

Targeted Violence: A Review of Six School Shootings and
Implications for School Counselors

by

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ABSTRACT

Lethal targeted violence in a kindergarten through twelfth grade setting is a rare occurrence, but when students and school staff become victims, the incidents become high profile and make serious cause for concern. The purpose of this study is to examine six instances of lethal and high profile school shootings that have taken place in a kindergarten through twelfth grade setting and the implications for school counselors. The six cases of lethal targeted violence will be examined with respect to the perpetrators' demographics, behaviors, relationships, family dynamics, and mental health. Information will be gleaned from scholarly journal articles, national and regional newspapers, books, and magazine articles.

Results of this research indicated that 100% of the shooting perpetrators made previous threats of violence and all showed a fixation with violent material such as

violent video games, stories, and movies. Recommendations are given for school counselors in working with students who may have a propensity for violence along with recommendations for further study.

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Chapter I: Introduction

When violent behavior is demonstrated by youth and unleashed in schools, the outcry can be tremendous. The study of violent human behavior can also lead to discouraged researchers who are seeking remedies, patterns, and profiles. An FBI agent and an expert in school shootings, Mary O'Toole (1999) stated, "the roots of a violent act are multiple, intricate, and intertwined" (p. 1). This can be especially true in targeted violence that takes place on property that is supposed to offer a safe environment for learning.

The United States Secret Service defined the phrase of "targeted violence" as "any incident of violence where a known attacker selects a particular target prior to [the] violent attack" (Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2000, p. 1). The target can be single or multiple individuals, a building, or an organization (Reddy, Borum, Berglund, Vossekuil, Fein, & Modzeleski, 2001). Cases of interest in this study share the characteristics of targeted violence taking place in school settings. More specifically, cases will contain targeted violence in a kindergarten through twelfth grade setting, during school hours, where multiple homicides were attempted or committed by way of fire arms, and were in both suburban or rural settings. Some recent and notable examples are the Columbine, Colorado and Red Lake, Minnesota school shootings. Both of these incidents left numerous individuals dead, including the shooters, crushed communities and families, and caught the eye of a nation.

Thomerson (2000) indicated that research has shown a child, overall, is in more danger at home than in school. Moore, Petrie, Braga, and McLaughlin (2003) and authors

Newman, Fox, Harding, Metha, and Roth (2005) suggest that a student is safer from violence while attending class than in out of school hours. Moore, Petrie, Braga, and McLaughlin (2003) also suggest that “only 35 of the nation’s 116,910 elementary and secondary schools have experienced a multiple victim shooting over the last decade” (p. 330). Taking those numbers into account, this translates into .0002% prevalence. Numerical evidence has shown that incidents of school violence have steadily declined since 1993 (Vossekuil et al., 2000), but these isolated incidents can have lasting effects on the entire country and even more powerful effects on communities, schools, and families.

Though acts of targeted violence in schools are very rare, the terror they create bring these relatively limited incidents to the headlines and cause serious public concern and attention. The profound consequences of targeted school shootings can also cause knee jerk reactions by policy makers, leading to hasty implementation of ineffective prevention efforts. School entrances are turning into security check points and students live in fear by the thought that deadly violence could permeate the halls and classrooms of their school, perpetrated by a fellow classmate or classmates.

Targeted violence in U.S. schools can be considered an act of domestic terrorism. Miller (2002) described terrorism “as old as civilization and has existed since people discovered that they could intimidate the many by targeting the few” (p. 283). This description can be applied to the Columbine shootings. The perpetrators of Columbine, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, implied in their homemade videos that they sought to deliver vengeance to those who hurt them and exact revenge for all who have endured the same treatment that they have (Gibbs, Roche, Goldstein, Harrington, & Woodbury,

1999). There was an intention to intimidate all who harmed them and all of those who failed to help them.

Students are ultimately going to suffer the worst from targeted school shootings. This can also include the perpetrators, who are often tormented and bullied before performing such an act, and who can become a victim of their own violence by committing suicide. Ultimately, both victim and perpetrator lives will be lost before they reach their full potential.

Students who witness and survive the horror of a school shooting can have lasting and detrimental physical, emotional, and mental injuries. Student victims can be left disfigured and disabled. Rehabilitation from injuries can take months or years. Permanent physical scars will be reminders of the horrors faced on that dreadful day.

The fortunate individuals who escaped the attack without physical harm can suffer from an array of psychological problems. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), along with depression and anxiety problems are just the tip of the iceberg. Some symptoms of PTSD in youth are nightmares, trouble focusing, and deterioration to previous developmental stages (Gellman & Delucia-Waack, 2006). Just months after the tragedy at Columbine, it was reported that students were having issues conducting fire drills, alcohol use was more prominent, and more students were seeing counselors than before the shooting (Gibbs et al., 1999). Another account from Columbine just under a year after the shooting stated “unannounced fire alarms and other unpredictable activities have been carefully considered due to the overwhelming auditory stimulation and memories they could trigger in students and teachers” (Arman, 2000, para 7). Once a

school shooting takes place, that event tends to be etched into the minds of students and school personnel for the rest of their lives.

The families of the victims, along with the families of the perpetrators, will forever be affected. Parents lose children or are left with a child who has changed dramatically due to what he/she witnessed and survived. Parents of the perpetrator will be left with many questions unanswered, feelings of guilt, and could end up being the center of the blame. The legal ramifications to the perpetrator's family can be severe. Numerous lawsuits were filed against the parents of Harris and Klebold in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings. Lawsuits have been filed, and have sometimes been successful, against school districts, school officials and teachers, video game makers, and even students, who were not tied to any part of the shooting besides being present (Pederson, 1999; Gottfried, 2006). I believe that Pederson (1999) said it best: "The courtroom seems to lead to nowhere, except additional grief" (para 2).

School staff can also be targeted or end up in the crossfire. School shootings in Moses Lake, Washington, Bethel, Alaska, Pearl, Mississippi, Paducah, Kentucky, Jonesboro, Arkansas, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, Springfield, Oregon, Littleton, Colorado, and Conyers, Georgia were analyzed by Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) and better than half had a teacher or school official mortally wounded. Along with the loss of life, school personnel could also take the brunt of the blame where it may not be due. School staff can also suffer from psychological problems by what they witnessed and survived.

The pain and suffering resulting from a school shooting is immense for all parties involved. These wounds take an enormous amount of time to heal, if they ever

do. The lagging question is how can these tragic events be avoided?

Trying to profile students and predict who is the most likely to be a perpetrator of targeted school violence is an inexact science. Mulvey and Cauffman (2001) stated that “it is not often clear exactly what to look for, who should have looked for it, or what should have been done if someone had seen something” (para 4). Students in danger of committing murder inside school walls might blend into the background and display behaviors common to their peers.

As stated earlier, predicting human behavior is a hit and miss proposition, especially in the prediction of targeted school shootings. Verlinden et al (2000) suggest that misidentification of a student with perceived potential for targeted school shooting can lead to “[negative] stigmatization, self-fulfilling prophecy, misuse of social services, and loss of individual freedom and privacy” (p. 21). Along with the difficulties in profiling and prediction, sometimes school policies run the risk of negative ramifications. Arman (2000) suggested that an implementation of a no tolerance policy, a school policy that handles incidents of violence with the same discipline without leniency, can “alienate students who are crying out for help with negative behavior” but a “hands off approach can jeopardize the safety of teachers and students” (para 10).

Guidance counselors have the responsibility to advocate for students. They usually have a unique view of students compared to other school personnel. Teachers may not be privy to the functioning of the home life or may not be knowledgeable of the difficulties the student is experiencing with his/her peers. Disciplinary authorities in the schools may only interact with a student if the student has found him/her into trouble. School counselors often have the opportunity to delve further into a student’s affairs and

notice the signs of a student who may be capable of school violence. Once that capacity for violence is determined, special attention and/or exploration could be given to the student in question on a discrete level by professional school staff, hopefully avoiding the negative consequences stated above.

Purpose of Study

The relationships that school counselors have with their students can provide a window to the life of a student outside of an educational setting, as well as the functioning inside the school. An educated counselor may be able to detect warning signs and symptoms of a troubled student. Once a student is noticed as having issues, a prevention plan can be put in place. Identifying a potentially violent student who has reached a breaking point can be crucial to preventing events like Columbine and Red Lake. The purpose of this study will be to review research, reports, and findings of targeted school shootings and offer an analysis of relevant research. Research will be conducted in the spring of 2007.

Research Questions

There are five research questions this analysis will address. They are as follows:

1. What are the demographics of previous targeted school shooting perpetrators?
2. What are the perceived behavioral characteristics of previous targeted school shooting perpetrators?
3. What are the relationship characteristics of previous targeted school shooting perpetrators with peers, school personnel, and community members?
4. What are the family dynamics of previous targeted school shooting

perpetrators?

5. What mental health issues are present in previous targeted school shooting

perpetrators?

Cases

The incidents reviewed for this study will be of targeted violence in a kindergarten through twelfth grade setting, during school hours, where multiple homicides were attempted or committed by way of firearms in rural and suburban settings. Each of the incidents researched have also been committed in the past eleven years and were of high profile.

Perpetrator(s)	City, State	Date
Luke Woodham	Pearl, Mississippi	October 1, 1997
Michael Carneal	West Paducah, Kentucky	December 1, 1997
Kipland Kinkel	Springfield, Oregon	May 21, 1998
Andrew Golden & Mitchell Johnson	Jonesboro, Arkansas	March 24, 1998
Eric Harris & Dylan Klebold	Littleton (Columbine), Colorado	April 20, 1999
Jeff Weise	Red Lake, Minnesota	March 21, 2005

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that there has been enough research conducted on targeted school shooting perpetrators to complete an adequate review of literature related to the five research questions this investigation seeks to address. The validity of previous research is also assumed.

The main limitation of this investigation is that no actual data collection will be taking place. This investigation will be based on previous research allowing conclusions

to be drawn from potentially unsound or invalid data resulting in conclusions that may not be generalized to other cases.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

This chapter will provide an overview of five areas of characteristics that seem to be common in most reports of targeted school shooting perpetrators and will begin by looking at the demographics of previous school shooting perpetrators. An investigation of the behavioral characteristics of previous school shooting perpetrators will then be presented. Thirdly, a review of previous perpetrators' relationships with peers, school personnel, and members of the community will follow. A discussion of mental health issues that were present or a concern of earlier perpetrators, along with a discussion of how those mental health issues may have impacted the episode will be presented. Finally, this investigation will review the family dynamics of previous perpetrators.

Demographics

Luke Woodham was 16 years old when he took the lives of his mother, whom he killed with a knife and baseball bat while she lay in bed, and two students on October 1, 1997. Along with the three dead, including the two students killed at Pearl High School in Pearl, Mississippi, the Caucasian teenager wounded seven more. Woodham's weapon of choice in the school's commons was a 30/30 hunting rifle (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000).

On December 1, 1997, Michael Carneal, a 14 year old Caucasian male, shot and killed three students and wounded five at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky. Carneal took aim at a prayer group that morning before classes. While Carneal brought a total of 5 guns to school, he opened fire on the group of students with a .22 pistol (Moore et al., 2003; Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000).

Fourteen year old Mitchell Johnson and 11 year old Andrew Golden, both white males from Jonesboro, Arkansas, pulled a fire alarm at West Side Middle School on March 24, 1998, to lure students and staff outside while they sniped from a vantage point in the woods about a football field length away. The boys left four students dead and also killed one teacher, who was shielding a student from the onslaught. The boys amassed an arsenal of a total of ten guns for their attack (Moore et al., 2003; Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000).

Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon saw violence that left two students dead and 25 injured. On the morning of May 21, 1998, Kipland Kinkel, who was 15 at the time of the crime, unleashed fifty rounds of .22 caliber ammunition into a cafeteria of four hundred students. Unbeknown to the victims of the shooting that morning, Kinkel shot and killed both of his parents the night before (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000).

Two white teenagers from Littleton, Colorado, committed the largest mass murder in United States history within the walls of any kindergarten through twelfth grade setting. Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, laced Columbine High School with bullets and homemade bombs on April 20, 1999, killing twelve students, one teacher, and leaving 23 wounded, before they took their own lives (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000). This is perhaps the most famous of school shootings reviewed in this study.

The Red Lake High School in Red Lake, Minnesota, was rocked by violence on March 21, 2005. Jeff Weise, a 16 year old Native American and resident of the Red Lake Reservation for 5 years, took the lives of his grandfather and female companion, stole his grandfather's .40 caliber handgun, 12 gauge shotgun, bullet proof vest, along with his grandfather's police vehicle and drove to Red Lake High School. There Jeff shot and

killed an unarmed security guard, a teacher, and five classmates. After reportedly trading gunfire with police near the end of his 10 minute rampage, Jeff took his own life (Gregory, 2005; Haga, 2005; Hanners, 2005; Harden & Hedgpeth, 2005).

Kidd and Meyer (2002) gave a profile of a school shooter based on the outcome of their study of school shootings in Moses Lake, Washington, Pearl, Mississippi, West Paducah, Kentucky, Jonesboro, Arkansas, Springfield, Oregon, and Littleton, Colorado. The authors suggested that the typical perpetrator of a school shooting involving multiple victims is a Caucasian teenage male, who of late made murderous threats. From the information that the authors used, this would be an accurate result, but it is not that easy to generalize their results. Three years after Kidd and Meyer concluded their research, Jeff Weise committed his crime. Despite the discrepancy in race that occurred after their research, the authors' conclusions hold true to the age and gender of their profiled school shooter. Of the eight shooters in the six incidents review, seven were Caucasian.

Besides looking at race, gender, and age, research has suggested other demographic areas to consider. The majority of school shooting perpetrators possessed an average or above average ability in academics. Bender, Shubert, and McLaughlin (2001) stated that the majority of the perpetrators were underachievers but showed their cognitive ability by the meticulous planning that went into the attacks. The best example of this is the plans that the Columbine shooters had before the attacks. Investigators of the Columbine shooting uncovered journals, day planners, maps, diagrams, hit lists, and even a budget that Harris and Klebold accumulated while planning their attack (Pankratz & Nicholason, 2006; Vaughan, Kass, & Able, 2006). The duo even planned to use hand signals for a more efficient attack (Chicago Sun-Times, 2000). The detail and

thoroughness of their plans demonstrates intellectual ability. Weise had also made detailed plans. During the investigation after the shooting, officials discovered a map in Weise's bedroom and recovered emails and text messages that detailed the plot. According to the evidence found, it seemed as though Weise wanted to plan his attack when the school was most crowded and station co-conspirators at the schools exits and hallways to achieve a high body count (Rosario, 2006). Just two days after the shooting at Red Lake, an FBI agent told reporters that the incident looked like it was planned for sometime (Haga, Padilla, and Meryhew, 2005). The shootings in Pearl, West Pudacah, Jonesboro, and Springfield also required foresight and planning but not to the extent of Columbine and Red Lake. Newman et al. (2005) state that "there is nothing spontaneous about a rampage school shooting" (p.21).

The plan making is not the only window to the shooters' intelligence. Kipland Kinkel was able to construct "sophisticated" pipe bombs that were found in the home after the shooting at Thurston High School (Moffatt, 2000; Mosley 1998). The Lane County Sheriff, Jan Clements, commented on the bombs that Kinkel produced saying "it tells me that this kid is intelligent" (para 16). The Columbine shooters, Harris and Klebold, also made pipe bombs for their massacre, learning the trade from the internet (Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffatt, 2000). The fascination with violence drove Kinkel, Klebold, and Harris to be eager self learners.

When looking at school performance specifically, the killers' transcripts are mostly unavailable due to privacy issues of the education system. Luke Woodham of the Pearl, Mississippi shootings was reported to have normal intelligence and performed in the C through A range (Kiely, 2002; Moffatt, 2000). Woodham also appeared to have a

liking for Nietzsche, a 19th century philosopher, and composed song and poetry (Branan, 1999). Eric Harris was a B student and familiar with Shakespeare as he quoted a line from *The Tempest* in one of the five video tapes produced by Harris and Klebold before the shootings (Briggs & Blevin, 1999; Gibbs et al., 1999). Dylan Klebold was known to excel in math and was beginning to plan his freshman year at the University of Arizona (Briggs & Blevin, 1999). Michael Carneal tested with a 120 intelligence quotient but had grades that fluctuated (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). Kipland Kinkel maintained adequate grades but his teachers noted that he didn't devote himself to his studies (Moffatt, 2000). A teacher of Jeff Weise stated that he wasn't performing in school and he didn't graduate from the eighth grade but postings on the internet revealed a different side (Harden & Hedgpeth, 2005). Weise's internet postings revealed a boy who, according to Hanners (2005), was "articulate, creative, [and] thoughtful" (para 18). Mitchell Johnson of Jonesboro was described as a keen student who mostly achieved A's and B's where his shooting partner, Andrew Golden, did not apply himself and achieved average grades (Moore et al., 2003). The range of academic ability of school shooters does vary from an A student to failing, but when looking at the majority, most showed around average ability or intellect (Bender et al., 2001; Chicago Sun-Times, 2000; Kidd & Meyer, 2002).

Researchers point out that access to firearms was a predictor in the majority of the school shooting cases. Kidd and Meyer (2002) noted that out of the seven incidents reviewed, three had the characteristic of the murder weapons being owned by a family member. Firearms may be viewed as an easy way to gain respect by youth. Youth may

use the presence of guns as a way to gain respect and when that respect is not gained, they may turn to violence to gain that respect through homicide (Kidd & Meyer, 2002).

Klebold and Harris of the Columbine shootings gained access to their weapons through friends and acquaintances (Gibbs et al., 1999). The shooters used two types of guns in their assault. One of the shooters carried an assault weapon, TEC-9 pistol, which was purchased from an individual for \$500. Three other rifles were obtained by Dylan Klebold's adult girlfriend, who could legally purchase such firearms (Moffatt, 2000). In the videotapes left by the killers, Harris and Klebold protect the people who got them the weapons proclaiming they knew not of the intention and inferred that they would have been able to obtain firearms no matter the obstacle (Gibbs et al., 1999). In this case, the Columbine shooters had to work to gain access to guns where others in this study obtained the access in their own home.

Kipland Kinkel received a handgun and a .22 rifle as a gift from his hesitant father (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000; Mosely, 1998). Kip's fascination with firearms concerned his father and Mr. Kinkel gave in to his son's request for a gun figuring that if he introduced his son to guns under supervision, he would learn responsibility and the mystique of firearms would diminish (Moffatt, 2000; Mosely, 1998). Bill Kinkel's attempts to demystify guns to his son failed, and Kip was caught with a sawed off shotgun and a small caliber pistol in his room. Kip told his father that he bought the guns at school for a mere \$100 (Moffatt, 2000). A day before the shooting, the Thurston High shooter was caught at school with a stolen small caliber handgun leading to a suspension and arrest (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000). Even after being caught by his father with guns in his room and incarcerated for a stolen weapon, Kipland was still able to

access his gifted handgun, which he used to murder his father, and a .22 rifle, along with another pistol and two knives for his onslaught at Thurston High School (Kidd & Meyer 2002; Moffatt, 2000).

Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shooting obtained their weapons from their immediate and extended families. Golden's family was steeped in hunting and shooting, with his father being a pistol enthusiast and an avid hunter and his grandfather a collector of firearms (Moore et al., 2003; Moffatt, 2000). When the boys first put their plan into motion, they could not break into a gun safe at the Golden's home but gathered the unsecured weapons and traveled to Golden's grandfather's. They broke into Andrew's grandparents' home and were able to amass an arsenal of guns and ammunition for their ambush at Westside Middle School.

Jeff Weise used a .22 caliber rifle to kill his grandfather and his grandfather's companion the morning of the Red Lake tragedy. After analyzing evidence, investigators surmised that Weise had possession of the rifle one year before the shooting (Rosario, 2006). After the first two murders, Weise took his grandfather's 12 gauge shotgun and police issue .40 caliber pistol (Haga, 2005; Rosario, 2006). Along with the two weapons, the shooter also stole his grandfather's bullet proof vest and stole his police vehicle and drove to the Red Lake High School.

The other shooter who stole his fire power was Michael Carneal. Carneal stole a total of seven guns from his father and a neighbor, including the .22 pistol that he used in the shootings (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffatt, 2000; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). Michael collected these weapons days before he opened fire at a prayer group at Heath High School although the only weapon used to kill was the .22 pistol.

Throughout the research it is unclear where Luke Woodham, from Pearl, Mississippi, obtained the hunting rifle. Verlinden et al. (2000) reported that one of Woodham's friends boasted easy access to assault weapons but most sources describe the weapon as a .30.30 deer rifle. The .30.30 was the only firearm used in the shooting.

A troubled youth sometimes walks a fine line between being in control of himself or erupting into a tirade. A single event might be the antecedent to induce a flare-up of unacceptable behavior. Kidd and Meyer (2002) make the point that an "experience of loss or perceived failure may have been a breaking point for adolescents who were already experiencing significant emotional distress caused by other rejections or failures, lack of social support and inadequate coping skills" (para 29). Examples provided by Kidd and Meyer (2002) included divorce, school suspension, and a break up with a girlfriend.

The most glaring example of this is Kipland Kinkel. Kinkel was caught with a stolen handgun in his locker and was arrested, along with being suspended from school. He expressed to a friend in a phone conversation in between the killings of his father and mother that he "felt his life was over," and he considered killing himself while he waited for his father to pick him up from jail (Moffatt, 2000, p. 130). The day after killing his father and mother, Kinkel killed four students of Thurston High School.

Eric Harris, of the Columbine shooting, had multiple disappointments in the weeks leading to April 20, 1999. It was the spring of Harris' senior year and he was yet to be accepted by any colleges and, five days before the shooting, he was rejected by the Marine Corps (Briggs & Blevins, 1999; Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). There was a discrepancy between his application and an interview with his parents that led to

the rejection. His parents reported that he was taking luvox, a psychotropic medicine, for depression and Eric stated on his Marine application that he was not on any medication (Verlinden et al., 2000). Harris might have also been scorned by a female leading up to the attack. The prom occurred three days before the attack and while Harris' partner, Dylan Klebold, had a date, Eric did not and was recently denied by a female classmate (Briggs & Blevin, 1999; Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffatt, 2000).

Luke Woodham experienced a similar situation with the opposite sex. Woodham dated a girl from his school for less than a month a year prior to the shooting (Moffatt, 2000). One author stated that Woodham "fell hard for [Christina] Menefee" (Kiely, 2002, para 25). Testimony from Woodham's trial stated that one reason for the school shooting was because of a breakup with his girlfriend (Sullivan, 1998). Christina Menefee was one of the two student victims, both of which were females. There is also mention that one of the Jonesboro shooters also was scorned by a girlfriend. Mitchell Johnson reportedly threatened to shoot his ex-girlfriend and then turn the gun on the school for their breakup (Moffatt, 2000). This breakup took place approximately two weeks before the shooting (Moore et al., 2003).

Jeffery Weise lived on Red Lake Reservation with his grandmother, who was recently separated from Weise's grandfather. Authorities are hypothesizing a year after the shooting that the split between the grandparents was a catalyst for the shooting (Rosario, 2006). Weise's first victims were his grandfather and the younger companion.

Behavior

In a study done by Anderson, Kaufman, Simon, Barrios, Paulozzi, and Hammond (2001) on school-associated deaths in the United States, it was reported that in over half

of the incidents studied between 1994 and 1999, there was some type of indicator made by the perpetrator prior to the violent act. Anderson et al. (2001) also reported that in one third of the incidents examined, there were threats made by the perpetrator. Kidd and Meyer (2002) conducted a study of six rural school shootings from 1996 to 1999 involving eight offenders and results showed that seven of the eight perpetrators made threats before committing homicide inside their respected schools. These threats ranged from very specific to ambiguous.

Eric Harris, one of the two shooters of Columbine, reportedly had a personal website that contained numerous graphic threats and information about his homemade pipe bombs (Chicago Sun-Times, 2000; Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffatt, 2000). The website was first discovered and reported to authorities when Harris had an altercation with a fellow student named Brooks Brown. Brooks Brown was tipped off to Harris' website by Dylan Klebold who gave Brooks the web address and told Brooks to go and look at it (Gibbs et al., 1999). Brooks then brought it to the attention of his parents as Brooks was specifically mentioned in the violent ramblings and bomb making instructions (Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffatt, 2000). The Browns reported the website to the Sheriff but to no avail, as the sheriff's office could legally do little to stifle Harris' online writings (Moffatt, 2000). Although the Browns could not get the website deleted, they kept in contact with the police about their complaint, warned neighbors about Harris and Klebold, and filed a complaint with America Online, who supported Harris' website (Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffatt, 2000).

Jeff Weise's plan to shoot up his high school wasn't a secret. Investigators informed relatives of victims that nearly 40 individual classmates had known about

Weise's intentions (Lee, 2006). Early reports just days after the shooting state that classmates remember the Red Lake shooter talking about plans to target the school and making a reference to "shooting up the school" (Haga et al., 2005; Hanners, 2005). The individuals who were privy to Weise's plan didn't take him seriously and failed to alert authorities (Hanners, 2005).

Luke Woodham's close circle of friends was aware of his violent intention for his mother and his school. His friends not only knew of his intentions but were also supportive (Verlinden et al., 2000). Although word of Luke's violent goals did not stray far from his close friends, it wasn't Luke's personal secret.

In Pudacah, Kentucky, Michael Carneal was frank about his intentions to certain students. The week before the morning shootings, he warned some of his acquaintances to avoid the lobby on Monday morning (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). He told others that Monday "something big was going to happen" (Moore et al., 2003, p. 140). Newman et al. (2005) states that "it [was] very clear that a lot of people heard Michael talk in vague terms about how Monday would be the big day' (p 31). Even years before the shooting, Michael had vengeance on his mind for his maltreatment and discussed it with his friends. Verlinden et al. (2000) state that "Michael and his friends had talked for years about one day 'taking over the school' with guns" (p. 33).

Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden were talking with their friends about plans for a shooting at Westside Middle School and making vague threats months prior to bringing their plans to fruition (Moore et al., 2003). What was first casual talk between the adolescents soon turned into the real deal. During Westside's spring break, Mitchell

showed a hit list to his friend, Chris Jackson, that contained staff and students' names from the school (Newman et al., 2005). Threats about killing students were reported from nearly the beginning of the 1997-1998 school year. One student testified that he heard Golden say that he was going to bring guns to school and shoot people in October of 1997 (Moore et al., 2003). The student then reportedly told his parents who then contacted the middle school. Andrew was questioned about the threats and he replied that he was only kidding. Andrew's parents were contacted and notified about the situation (Moore et al., 2003).

Kipland Kinkel also let his intentions be known. Kinkel made it no secret that he was fascinated with guns and explosives, prompting a fellow classmate to ask about his obsession. According to Moffatt (2000), Kinkel replied, "Because when I snap, I want to have all the firepower I can" (p. 128). Moffatt (2000) also points out that a peer of Kinkel's stated that Kinkel "talked 'way too much about killing'" (p. 128). "Kip had shared with classmates the details of his plan to bring a gun to school and shoot people, but they did not take his talk seriously" (Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 38).

There is conflicting information on previous violent behavior of school shooters. Kidd and Meyer (2002) pointed out that seven of the eight perpetrators examined in their study had a history of violent behavior. Episodes of violence were reportedly comprised of fighting in school, possession of a weapon on school grounds, harming or killing animals, or police contact for aggressive behavior. It was pointed out, however, that these violent acts may be the result of the offending students protecting themselves from aggression from their peers (Kidd & Meyer, 2002). Comparatively, Bender et al. (2001) noted that some school shooters go unnoticed to school staff because of their lack of

explicit conduct issues. The authors reasoned that school shooters “have internalized their aggression to such an extent that an explosion of violence is the result” (Bender et al., 2001, p. 107). This explosion of violence is a demonstration of power in the school environment where these students might have previously felt powerless.

The violent history of Luke Woodham is disturbing due to his torture and killing of his dog, Sparkles (Moffatt 2000; Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Verlinden et al., 2000). Moffatt (2000) describes a passage in Luke’s personal journal that the death of his dog was his first murder. Luke and a friend beat the dog, burned it with lighter fluid, and threw it in the lake (Moffatt, 2000). Kidd and Meyer (2002) along with Moffatt (2000) included excerpts from Woodham’s diary that glorified the killing and expressed the fun they had killing the dog. There is conflicting evidence on Luke’s violence in school. Kidd and Meyer (2002) stake claim that Luke was involved in numerous physical altercations at school. Moffatt’s (2000) description of Woodham is that he was a “quiet boy who just absorbed the insults, never responding” (p. 119). Verlinden et al. (2000) follow suit with Woodham being described as “a target of teasing by peers, but was not known for fighting back” and “[Woodham] did not display a high frequency of aggression” (p. 31).

Michal Carneal does not have an extensive school history of violence either. In 71 days of Carneal’s high school education, the school sought disciplinary actions five times, all for minor infractions (Moore et al., 2003). Michael was not labeled a violent student (Verlinden et al., 2000). West Paducah, Kentucky’s Heath High School Principal stated that Carneal was “very intelligent and had never been suspended” (Moffatt, 2000, p. 116), although not reported to or discovered by school officials was an account where

“Carneal threatened two boys with a handgun after the boys threatened to beat him up” (Kidd & Meyer, 2002, para 17). Classmates also reported that “[Carneal] had taken fish out of a fish tank and stomped on them” (Moore et al., 2003, p. 138). With the low profile Michael kept in school, the school staff who knew him were stunned when they found out he was the perpetrator of three student deaths (Moore et al., 2003).

The Columbine shooters were not known for their violent history, at least not in their high school. Although they were outcasts and picked on, there is little reference to violence in school besides violent threats and the shooting. There are reports that both Harris and Klebold were in repeated fights in the community and they had gloated to their friends about animal mutilation (Verlinden et al., 2000).

Mitchell Johnson wasn't considered a serious trouble maker in school but was noted to have a few physical outbursts. Mitchell once got angry and punched a thermostat in the school hallway, smashing the case (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). Johnson decided one day to wear a baseball hat in school, which was against the rules. When confronted by a teacher to take it off, he refused. The situation escalated to the point where two teachers had to physically take the hat away from him (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). The most notable incident of physical abuse was Mitchell being accused of sexually touching a two year old girl (Moore et al., 2003; Moffatt, 2000; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). Mitchell was charged in juvenile court for the incident the summer before the Jonesboro, Arkansas shooting (Moore et al., 2003). The incident happened when Mitchell was visiting his father for the summer in Minnesota. When he returned to Arkansas in the fall, his mother had him see a

psychologist who remarked that it was most likely a one time affair (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005).

Mitchell Johnson's partner in crime, Andrew Golden, also displayed violent behavior although not much at Westside Middle School. There are reports of him hitting boys in the back of the head and messing up his female classmate's hair in class but these actions were considered trivial (Newman et al., 2005). Golden's neighbors cite that Andrew had a tendency to pick on the smaller girls in the community and was noted for hitting them (Verlinden et al., 2000). According to Kidd and Meyer (2002), Golden was kicked out of daycare for fighting. The most disturbing of Golden's violent behavior is reported animal cruelty (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). It seems as if he had a hatred for cats. Children in the neighborhood told their parents that they saw Golden "shove the heads of kittens through a chain link fence" (Newman et al., 2005, p 40). There was also speculation that Golden had starved to death a cat or cats in a barrel (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). In conversations with a jailor where Andrew was serving his sentence, he glorified his shooting and killing of cats (Newman et al., 2005).

Jeff Weise came from a violent family environment but there is little documentation that suggests a history of violent behavior on his part. Five weeks before March 21, 2005, Weise stopped attending classes at Red Lake High School (Hanners, 2005). A report two days after the shooting states that Weise was expelled from school for "violating school rules" (Gunderson, 2005, para 3).

Kipland Kinkel didn't have an extensive history of violent behavior prior to being suspended for bringing a gun to school just before the shooting at Thurston High School

in Springfield, Oregon. One incident noted in an educational setting is Kinkel serving a suspension from his school for “karate kicking a boy in the head” in the seventh grade (Moffatt, 2000, p. 127). There is also no support for a violent history outside the school walls other than statements from his peers that he bragged about torturing and killing animals (Barnard, 1999; Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). While eye witness evidence is not available, these claims to animal torture could be faired as “just talk”, as it is also mentioned by Kinkel’s peers that he claimed to have “blown up a cow” (Moffatt, 2000, p. 128).

Researchers have also noted an obsession with violence with school shooters. This can include violent movies, video games, music, and books. Seven out of eight offenders investigated by Kidd and Meyer (2002) indicated an obsession with violent media. This obsession can also show up in the creative work of students. Poems, stories, homemade movies, and drawings of a violent nature have been a trade mark of several school shooting perpetrators. Kidd and Meyer (2002) also reported that six out of eight school shooters wrote about death and murder in coursework or in private entries.

Bill and Faith Kinkel noticed that their son had a fixation with “violence, expressing an interest in explosives, guns, and violent television” years before Kip killed two students at Thurston High School (Moffatt, 2000, p. 127). Kip’s fascination was well known to his immediate family and classmates but eluded school staff (Moffatt, 2000; Mortenson, 1999; Mosley, 1998). There is a report that Kinkel wrote in a journal for a literature class that he had plans to murder and gave a class presentation on bomb making (Barnard, 1999; Verlinden et al., 2000). Kinkel’s sister was open about her brother’s

obsession with firearms and explosives after the murders by saying that he had plans one day to be on a bomb squad (Mortenson, 1999).

A window into Michael Carneal's world was a story discovered post shooting. The story was written for an English class and was named "The Halloween Surprise" (Newman et al., 2005). Carneal authored a story with the main character named after himself who was teased by his peers (Moffatt, 2000; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). The story ended with the antagonists being murdered by the main character and his brother using a multitude of guns (Moffatt, 2000; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). The story was very graphic and detailed but the English teacher never reported this story to anyone (Newman et al., 2005). Newman et al. (2000) also suggest there were other school assignments by Carneal suggesting suicidal tendencies. During the investigation after the shooting, Michael mentions the movie *The Basketball Diaries*, where a school shooting is depicted, as inspiration for his actions (Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000).

Jeff Wiese showed his creative side in violent drawings and writings. Classmates pointed out Wiese's violent and disturbing art by recalling his artistic renditions of war, violence, and murder in newspaper interviews before the murders (Haga et al., 2005; Hanners, 2005; Harden & Hedgpeth, 2005). Wiese's ability to write made him at home online. In the investigations after the shooting, Wiese was traced to numerous online journals, website postings, and personal websites (Haga et al., 2005; Hanners, 2005; Harden & Hedgpeth, 2005; Gregory, 2005). York (2005) makes reference to an animation reportedly created and uploaded to the internet by Wiese. This Flash

animation is named “Target Practice”; it depicts a figure shooting four figures, blowing up a police car, and then turning the gun on himself (York, 2005).

Harris and Klebold, the Columbine shooters, were fans of violent video games and referred to the ultra-violent video game “Doom” in the video tapes made by the boys before the killing (Gibbs et al., 1999; Kidd & Meyer, 2002). In an essay written by Harris, he explains that Doom is very important to him and revels at his expertise in playing the game (Vaughn et al., 2006). Both Columbine shooters were responsible for writing violence themed essays, poems, and stories, ranging from Nazi glorification to a first person view of being a shotgun shell (Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffat, 2000; Vaughn et al., 2006). The graphic nature of the boys’ written work disturbed an English teacher so much that the teacher spoke with the boys’ parents and got the school counselor involved (Moffat, 2000). According to Moffat (2000), the school counselor minimized the importance of the violent text after speaking with the father, and the counselor didn’t seek further action. Along with the violent prose, Klebold and Harris produced violent homemade videos with them as the protagonists. In one ironic story line, Klebold and Harris play vigilantes protecting a picked on student from bullies (Abbott, 2004). The same video, which was created for a class assignment, eerily show the Columbine shooters in theatrical poses with toy guns in school halls (Abbott, 2004; Moffat; 2000). The videos made for school were not the only visually recorded violence the shooters left behind. They made their intentions clear in five video tapes that were recovered after the shootings. Content within the five tapes show the boys outlining and giving rationale for the shootings, apologizing to their families, practicing drawing and shooting their

weapons, and fantasizing about the day of the planned attack (Abbott, 2004; Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffat, 2000).

Although not as significantly noted as the Columbine shooters, the Jonesboro shooters, Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden had a taste for violent material. Johnson frequently listened to and recited lyrics from violent hip-hop music (Verlinden et al., 2000). While Verlinden et al. (2000) didn't state specifics regarding Golden's violent likes, it was noted that both Golden and Johnson "were fascinated with weapons and violence" (p. 36).

Luke Woodham's fascination with violence embodied itself in his public proclamation of "praising Hitler and espousing Satanic worship" (Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 32). Verlinden et al. (2000) also suggest that he and his small peer group played violent video games and talked extensively about violence. Woodham's interest in violence was emphasized by his peer group.

Relationships

It appears that the relationships that the accused school shooters possess are a key factor in their willingness to commit homicide. There has been an increased awareness of bullying in recent years, which could be accounted for by high profile school shootings. Once a student starts getting rejected by his/her peers, he/she maybe in trouble in terms of the potential for failure at social skills necessary to function successfully in our social world.

There appears to be consistency in the type of relationships that school shooters have within the school walls. Most appear to be alienated, bullied, or rejected. When studying school shootings in Colorado and Georgia, Bender et al. (2001) cited that the

offenders all were apt to be the victims of bullying. In a study done by Anderson et al. (2001), there is strong evidence to suggest that there is a link between bullying, victimization, and aggressive behavior. Kidd and Meyer (2002) found that six out of the eight perpetrators investigated possessed a feeling of rejection by their peers.

If school shooters aren't completely alienated from the rest of their classmates, they usually have a small group of friends. Even with a small group of friends, the school shooters might be encouraged to violence by their acquaintances. This is usually because this subgroup is treated the same way as the school shooter.

Sources indicate that Luke Woodham was rejected and ridiculed by his peers (Branan, 1999; Kiely, 2002; Kidd & Meyer, 2000; Moffatt, 2000; Sullivan, 1998; Verlinden et al., 2000). Even though Woodham was an outcast, he did have a small group of what he considered as friends and, for a brief period of time, a girlfriend (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Moffat, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). The relationship with this female lasted only weeks and after the break up, Luke began associating with a subgroup of outcasts that thought of themselves as Satanists (Branan, 1999; Kiely, 2002; Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). Kidd and Meyer (2000) and Sullivan (1998) report that the influence of this group, especially the perceived leader, had a great effect on Woodham and fueled his anger against the individuals who had hurt him. Woodham even stated in court that he was ordered to commit murder by the subgroup's leader (Sullivan, 1998).

There are two stories behind Michael Carneal's relationships outside of his family before the shooting. Shortly before committing murder in West Paducah, Kentucky, Michael Carneal was not a loner and sometimes fit the role of a bully in his school by teasing and ridiculing members of a school prayer group (Verlinden et al., 2000).

Carneal gravitated toward the Heath High School “Goths” once becoming a freshman and this may explain the teasing delivered to the prayer group (Moffatt, 2000; Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). In findings after the shooting, Carneal was considered a friend by his fellow students outside of the Goth group (Moore et al., 2003). While there are reports of Carneal delivering harassment to other students, there is information that reflects bullying and alienation from his peers (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). A noted incident involved a statement about Carneal’s sexual orientation in the gossip column of the school newspaper which led to an enormous amount of teasing (Moffatt, 2000; Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). Although he was not completely shunned by his peers, he struggled to find a group to call his own which may have made Carneal feel alone (Moore et al., 2003).

In one report, Kip Kinkel seemed a socialite at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon. He was well liked by some of the females at school and was said to have normal friendships (Moffatt, 2000). He was part of the football team and was interested in sports. His friendships were secure enough that after the shootings, friends can recall both his charming side and his problems with authority (Moffatt, 2000). Kinkel’s stints on the wrong side of the law, besides the shooting, were perpetrated with friends. Verlinden et al (2000) found that Kinkel was introverted but sometimes resorted to classroom antics to draw attention to himself.

The sixth grader, Andrew Golden, was not a loner but also wasn’t the most popular kid in school. On school grounds, Andrew was not found to be a bully but after the school day, Golden seemed to have had a mean streak. Golden was reported to have

used foul language around and threatened his peers and some children in his neighborhood were forbidden to play with him (Moore et al., 2003; Verlinden et al., 2000).

The other half of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shooting, Mitchell Johnson, had normal relationships within school. It cannot be said that Johnson was picked on excessively by his peers. He had sleepovers and had a girlfriend (Newman et al., 2005). There is some evidence, however, that Mitchell was a bit of a bully (Moore et al., 2003; Verlinden et al., 2000). In an ironic twist, this pair of perpetrators was not considered to be close friends prior to the shooting (Moffatt, 2003; Moore et al., 2003).

The Columbine shooters were notoriously bullied and alienated from the “popular” students. “Both Eric and Dylan have been described as outsiders who were pushed to the fringe of high school society” (Verlinden et al., 2000, p 40). The shooters did find companionship in a small group of friends who experienced the same alienation (Gibbs et al., 1999; Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). The athletes at Columbine High School were Eric and Dylan’s worst enemies and they were consistently harassed by them. The shooters were so deeply affected by this bullying that Harris and Klebold especially targeted the school’s athletes and taunted victims before firing at them at close range (Gibbs et al., 1999; Kidd & Meyer, 2002).

Jeff Weise seems to fit in the category of being a loner. In interviews after the shooting, his peers recollected that he had very few friends and was teased (Gunderson, 2005; Haga et al., 2005). When Weise was young, a relative recalled that he would play alone or shut himself in his room when other children were around (Haga et al., 2005). Some of Weise’s fellow students did make comments referring to Weise as quiet, polite,

and a “good guy” (Gunderson, 2005; Haga et al., 2005). “On a sparsely populated reservation where everybody knows everybody, few seemed to know Weise and fewer still claimed to know him well” (Haga et al., 2005, para 4). This would also hold true for Weise’s relationships with non familial adults. Teachers and family friends can’t recall seeing or hearing much of Weise from early childhood to his teen years (Haga et al., 2005).

School shooters are seemingly disassociated with adults in their lives, including their families, which will be discussed later in this paper. William Glasser (2000) pointed out that those violent students involved in school shootings are deficient in solid relationships with compassionate, caring adults. The violent actions of school shooters can be considered a cry for attention from adults.

Information obtained regarding the shooter’s relationships with non-familial adults show mixed results. The Jonesboro shooters, Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, had no close relationships with adults outside the immediate family (Moore et al., 2003). As stated earlier, Wiese was nearly unknown in his community. Littleton, Colorado citizens noted that “[Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold] were quiet and no trouble” (Moffatt, 2000, p. 138). Information suggests that Kip Kinkel and Michael Carneal were liked by their teachers (Moore et al., 2003; Moffatt, 2000). One can only speculate how deep those outside relationships were from the information gleaned on the shooters.

Family Dynamics

When an outsider studies the events leading up to a school shooting, he/she may ask themselves why the parents didn’t intervene. Or at the very least, why didn’t the

parents have a clue what was going on? The majority of school shooters didn't have close relationships with their family.

Kidd and Meyer (2002) note that the majority of school shooters had little if any emotional support from their parents. Bender et al. (2001) pointed out that of the two school shootings they investigated, the shooters were "almost totally dissociated from friends and family" (p. 107). This point was also supported by Glasser's (2000) statement about lack of connection with adults. Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, and Vernberg (2002) stated that the majority of school shooting perpetrators were products of intact families that were deficient in "emotional closeness and intimacy" (p. 477).

Harris and Klebold are great examples of their disconnection from their families. Klebold recalled a time when his parents entered his room while he was wearing his black trench coat with a firearm hidden underneath (Gibbs et al., 1999). Klebold boasted in one of his homemade videos that his parents didn't even notice the gun was there. Harris also recounted a close call where his mother noticed a gun handle sticking out of one of his gym bags and she assumed it was a BB gun (Gibbs et al., 1999). Both sets of parents were married. Harris' came from a military family who moved quite frequently (Verlinden et al., 2000). In a release of Wayne Harris' journal, Eric's father expressed private struggles with his son's behavior, sometimes enabling and sometimes pleading with his son (Vaughn et al., 2006). The Klebolds were described by some Littleton, Colorado parents as caring and engaged in their son's life (Gibbs et al., 1999). The video tapes made by the shooters captured some emotion and attachment to their parents while saying their goodbyes. Both Harris and Klebold displayed remorse and empathy for the trouble the boys know they are going to cause them and Klebold expresses that he

appreciated his parents and thought they were good to him (Gibbs et al., 1999). But from the weapons the boys collected and the in depth planning they conducted, there appears to be a definite deficiency of parental control (Verlinden et al., 2000).

Luke Woodham was forced to deal with his father leaving the home when he was in his early elementary school years and a subsequent divorce that followed (Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). It appears that Woodham's father wasn't present for the majority of Woodham's years before the shooting. Woodham's relationship with his mother seemed to be strained. There is evidence that there was a lack of care from Woodham's mother but there are also reports that she acted toward Luke in a domineering manner. An example of Woodham's mother's dominance is her chaperoning him on some of his dates as a teenager (Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). Woodham self reported that his mother was not there for him, that she blamed him for everything, and that she didn't love him (Verlinden et al., 2000).

Michael Carneal didn't come from a broken home. In the year of the shooting at Heath High School, the Carneals celebrated their 26th wedding anniversary (Newman et al., 2005). By most accounts, the Carneals seemed like loving and caring parents. They frequently ate meals together, invited their children's friends over, took family vacations, and were involved in their children's lives at school (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000). Michael's father was a lawyer in West Paducah who earned enough to have Michael's mother be a stay at home mother. His mother also had completed some post graduate work (Moore et al., 2003). Reports suggest that Carneal was not emotionally close to his father but another family stressor seemed to haunt Michael (Verlinden et al., 2000). Michael did have an older sister who achieved both

academically and socially and there seemed to be a definite sibling rivalry between them (Moffatt, 2000; Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005; Verlinden et al., 2000).

Michael could never quite measure up to his sister and this seemed to bother him immensely.

The pair of shooters from Jonesboro, Kentucky came from different family relationships. Andrew Golden came from an intact family that were life long residents of Jonesboro. Andrew's parents and grandparents were involved in his life but possibly to the point where Andrew was overly protected and spoiled. The public belief of Andrew and his family was that "he was overindulged and rarely subject to discipline" (Newman et al., 2005, p. 40). Golden's family was not around him all of the time, and he had a considerable parts of the day where he was left alone and unsupervised (Moore et al., 2003; Verlinden et al., 2000). The dynamics in Mitchell Johnson's household were not as close knit as his partner's. Mitchell's mother was married once before he was fathered by her second husband. Mitchell's biological father reportedly had a temper and was known to yell a lot at his son's (Moore et al., 2003). His parents went through a troubling divorce when Mitchell was eight that led to family relocation and Mitchell and his younger brother had to stay with their grandmother for a period of months while the custody battle raged in Minnesota courts (Moore et al., 2003; Verlinden et al., 2000). When Mitchell, his mother, and his brother moved to Arkansas, his mother married a former inmate she worked with when she was a corrections officer in Minnesota (Verlinden et al., 2000). It appeared that he got along with his stepfather and his mother stated that the period after her marriage to her third husband was the "happiest they have ever been" (Moffatt, 2000, p. 123). But the damage was most likely already done.

“Mitchell’s family life was characterized by a history of conflict, parental antisocial behavior, and inconsistent supervision and support” (Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 35).

Kipland Kinkel’s parents were happily married teachers who put time, love, and effort into their children. The family spent quality time together doing “normal” family things. He had an older sister who thrived academically and socially (Moffatt, 2000). Although his sister was successful, she reports that her parents treated them equally and didn’t hold Kip up to her standards (Mortenson, 1999). Kip, who shot and killed both of his parents, didn’t have a solid relationship with his father. When Kip started attending psychotherapy, the therapist suggested to the family that Bill Kinkel, Kipland’s father, take it easy on him (Koch, 2000). Family friends and community members recall that Bill Kinkel discussed his relationship with his son and said that he was never fully able to relate to Kip and get emotionally close with him (Verlinden et al., 2000).

Jeff Weise’s parents were never married and he spent the beginning part of his life floating around from Minneapolis, to the suburbs of the Twin Cities, and the Red Lake Reservation, located in the northwestern corner of Minnesota. His father committed suicide by shooting himself in the chest in 1997 after a standoff with Red Lake Reservation Police (Haga et al., 2005; Hanners, 2005). His mother suffered a traumatic brain injury in 1999 that left her in an assisted living facility (Hanners, 2005). Weise returned to the Red Lake Reservation in 2000 and lived with his grandparents. When Jeff was living with his mother, who was an alcoholic, he wasn’t treated very well by her or her boyfriends (Harden & Hedgpeth, 2005). Weise’s grandparents were also separated, and Jeff killed his grandfather and his grandfather’s companion before terrorizing his school. To say the least, there was barely a stable family figure in Jeff’s family.

Mental Health

There can be a knee jerk reaction from the public when news of a school shooting hits the media. The automatic thinking is that there must be something mentally wrong with the perpetrator to unleash a killing spree inside the walls of a school. One might also think that poor mental health or illness could be a solid predictor of violence. This is not always true. One issue with using mental illness as a predictor of violence hedges on the notion that “violent events are often precipitating events for hospitalization” (Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 6). Unstable or impulsive behavior may also be a catalyst for a look further into possible mental health issues. If there isn’t any manifestation of symptoms, mental health issues can be overlooked until it is too late.

The Jonesboro shooters, Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, had little to no previous history of any mental health issues. There were psychological evaluations completed on both boys after the shootings but the results were sealed due to the individuals being juveniles (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). There were some hearsay reports of Golden torturing animals which is a sign of antisocial behavior. Mitchell Johnson was charged with child molestation in Minnesota the summer before the shooting. While visiting his father, Mitchell “was caught with his pants down while changing the diaper of a two year old girl” (Newman et al., 2005, p. 38). After the shooting, it was admitted by Mitchell that he was sexually molested by an older male in his neighborhood, which could have been a precursor to the event leading up to his conviction of child molestation. After his conviction in Minnesota courts, Mitchell’s mother had him evaluated by a psychologist that presumed the diaper changing incident was “isolated” (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). Although information about a

concrete diagnosis of mental health issues could not be found, there are events that could suggest there may have been some trouble in the emotional areas of both Johnson and Golden.

Another case of mental health issues after the fact is the West Paducah shooting. Michael Carneal was not diagnosed with any mental health issues before the shooting but did display some minor symptoms. “Michael was described by [his] peers and former teachers as somewhat impulsive, [nervous], and [restless]” (Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 33). There was also a history of paternal mental illness (Newman et al., 2005). After the shooting, Michael was diagnosed with dysthymia and schizophrenia (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2005). Some odd behaviors that came to light after the shooting were paranoia that people were looking at him through air ducts, using multiple towels to cover himself and the air ducts in the bathroom after he was done using the shower, and being scared of eating in restaurants because he feared his family would be stolen from (Moore et al., 2003). “[Michael] never told his family about his fears because he knew them to be unreasonable” (Moore et al., 2003, p. 150). While in prison, Michael developed severe psychosis after the Columbine shootings and blamed himself for Klebold and Harris’ actions (Moore et al., 2003).

Other than the brutal killing of his dog, Luke Woodham’s mental health issues were not noted until his trial for the murder of his mother, ex-girlfriend, and female peer. During his trial, he made note that he was seeing demons that encouraged him to kill those who have wronged him (Moffatt, 2000). A forensic psychologist noted for the defense that “In July 1997, Luke Woodham started seeing 8-foot-tall demons, red-cloaked with glowing eyes, that appeared slumped over, spikes on their head, no hair on

their blue skin, while others looked like angels” (Kiely, 2002, para 33). The prosecution noted that the demons were invented by Woodham and two psychiatrists for the prosecution reported that Luke “suffered from little more than a narcissistic personality trait, not a full blown mental illness or defect that would exempt him from responsibility for his actions” (Sullivan, 1998, para. 29).

Only one of the Columbine shooters, Eric Harris, was diagnosed with a mental health issue prior to the shooting. He was prescribed the antidepressant Luvox, which he stopped taking before the shooting in an attempt to become angrier (Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). After the shooting it was discovered that Dillon Klebold had suicidal ideation two years prior to the shooting (Vaughan et al., 2006). This was discovered in a personal journal that Dillon kept prior to the shootings and released to the public in 2006.

Kipland Kinkel’s parents were desperate to find solutions to his adversarial behavior. They took Kip to many different counselors/physicians to obtain a correct diagnosis and receive adequate help. Kip was labeled with hyperactivity and issued Ritalin but to no avail (Moffatt, 2000). He was also given Prozac when he was diagnosed with major depressive disorder but that also didn’t seem to work (Koch, 2000; Moffatt, 2000). Verlinden et al. (2000) noted that he was not on Prozac at the time of the shooting. After the shooting, classmates reported that he bragged about killing animals and gave them intricate details about dismembering them (Barnard, 1999; Moffatt, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). The defense for Kinkel’s case brought in a psychologist who noted that Kip heard voices and “showed symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia and the manic stage of bipolar disease” (Barnard, 1999, para 5).

There is little doubt that Jeff Weise had a troubled life that could have led to his depression. During an interview, one of his former teachers noted that he had been depressed since the eighth grade (Hanners, 2005). During the past school year, Weise left the reservation school due to severe depression that was enhanced by the torrid teasing he experienced (Harden & Hedgpath, 2005). Harden and Hedgpath (2005) note that exactly a month before Jeff went on his shooting spree, he had his prescription refilled with Prozac which he had been taking for around 10 months.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) states that cruelty to animals by children or adolescents fits the criteria for conduct disorders. This is important in this study as Luke Woodham, Michael Carneal, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Andrew Golden, and Kipland Kinkel all glorified some type of animal torture or killings. In a literature review, Schaefer, Hays, and Steiner (2007) report that “therapists should be concerned when they encounter clients who have been or who are currently abusing animals because these behaviors may indicate increased risk for other forms of violent behavior” (p. 531). Schaefer et al. (2007) also state that animal cruelty is a harbinger of a person’s “functioning and a means of identifying individuals at risk for committing other aggressive acts” (p. 531).

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

This chapter will include a summary of the main findings covered in the literature review in chapter two. The summary will be followed by a critical analysis of reviewed research. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for school personnel, especially school counselors, for identifying possible school shooters, violence prevention programs, and further research.

Summary

Trying to identify a potential school shooter is risky business. The characteristics described of the school shooting perpetrator appear to be all over the map. As stated earlier, the only consistent traits of school shooters in the last ten plus years were the making of threats, age, and gender. Any one of the characteristics described of the recent school shooters could apply to numerous teenagers. Yet, educators must be vigilant in their attempts to keep their school a safe and secure place.

Critical Analysis

There seems to be no set criteria or profile of school shooters. It is important to combine what is known currently about school shooting episodes from the past and apply it to what is happening in schools today. History can teach us about our future, but it must remain in context.

The area of demographics as it applies to this research yielded the most information but not the most consistent. Of the six shooting events and 8 total shooters, all were male. The age range spanned from eleven to eighteen, yielding seven out of eight shooters as teenagers. Ethnicity of the perpetrators was mainly Caucasian with Jeff Wiese being the lone exception.

Academic performance ranged from failure to high achievement. Seven out of eight shooters performed in the average or above range. As noted, school performance does not necessarily reflect intellectual ability. Jeff Weise is the exception once again. While his achievement in school was failing or near failing, he showed his intellectual prowess in his writings and the plans he put in place before the Red Lake shooting.

The shooters access to fire arms is the most inconsistent. Out of the six shooting episodes, two used stolen weapons, two owned the weapons, one bought the weapons through friends or acquaintances, and one is unknown how he obtained the weapon. This researcher could not find specific information on how or where Luke Woodham obtained the 30/30 hunting rifle he used in the Pearl, Mississippi shootings. There was reference that his group of friends had access to assault weapons but the weapon Luke used was not considered to be of the assault weapon type.

Five out of the eight school shooters had some type of tragic event that might have been an antecedent to their shooting spree. Three out of the eight shooters had a break up with a significant other near the time of their shootings. Eric Harris was not accepted by any colleges or universities, along with being denied by the Marine Corps and not having a date for prom that all took place a short time before the Columbine shootings that could have fueled his rage. Jeff Weise had several disappointments and hardships in his life but the most recent before the Red Lake shootings was the break up of his grandmother and grandfather, which was the most stable relationship he had been a part of in his life. According to the information obtained, the remaining three shooters did not show any evidence of an antecedent before their shootings.

Perhaps the most consistent area in this research was the perceived behaviors of the shooters. Out of the six incidents researched, all made threats of violence leading up to the shooting. The threats range from ambiguous to specific, but all suggested violence inside the school walls.

There is no evidence that a violent track record in school is a predictor of a school shooting. Out of the eight shooters looked at, none had a history of significant violence in school. Six out of the eight shooters had evidence of violence outside of the school that was discovered after the fact.

All of the shooters studied displayed an obsession or fixation with violence. The evidence manifested itself in the playing of violent video games, violence themed school assignments or personal writings, bragging about violent acts to classmates, and violence themed music. The majority of the obsession with violence came to light after the shootings took place.

The shooters' relationships with their peers ranged from being popular in the school, to a small group of friends, to being an outcast or a loner. Four out of the eight shooters showed strong evidence that they were bullied by their peers, while three out of the eight showed evidence that they may have been the aggressor in cases of bullying other students. Kipland Kinkel showed no evidence of either being bullied or being a bully himself, while Michael Carneal showed evidence of both being a bully and getting bullied himself.

In regards to the shooters relationships with adults outside of the family, five out of the eight perpetrators showed evidence of no significant relationships. Kipland Kinkel

and Michael Carneal showed evidence that they were known and liked by their teachers. The researched obtained on Luke Woodham was inconclusive.

Family dynamics focused on the perceived connectedness of the shooter to their immediate family and divorce or lack of relationship between biological parents. Seven out of the eight shooters showed evidence that there was a disconnect between family members with Andrew Golden being the lone exception. Three out of the eight shooters were products of a broken household.

Finally, the evidence of a mental health issue yielded five shooters out of eight. Three out of the five shooters had a diagnosis of a mental health issue before the shooting while two out of the five shooters were diagnosed sometime after the shooting. All of the shooters diagnosed with a mental health issue were diagnosed with some sort of a personality disorder. Reports of animal cruelty were apparent in six out of the eight shooters.

Recommendations

Besides having locked school entrances, metal detectors, and armed guards at schools entrances, school administrators and school personnel can implement internal and unobtrusive measures to enhance the safety of their students from targeted violence inside the school walls. School district administrators need to understand the importance of the safety of their students and the resources available to them from their own school personnel, particularly the school counselor. Administrators also need to realize that there is no simple answer to prevent such targeted violence in their schools and to allot the time and resources needed to avert such events.

Brunner and Lewis (2006) suggest that school districts “should establish a definition of what constitutes a serious threat of violence” (p. 34). Clearly defining what school staff should be aware of and report is the first obstacle to overcome. A suggested definition from Brunner and Lewis (2006) reads: “A serious threat of violence is any direct or indirect threat to cause injury that could permanently disable or result in the death of at least one person. [Additionally] a threat to bring any instrument of a lethal nature to school also constitutes a serious threat of violence” (p. 34). Once a definition is set in place, school personnel should be trained on what to look for, how to assess the threat or situation, and who to report it to. This training can be facilitated by both the school administrator and school counselor.

Due to personal experience in a post secondary educational setting, universities and colleges across the country have recently established teams of internal individuals who meet on a regular basis to evaluate, discuss, and determine services for students who might pose a threat to their personal safety or safety of the campus. A model of this sort can also be applied to a K-12 setting, being led by school administrators and school counselors. An important aspect to this model is having a properly trained individual to assess the immediate situation and determine if action needs to be taken immediately against a student who made a threat of violence.

School counselors can take advantage of assessment tools that have been developed specifically for targeted violence. Bernes and Bardick (2007) discuss assessment tools that can be used by school counselors. One assessment tool is the Structured Assessment of Violence and Risk in Youth, otherwise known as the SAVRY, that looks at the historical risk factors, social/contextual risk factors, individual risk

factors, and protective factors (Bernes & Bardick, 2007). Another assessment tool is labeled ACTION, which looks at attitudes towards violence, capacity for violence, thresholds previously reached, intentions of violence, outsiders reactions and responses, and noncompliance with interventions (Bernes & Bardick, 2007). With the inside information that school counselors can obtain and the establishment of personal relationships with students, assessment tools like the SAVRY and ACTION can be invaluable.

One of the most consistent traits that was discovered in the research was threats from the perpetrators prior to the shootings to their peers. School counselors can incorporate curriculum beginning at the elementary level that violent threats from peers is something that needs to be reported to an adult. Curriculum can be borrowed from previously created lessons or can be established by the school counselor based on the needs of the school district. Reporting violent threats can also be incorporated into previously established anti-bullying curriculum already in use in school districts.

Another consistent trait of the perpetrators researched was the absence of connections with caring adults. Once at risk students are identified, they may be paired with an adult mentor. In a study, conducted by Rollin, Kaiser-Ulrey, Potts, and Creason (2003) that researched the affects of students paired with adult mentors, it was found that “[mentored students] demonstrated a significant decrease, as compared to the control group, in [the] total number of in-school suspensions, total days of out-of-school suspensions, and number of infractions committed on school property” (p. 412). School counselors can advocate for or take the reins in developing a mentor program in their school district.

In conclusion, school counselors possess a unique position in their schools to advocate for and provide services for their students with respect to keeping them safe both inside and outside of the school's walls. Being alert to the subtle signs, as previously discussed in this research, can avert a tragic situation. Implementation of school wide curriculum and programs specifically related to bullying and targeted violence can provide a significant impact on prevention of targeted violence. Recommendations for further study include the efficacy of anti-bullying curriculum, bystander intervention, efficacy of school protocol for violence, and school staff knowledge of targeted violence and its warning signs.

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