait. I'm shaking like a leaf. "

Harris adds "It's going to be like [expletive] DOOM. Tick, tick, tick, tick ... Haa! That [expletive] shotgun is straight out of DOOM. (Gibbs, et al, 1999).

On April 14, Harris asked a girl out to the prom and was turned down. April 15, Harris heard he was rejected by the Air Force because of his prescription for the antidepressant Luvox.

On April 20, Brooks Brown noted that Harris and Klebold were not in their morning classes. He walked out to the parking lot for a cigarette after third period and saw Harris pull up in his car and get out carrying a duffel bag. He told Harris he missed a test in third period and was told in return "It doesn't matter anymore ... Brooks, I like you now. Get out of here. Go home. (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Brown states he figured Harris was setting up a pipe bomb to detonate in the parking lot or bringing a paintball gun to school—a harmless prank. He finished his

cigarette when he heard the gunshots in the distance. At that point, he realized what was happening and ran (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Harris and Klebold walked up to Rachel Scott and Richard Castaldo, who were having lunch at a picnic table. He shot them both, wounding Scott in the torso and legs and paralyzing Castaldo with a shot to the spine. A minute later, Harris returned to Scott, who was trying to crawl away. Grabbing her by the hair, he asked "Do you believe in God?" She answered "You know I do." He then said "Then go be with Him," and shot her in the head (Scott, Nimmo, & Klingsporn, 2001).

Klebold and Harris then entered the cafeteria, shooting at several students. Eventually, they headed up the stairs and down the halls, where they shot teacher Dave Sanders as he was routing students outside. Finally, they wound up in the library, where they went to various students who were hiding under desks. Before shooting them, they frequently taunted them, calling black student Isiah Shoels various racial epithets, saying "Peek-a-boo" to another student hiding under the table, asking at least two others about their belief in God.

The police, aid units, and SWAT teams arrived outside the school, but nobody was willing to enter it. Even as eyewitnesses reported who the shooters were and students inside on cell phones were reporting the whereabouts of Klebold and Harris, everyone stayed outside. Several students stayed with Sanders as he lay bleeding, and one even posted a sign saying he was bleeding to death. Three hours after he was shot, Sanders died, looking at pictures of his wife and kids held up to him by students.

Harris and Klebold shot themselves in the library 40 minutes after the rampage started. Their bombs had failed to detonate. They had succeeded in killing only 13

people, injuring 23 others. Most of the students were able to escape, some out doors, a few out windows. Many others stayed hidden inside the school until being escorted out by the police, who finally entered the building four hours after arriving.

The dead were left in the school overnight, even the ones that were killed outside. Parents were notified slowly, and one of them actually found out his child was among the dead when he saw the photo of his son dead on the sidewalk in the next morning s paper. Meanwhile, the Jefferson County Sheriff s Department attempted to justify their inaction during the shooting and to implicate Brooks Brown as an accomplice (since he had been warned and was known to be a friend of Klebold s).

The surviving Columbine students finished out the year at a nearby high school, which served their students in the morning and Columbine s in the afternoon. Graduation saw students picking up their diplomas in wheelchairs, crutches, and canes. Some parents picked up diplomas for children who were still in the hospital or who had been killed.

The school was remodeled that summer, with the library completely removed and housed in an external building. The library had been located on the second floor directly above the cafeteria. When it was rebuilt, it was moved to an entirely different location, and that part of the school is now the cafeteria and a tribute section (Brown & Merritt, 2002; -@- 4-20 ,ñ.d.).

### *Causes:*

It seems fairly easy to note the anger in Klebold and Harris and to see the source of some of it. High school is a difficult enough time for anyone without adding emotional



and physical assault on top of it. Adolescence is a time for children to develop and strengthen peer relationships, and it was clear that Klebold and Harris were denied that opportunity.

Still, such is not unusual, and in most cases, even the most rejected of children are able to rise above it. What was so different about Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Andy Williams, or Barry Loukaitis?

Looking first at Harris and Klebold, Harris was a narcissist. He was very good at drawing attention to himself, even if it was negative attention. He had an abnormal fascination with violence that likely predated his interest in violent video games. He had a narcissistic need to make himself known to the world, but circumstances of his life — his family's constant moving, his stature, his chest deformity, the culture at Columbine — made it difficult for him to do so. He found an outlet in the web, and then a willing disciple in Klebold.

Klebold was a follower. As intelligent as he was, he was not one to think for himself. He was more likely to blend into the background, to let things happen to him, to accept his lot in life as the way it should be. When he heard Harris explain that he didn't have to live life that way and could actually take charge, even if it meant dying in the process, he was interested. A lifetime of rage at the way Littleton had treated him, from the time he was in the second grade and was abused by his classmates in the gifted program to the bullying in high school, had been kept inside, and this was the perfect channel for it.

Barry Loukaitis was also a quiet, almost invisible kid, silently seething over the way his classmates treated him. In addition, he was burdened with the murderous and

suicidal thoughts of his mother, who told him that she wanted to tie up her estranged husband and his girlfriend and make them watch as she shot herself to death. He was fascinated with the film "Natural Born Killers," and the Pearl Jam music video "Jeremy," in which a student kills classmates who have been tormenting him (Ryan, 1997).

Andy Williams was a friendly, seemingly well-adjusted child whose military mother left the family for the middle east while he was young. He was raised with his father in Maryland, where he excelled in sports and science. However, as he was running for seventh grade class president, his father decided to move the family to California so he could be closer to his grandparents. He became close friends with a handicapped child who was teased and bullied regularly. After living in Twentynine Palms, California for a year, they moved to Santee, where Williams never felt he fit in. Tragically, in February of 2001, the friend was killed in a bus accident. One month later, Andy Williams went on his killing spree. (Williams & Williams, 2003a).

Andy Williams describes his side of it well in a poem he wrote in prison (Williams & Williams, 2003b, spelling, punctuation and capitalization are as in the original):

March fifth two thousand one  
There was a kid who had a gun  
He finally decided he had nothing to Lose  
People all over saw him on the News  
2 people Dead 13 people hurt  
1 stupid decision cut 3 peoples lives short

He is getting tried as an adult he is a 15 year old kid  
He is sorry He is sorry he should never have done what he did  
He thought nobody liked him he got messed with everyday  
He didn t like Santee and he didn t want to stay  
He would hurt emotionally bruised to the touch  
For every one person who hated him 4 loved him very much  
He didn t find that out until it was to late  
If he had a time machine he d go back to that Date  
Instead of shooting a gun he d shoot a smile  
But now it is too late 2 people Dead  
One locked up wish someone said  
They loved him instead of making him feel dumb  
Santana High still and numb  
A nation is sending out their forgiveness and sorrow  
But he will be locked up today and tomorrow  
That kid screwed up with something that shouldn t ever be  
That Kid well ..That Kid was me  
Charles A. Williams

It is incredible how many signs were given in these cases and how many were ignored. In each case, bullying and tormenting occurred on a daily basis, yet teachers and administration did nothing, or even worse, punished the victims for retaliating. But more alarming is that these children did not suddenly commit their crimes with no

premeditation and no warning. Eric Harris posted details of his plans for violence on the internet. They were reported to the police with the Brooks Brown death threat. The police did nothing. Andy Williams told numerous classmates and at least one adult of his intentions to shoot his classmates. It was dismissed as braggadocio, and the only action taken was to pat down his backpack that morning. They did not feel the revolver he had inside it. Kip Kinkel was arrested the day before the killings for bringing a gun to school. He was released to his parents. Evan Ramsey, who killed his principal and a student and injured two others in Bethel, Alaska in 1997, told at least 24 students to watch him from a mezzanine above where the shooting took place; one student even recorded the killings on a video camera.

Another factor common to all these cases is the easy access to guns. Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden, the Jonesboro, Arkansas killers, used guns they had been given for hunting. Eric Harris was unable to purchase guns at a gun shop himself, not because of his age, but because he was on probation. He had an 18-year old classmate buy some for him. Others, he bought at private gun shows or private sales, where background checks are not required. Kip Kinkel bought a stolen gun from a friend. In most other cases (nearly 2/3 of 37 incidents), the guns belonged to a parent or a relative (U.S. Secret Service, 2002).

Our culture is increasingly one that glorifies violence. In addition to the violent video games, which Attorney General John Ashcroft quickly blamed for the Santee shooting, our movies and music tend to glorify violence (Ashcroft, 2001). Music videos like the aforementioned Jeremy and movies like 187 specifically depict school violence. Gangster rap is one of the most popular styles of music, and songs that

glorify violence, sex, and drug use tend to be the most popular. Movies that depict youth violence and gang life are very successful among the teen demographic. As a result, what should be horrifying to children is instead routine at best and stimulating at worst.

The media does not help us here. In their quest for ratings, ethics takes a back seat to sensationalism. A chilling example of that was when a Columbine student called a local TV station on his cell phone while hiding from Harris and Klebold. The anchor interviewed him live on the air for several minutes, and the newscasters would later brag about being involved in the first interactive school shooting. Never did it appear as though they were concerned with the well-being of the student who called or the possibility he could be shot while on the air —if that would have happened, would that have been an even greater news story? (Murder-Spree-TV, '1999).

Indeed, media coverage of Columbine fulfilled Eric Harris' quest for notoriety. Within minutes of the start of the shootings, Harris and Klebold were identified on television —families of the victims knew who was doing the shooting even before it was finished and long before they knew whether their children survived. Footage of students running out of the school and photos of dead students were shown even before parents were notified —one father found out his son was dead by seeing his photo in the paper.

Everyone knows Klebold and Harris now. There are internet sites and internet discussion groups hailing them as heroes. Kip Kinkel is fairly well known. Barry Loukaitis has some name recognition. Andy Williams receives email and postal mail daily, as well as occasional visitors who travel long distances simply to see him. These children were seen as invisible, unknown to most of the people in their schools as they were not the major problem children, but they also did not accomplish much. They had

minimal positive attention from peers. Now, their actions and media coverage has insured nobody could ignore them.

*Solutions:*

Several different ideas have been suggested as solutions to this problem. Some of them seem overly simplistic and ambitious, such as the oft-repeated suggestion that the Ten Commandments be posted in every school (as if a student would walk into the school, fully armed, read 'Thou Shalt Not Kill,' and suddenly realize the error of his ways).

Bringing back prayer in schools is frequently mentioned, as well, and while it may not be in and of itself a solution, the removal of any and all religious influence in the schools is one part of a larger erosion of values. One of the roles that school has been expected to fulfill is the socialization of our youth into the values of our society. Yet, in the interest of separating church and state, many teachers now shy away from moral and ethical education. In addition, religious arguments as a justification for a position in a discussion are discounted, if not disallowed.

Another solution brought up frequently is the use of metal detectors, armed guards, and other forms of physical protection. While these measures may prevent the introduction of weapons into school property, they fail to address any underlying issues and may serve to increase tension as the school begins to resemble a prison.

One interesting idea is to arm everyone. Edmonds (2001) suggests that teachers, administrators, and students should be armed. His rationale is that armed criminals tend

to attack unarmed people, and so if the criminals know that most everyone is armed, they will not act. Edmonds points to fifty years ago when guns were available at department stores and children brought guns to school to participate in marksmanship clubs. He states that there were no school shootings fifty years ago.

Of course, the society as a whole was different fifty years ago. There were very few broken homes, almost nobody struggled with drug problems, and television and movies promoted healthy values. People in general accepted things as they were, and children accepted the values their parents taught them. Then came McCarthyism, the Civil Rights movement, and Vietnam, and people became dissatisfied with a country and society they had become comfortable with.

Some schools have taken measures to prevent school shootings that don't seem to address the problem at all. For example, after Virginia governor Jim Gilmore issued an anti-violence edict, a Richmond, Virginia student was suspended for writing a paper about being picked on by athletes (in other words, the school was punishing the victim rather than dealing with the issue), and a Dendron, Virginia student was suspended indefinitely for dying his hair blue (Virginia Takes, '1999).

In order to handle these school shootings, it is necessary to understand the motivations behind them. Bowman (2002) has noted that suburban school shootings resemble workplace violence far more than they resemble any other form of juvenile crime. In inner city schools, violence has generally been related to racial segregation, poverty, and the drug trade. The conflicts began off school grounds, and if the violence occurred on school property, that was simply due to circumstance. Suburban and rural shootings, on the other hand, were rampages that were to be resolved on school grounds,

had nothing to do with the drug trade or poverty and little to do with racism (though the shooters may have adopted a racist stance as part of their image or targeted members of a race that harassed them). Like workplace violence, there is a history of disillusionment combined with perceived mistreatment culminating in violence that may or may not be aimed at specific targets. Bullying behaviors ignored by teachers and administrators would easily fit the definitions of harassment in a workplace and, if brought to court, the employer and offenders would likely be subject to legal sanctions.

Access to guns needs to be reduced. It is too easy for children to get hold of guns, whether from their own families, private gun sales, or theft. Given that it is legal for 18-year olds to buy guns, some high school students are capable of buying them in gun shops legally. Private gun sales and sales at gun shows needs to be highly regulated, with sellers required to follow the same procedures as gun shops (requiring sales be by consignment would be one way to do this). Some guns can be purchased and possessed legally by children under 18 years of age, including rifles, shotguns, and some assault weapons –the law mainly covers handguns. All guns should be illegal for purchase or possession by children under 21 (with possession allowed when accompanied by a parent for hunting). Technology exists now for electronic trigger locks, combination locks, and other means of restricting gun use to the owner only. These technologies need to be used and need to be required by law. Gun stores are not required to secure their guns after hours, making it possible for people to break in and steal guns from display cases. California passed a law in 1998 requiring security standards for gun sellers –other states need to follow suit. And finally, parents need to be held accountable for children who can access their guns. Too many tragedies, not only school shootings but accidental



shootings, crimes, and suicides, have occurred because a parent left a gun accessible and loaded ( The 7 deadly loopholes, 1999).

Surveys have shown that students see about 10% of their peers as having the potential to be violent. A full 2.6% not only could be considered violent, but also had access to a gun and had made a plan to harm another student. In other words, in a school of 800, potentially 20 of them could have the means and the plan to commit a school shooting. 87% of students surveyed stated that they believed the shooters would be motivated by revenge, and 37% of them agreed with the statement There are kids at my school who think I might shoot someone. (Bowman, 2001).

What is frightening about this is that in spite of the concern, research shows that only 54% of students who hear of a planned shooting would tell an adult. Several shootings have been prevented because adults have found out and intervened. Still, each of the shootings mentioned above had people who knew of the possibility in advance and did not report it, or if it was reported, nothing was done ( Lethal Violence , n.d.).

It is vitally important that that code of silence be broken. Students need to learn that such an incident needs to be reported. They also need to be able to report bullying, and to be able to trust that incidents of bullying will be dealt with. Most of the students involved in school shootings reported bullying only to find it not dealt with, or even in the case of Columbine, to find the reporting student branded a troublemaker by the staff (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Students have reported an overall perception that teachers are not interested and that they are unaware of what goes on with students at school, a perception that often has proved accurate when they are interviewed by the media following a shooting ( Lethal Violence , n.d.). For example, the principal of Columbine

high school stated publicly he had never heard of the Trenchcoat Mafia (Bender, et al, 2001).

The invisible students who make up most of the shooters need to be detected. These are students that show signs of problems –minor discipline problems, falling grades, social difficulties, increasing quietness and introversion, but do not have enough problems to attract the attention of the school s 'administration or the police. One way of detection recommended by Bender, et al (2001) is the use of a survey having each student rate his or her classmates on several Likert-scale questions ( I'would like to sit with this person at lunch , 'agree or disagree scale 1-5).

Still, a more important move is to reduce the number of invisible students. Aronson (2000) suggests the use of the Jigsaw teaching technique, a method he developed several years ago to integrate schools in San Antonio, Texas. Students spend a portion of the day (one hour is typical) in Jigsaw groups (assigned with diversity in mind) working on research together. For example: students are divided into groups of six. Each group is to do research on World War II. One student in each group is assigned to study Pearl Harbor, another the north Africa campaign, another D-Day, another Hiroshima, another the Holocaust, and the sixth the French resistance. Each of the students studying Pearl Harbor then get together and study together, discussing facts and issues –likewise with the other groups. Then, the representative from each group returns to his or her group and teaches the rest about Pearl Harbor. Another group member teaches about north Africa, and so on.

The result is that all students have to be actively involved in learning and discussing the issue with their peers. They become dependent on each other for

knowledge, and as a result, shunning a student only serves to harm the group. In addition, students who would ordinarily be quiet and reserved cannot afford to be, and students who would never interact are forced to. The technique has worked with age groups from early elementary through high school.

Olweus (n.d.) has developed a program to prevent bullying specifically. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been used successfully in elementary and junior high schools, greatly reducing not only bullying behaviors, but also other antisocial behaviors such as vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy. Improvements in classroom order and in student attitudes have also been reported.

The Olweus program begins with the administration of an anonymous survey for students, staff training, the formation of a Bullying Prevention Committee, development of schoolwide rules against bullying, and organization of a coordinated system of supervision during breaks. Then regular class sessions are devoted to education about bullying, and parent meetings about bullying are held. Finally, interventions are made on kids who bully and kids who are targets of bullies, as well as the parents of these children.

The reduction of bullying behavior and of the invisibility of certain students, combined with the detection and intervention of potential problem students should lead to fewer students reaching the boiling point and taking out their rage on their classmates.

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