Nils Böckler · Thorsten Seeger
Peter Sitzer · Wilhelm Heitmeyer *Editors*

School Shootings

International Research, Case Studies,
and Concepts for Prevention

Springer

School Shootings

Nils Böckler • Thorsten Seeger • Peter Sitzer
Wilhelm Heitmeyer
Editors

School Shootings

International Research, Case Studies,
and Concepts for Prevention

Editors

Nils Böckler
Institute for Interdisciplinary Research
    on Conflict and Violence
University of Bielefeld
Bielefeld, Germany

Thorsten Seeger
Institute for Interdisciplinary Research
    on Conflict and Violence
University of Bielefeld
Bielefeld, Germany

Peter Sitzer
Faculty of Educational Science
    and Institute for Interdisciplinary
    Research on Conflict and Violence
University of Bielefeld
Bielefeld, Germany

Wilhelm Heitmeyer
Faculty of Educational Science
    and Institute for Interdisciplinary
    Research on Conflict and Violence
University of Bielefeld
Bielefeld, Germany

Printed on acid-free paper

Preface

The subject of this volume is disturbing in several respects. Why do these mostly male adolescents extinguish the lives of others—fellow students, teachers, even police—in so extreme an act of armed violence?

Why does this occur in and around an institution that is supposed to be preparing young individuals for life in a competitive society, strengthening their personalities, and fostering peaceful coexistence among adolescents from different social milieus and ethnic groups?

And finally, can we successfully identify causes, remedies, and countermeasures with respect to warning signs and triggers? Can we pin down structure-changing concepts within the institution itself? Can we avoid pathologizing the perpetrators and stop isolating them from their surrounding social circumstances?

These are the underlying questions addressed by 31 international authors in 22 chapters in the four sections of this volume. The volume begins in Part I with theories, explanatory models, and empirical findings, which are deepened in Part II by various case studies. Part III addresses media and public reactions, and the volume ends in Part IV by examining a broad spectrum of opportunities for prevention and intervention, as well as their limitations.

In terms of its range of content and theoretical and empirical perspectives, the international overview provided by this volume is a novum.

My young colleagues Nils Böckler and Thorsten Seeger came up with the idea for the book in the course of their work on Germany and developed it into the published form in collaboration with Peter Sitzer.

We should like to extend our sincere thanks to all our contributing authors and reviewers, who required no great persuasion to participate.

And finally, our heartfelt thanks to our translator and copyeditor Meredith Dale, and to Katie Chabalko at Springer for her patience and encouragement throughout the entire preparatory phase.

Bielefeld, Germany   Wilhelm Heitmeyer

About the Editors

Nils Böckler is a member of the Group-focused Enmity graduate college which is funded by the German Research Foundation and associated with the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University. His PhD project (science of education) examines patterns of online hate and radicalization focusing primarily on adolescents.

Thorsten Seeger is a member of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University. Coming from a background in educational science, his main scholarly interests lie in the fields of traumatic childhood experiences, attachment theory, socialization, and violence research. He deepened his knowledge in psychoanalytic ideas and methods at the University of Vienna.

Peter Sitzer is member of the Faculty of Educational Science and associated with the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University. His main research interests are theories of socialization, youth violence, right-wing extremism, media and violence, and cyberbullying.

Wilhelm Heitmeyer is professor of socialization at the Faculty of Educational Science and director of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University. His research interests concentrate on violence, social disintegration, right-wing extremism, and ethnic-cultural conflicts. He edited the International Handbook of Violence Research (coedited with John Hagan), and is editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Conflict and Violence.

Contents

Contributors

Nils Böckler Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany

Rebecca Bondü Department for Psychology, University of Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany

Duncan Cartwright Centre for Applied Psychology, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa

Dewey G. Cornell Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

Jeffrey A. Daniels Department of Counseling, Rehabilitation Counseling and Counseling Psychology, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA

Camélia Dumitriu School of Business Science, University of Quebec, Montreal, QC, Canada

Jonathan Fast Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, New York, NY, USA

Marius Harring Institute for Educational Science, Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany

Wilhelm Heitmeyer Faculty of Educational Science and Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany

Jens Hoffmann Institute for Psychology and Threat Management, Darmstadt, Germany

Douglas Kellner Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Peter Langman Langman Psychological Associates, LLC, Allentown, PA, USA

Ralph W. Larkin Department of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York, New York, NY, USA

Vincenz Leuschner Department of Educational Science and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Jack Levin Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Eric Madfis Department of Social Work, University of Washington, Tacoma, WA, USA

Glenn W. Muschert Department of Sociology and Gerontology, Miami University, Oxford, OH, USA

Katherine S. Newman Zanvyl Krieger School of the Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA

Johanna Nurmi Department of Social Research, University of Turku, Helsinki, Finland

Atte Oksanen University of Turku & Finnish Youth Research Society, Helsinki, Finland

Mary Ellen O'Toole Behavioral Analysis Unit, Federal Bureau of Investigation (Retired), Quantico, VA, USA

Jonathan W. Page Department of Counseling, Rehabilitation Counseling and Counseling Psychology, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA

Pekka Räsänen Department of Social Research, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

Frank J. Robertz Institute for Violence Prevention and Applied Criminology, Berlin, Germany

Carsten Rohlfs Institute for Educational Science, University of Education Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

Karoline Roshdi Institute for Psychology and Threat Management, Darmstadt, Germany

Herbert Scheithauer Department of Educational Science and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Miriam Schroer-Hippel Department of Educational Science and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Thorsten Seeger Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany

Peter Sitzer Faculty of Educational Science and Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany

Miika Vuori Department of Social Research, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

Chapter 1
School Shootings: Conceptual Framework and International Empirical Trends

Nils Böckler, Thorsten Seeger, Peter Sitzer, and Wilhelm Heitmeyer

School shootings shock, disturb, and provoke enormous and controversial debate. The stories of perpetrators and victims cause huge public and media resonance, becoming the subject of intense discussion in political debates, pop culture, and scientific research, as well as among numerous adolescents in the Web 2.0 (Moore et al. 2003; Webber 2003; Muschert 2007; Kellner 2008; Böckler and Seeger 2010; Sumiala and Tikka 2010; Lindgren 2011).

Some time ago Harding et al. (2002) listed the many diverse approaches developed by sociology, psychology, psychiatry, criminology, education, and medicine for understanding this extreme form of violence. Within this spectrum, disciplines often apply different definitions of the phenomenon and set their own specific explicatory priorities (socio-cultural influences, institutional factors, pathological personality structure, etc.). As Muschert (2007, p. 68) points out, this can lead to a counterproductive narrowing of perspective: "School shooting incidents need to be understood as resulting from a constellation of contributing causes, none of which is sufficient in itself to explain a shooting. The fact that many researchers have focused on a single causal dynamic has contributed to the lack of integration in the field."

While some of the research findings and explanatory models fit well together, others stand in fundamental contradiction to one another and appear irreconcilable. These differences are magnified in the prevention and intervention sector, where polarization occurs over questions such as controllability (Böckler, Seeger, and Heitmeyer (2010). Here, as elsewhere, researchers must acknowledge the ambivalence of control concepts (e.g., the possibility of early detection vs. the danger of

N. Böckler (✉) • P. Sitzer
Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence,
University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: nils.boeckler@uni-bielefeld.de

T. Seeger • W. Heitmeyer
Faculty of Educational Science and Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: nils.boeckler@uni-bielefeld.de

stigmatization). What is certain is that monocausal explanations are inadequate, and that school shootings must be understood as the outcome of numerous interacting risk factors (Verlinden et al. 2000; Newman et al. 2004; Robertz 2004; Kellner 2008; Henry 2009; Levin and Madfis 2009; Bondü and Scheithauer 2010), upon whose various relevance and interrelatedness little light has to date been shed.

After considerable and prolonged public, media, and research discussion blaming individual, isolated factors for the genesis of school shootings (a culture of violence, so-called killing games, inadequate gun laws, bullying, etc.), the existing body of empirical and analytical research would suggest that it is high time to turn attention to the *violence-affirming setting in its entirety*. This includes:

1. Structures and factors influencing the socialization of children and adolescents (socio-structural, cultural/media, familial).
2. Institutional circumstances of school life and study ([country-]specific school climate and culture).
3. Individual biographical and ensuing psychodynamic background, factors, and influences.

We hope this volume will provide a broad overview both for researchers and for those involved in practical work in the school and social sector, as well as creating impetus to shift the public discourse. This is the first international collection to bring together renowned researchers to present their latest empirical findings and theoretical concepts in the field of school shootings systematically and concisely in a single volume. Our two uppermost aims are to:

1. Present the various complementary and contradictory contributions, approaches, and models, and examine how they relate to one another.
2. Highlight controversies within the field and contrast specific standpoints and perspectives.

Looking beyond those immediate goals, we also hope to stimulate further (and especially interdisciplinary) research projects and international collaborations in order to improve understanding of this extremely infrequent but globally increasing phenomenon,[1] in particular sensitively dissecting perpetrators' intentions and informing the public debate with scientifically grounded analyses and concepts. Before we outline the structure of the volume and introduce the individual contributions, we will begin by examining the phenomenology and the central definitions used in the international discourse (Sect. 1). This is followed by a global survey of

---

[1] Schülein (1998, p. 96, translated) identifies a number of central requirements for interdisciplinary cooperation that appear exceptionally relevant in this connection: "Interdisciplinarity demands the capability to transcend boundaries and to tolerate transgressions. In other words, to accept that there are other ways of seeing the world and that others may relativize that which is central to one's own perspective." Such dialog is worthwhile and potentially extremely fruitful because innovative ideas and research activities can arise specifically out of controversy and interdisciplinary exchange (Dornes 2007). This observation can also be regarded as the motto for this book, which brings together authors from different countries, professions, and scientific disciplines to present their specific perspectives and findings for discussion.

the prevalence of the phenomenon, including a presentation of the method and findings of a survey of the geographical and historical extent of the problem and certain central characteristics of crime and perpetrator (in Sect. 2). At the end of this introductory chapter (Sect. 3) we outline the contributions and place them in the overarching context of the volume.

1.1 Definition and Classification

1.1.1 The Case Definition Problem

Various terms and definitions are used in contemporary scientific discourse to designate intentional multiple killings in educational institutions. Depending on which publication is consulted, the phenomenon is referred to as school shooting (O'Toole 1999; Verlinden et al. 2000; Kidd and Meyer 2002; Leary et al. 2003), rampage killing, rampage shooting (Moore et al. 2003; Newman et al. 2004; Muschert 2007; Fast 2008), or targeted violence in schools (Vossekuil et al. 2002; Scheithauer et al. 2008).

Because the acts under consideration here are not recorded as specific phenomena in official classification manuals or crime statistics, researchers are left to define the subject of analysis largely according to their own standards and subjective preferences. This leads to a *divergence* with important consequences: the literature contains numerous different (narrower and broader) definitions and operationalization criteria, often causing major deviations in research findings and greatly hampering the execution of meaningful meta-studies. To cite but one basic example, some researchers adopt a minimum number of victims and the use of firearms as defining criteria, while others prefer a broader focus. Especially in quantitative studies, school shootings/school rampages are frequently aggregated into a larger category, such as targeted or deadly school violence, in order to achieve a sufficient number of cases on which to base statistical analysis. This may obscure specifics or possible differences between the agglomerated phenomena and conflate the findings on different manifestations of potentially deadly violence in the school context (Böckler and Seeger 2010).

This "case definition problem" (Harding et al. 2002) is even reflected among the authors in this volume, with some of the presented contributions also using diverging definitions. In that context, we believe it makes sense to begin by describing the acts in the spectrum of intentional multiple homicides which we are talking about and to provide an overview of the prevailing definitions and operationalization criteria. The main reason why this is necessary is that classification, definition, and operationalization have significant repercussions for the identification of relevant research cases and for the theories developed to explain the phenomenon (Harding et al. 2002; Moore et al. 2003).

1.1.2 Classification: School Shootings in the Spectrum of Multiple Homicides

Holmes and Holmes (1998) distinguish three basic categories of multiple homicide:

- *Serial killings*: multiple persons are killed in distinct episodes *separated by significant intervals*.
- *Spree killings*: multiple persons are killed in a single episode *occurring in more than one place*.
- *Mass murders*: multiple persons are killed in a single distinct episode *at a single place*.

Rampage killings are a subcategory of mass murder (Morton 2008), where they are distinguished from genocide and terrorism by the greater role of personal motives vis-à-vis religious and/or political motivations (Imbusch 2006).[2] Rampage killings are also distinguished from victim-specific mass murders, which as a rule occur in non-public spaces such as families, gangs, or sects. Scheithauer and Bondü propose the following definition of "rampage" within the "mass murder" complex (Bondü et al. 2008, p. 12, translated): "A rampage involves the (attempted) killing of multiple persons least partly in public space by a single physically present perpetrator using (potentially) deadly weapons in a single event without any cooling-off period."

In public and scientific discourse, "rampage" as defined above is still frequently used as a catch-all label for a range of phenomena that differ significantly in terms of perpetrator, location, and victims (Bannenberg 2007; Robertz and Wickenhäuser 2007). Scheithauer and Bondü (2008) consequently divide rampage into three subcategories (see Fig. 1.1):

- *"Classical" rampage*: A usually adult perpetrator kills at random in a public place without immediately identifiable reason.
- *Workplace violence*: Cases of severe violence at the workplace standing in direct connection with the perpetrator's work and/or psychosocial and other experiences at work (see also Rugala 2004).
- *School shootings/rampage school shootings*: These are mostly committed by adolescent perpetrators and occur at school or in a school-related place such as the schoolyard or a school bus stop. The location is specifically chosen, often for its symbolic meaning to a perpetrator who wishes to take revenge on the community, or to experience or demonstrate power (Harding et al. 2002; Newman et al. 2004; Muschert 2007). Gang crimes and sexual, monetary, or similar specific motives

---

[2] Interestingly, more recent empirical research shows that (rampage) school shootings frequently mingle individual motives (such as personal revenge for experiences of humiliation) with ideological and political motivations, creating a complex set of motives that is not always clear-cut (Larkin 2009; Böckler and Seeger 2010; Muschert and Ragnedda 2010).
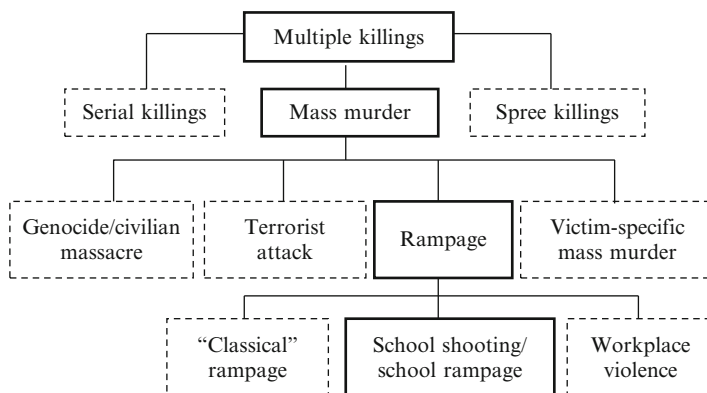
Fig. 1.1 The school shooting in the spectrum of multiple killings (after Scheithauer and Bondü 2008, p. 21)

are excluded. The perpetrator are a current or former student of the attacked institution.[3] There is presently no academic consensus about the number of victims required to classify a targeted act of violence as a school shooting. While Newman et al. (2004) include only cases where multiple persons were killed in their discussion of US incidents, Robertz (2004) and Hoffmann (2007) also include cases where the perpetrator *intended* to kill or injure numerous persons, regardless of the actual number of victims. The rare incidents involving two perpetrators are generally also classified as school shootings.

1.1.3 The Labels: School Rampage, School Shooting, and Severe Targeted School Violence

What we are dealing with, then, is a subcategory of multiple homicide, referred to in this volume as school shooting, school rampage shooting, school rampage, or severe targeted school violence. However, the reader should resist the temptation to draw conclusions about possible causes or consequences solely from the connotations of these terms, and avoid, for example, inferring from the term "rampage" that the perpetrator must be affect-driven.[4] The current international research draws a

---

[3] Note that this criterion excludes incidents committed by individuals who are *not* current or former students of the institution. Such cases are classified as general "classical rampage" (or, if the perpetrator is a teacher or other member of school staff, as "workplace violence").

[4] "Rampage" derives from the verb "to ramp," meaning "rage, storm, rush about" (*Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, 1978). Similarly the German term for rampage attack, "Amok," originates etymologically from the Malay "amuk" meaning "frenzied" or "attacking furiously" (also the origin of the English term "to run amok"). The related Malay verb "mengamuk" designates a spontaneous violent attack on random victims (Faust 2007).

more differentiated picture of the genesis and execution of acts of violence such as those at Columbine High in 1999 and Virginia Tech in 2007, and there is today empirical confirmation that many school shootings are not impulsive but planned in detail, in some cases over a period of years (Vossekuil et al. 2002; Newman et al. 2004; Hoffmann 2007; Larkin 2007; Muschert 2007). Nevertheless, the term "rampage" has stuck in the discourse and remains widely used in recent publications (Böckler and Seeger 2010).

The situation is similar with the term "school shooting," which is equally widely used in the literature. Although most of the cases in question involve the use of firearms, we will refrain in the following from defining this as a necessary criterion for classification. Outside the United States in particular there are numerous cases where perpetrators resort to other weapons, such as explosives, swords, knives, or axes (especially in the absence of access to firearms). Even if such incidents are not "shootings" in the literal sense, they exhibit clear similarities in perpetrator profile, contextual factors, developments in the lead-up to the attack, and modus operandi (see for example Chap. 10 in this volume). We therefore believe it would be counterproductive to exclude these cases by definition. Alongside a differentiated analysis of specific opportunity structures, our primary intention in this volume is to shed light on the *shared* underlying characteristics, dynamics, and motives in (attempted) acts of multiple killing and injuring in the school context.

The term "severe targeted violence in schools" is also used, especially in prevention research (Fein et al. 2002; Vossekuil et al. 2002; Heubrock et al. 2005; Hoffmann 2007). According to Fein et al. (2002), the term encompasses every potentially fatal attack on individuals or groups for which the school setting is intentionally chosen. One advantage of this term for prevention research is that it avoids focusing exclusively on (planned) multiple killings in the school context and includes (planned) acts of killing where a perpetrator symbolically singles out targets on the basis of their function, such as teachers or the principal (Vossekuil et al. 2002; Newman et al. 2004; Hoffmann et al. 2009). Simple acts of violence occurring in the scope of interpersonal conflicts and gang-related, drug-related, or other criminal cases where the location is merely a random site of opportunity are not categorized as severe targeted violence in schools. In the international research literature, the term "targeted violence in schools" is used synonymously with the term "school shooting."

1.2 The International Prevalence of Rampage School Shootings

As we have seen, there is no consensus in the international scientific discourse about what characteristics of an act of violence in a school context qualify a case to be classified as a rampage shooting. This "case definition problem" (Harding et al. 2002) is the key to the sometimes wide differences in frequency data cited by different researchers and research groups, which result partly from differences in the "number of victims" criterion (see Table 1.1):

Table 1.1 Definition of school shooting (number of victims) and associated number of cases

Author	Term used	Number of victims (dead or injured)	Period investigated	Total incidents
Moore et al. (2003)	Lethal school violence/ school rampage	At least *two* victims (including perpetrator)	1974–2001	45 (US only)
Newman et al. (2004)	Rampage school shooting	At least *two* victims (without perpetrator)	1974–2002	27 (US only)
Robertz (2004)	School shooting	Perpetrator intends to kill at least *two* persons; symbolic *single* killings also included	1974–2002	75 (worldwide)
Böckler and Seeger (2010)	School rampage	Perpetrator attempts to injure or kill *more than one* person	1956–2008	90 (worldwide)
Kelley and May (2011)	School shooting	Every firearm-related homicide which involves *one or more* victims	1966–2006	105 (US only)

1.2.1 School Rampage: Characteristics and Operationalization

We collected our data on school shootings on the basis of the following operationalization (Böckler, Seeger, and Heitmeyer 2010; Böckler and Seeger 2010):

- Location of violent incident was a school (elementary or secondary) or an institution of further or higher education.
- Perpetrator was a current or former student at the educational facility.
- Use of a potentially lethal weapon (firearm, knife, explosives, etc.) to attempt to injure or kill *more than one person*. The crucial criterion is not the outcome (actual number of victims) but the intent.[5]
- The attack took place during school hours on school premises, usually in front of an audience composed of other students and/or members of the school staff.

---

[5] A serious methodological problem of data collection arises here. In many cases, the perpetrator's exact motives are almost impossible to reconstruct reliably from media reports, making scientific quality criteria of reliability and validity hard to fulfill.

- The shooter chose victims:
  1. Deliberately on the basis of conflictual relationships; and/or
  2. Randomly; and/or
  3. For their symbolic significance or their status in the school's social system.[6]

1.2.2   Methodology and Data Collection Problems

After reviewing the relevant literature, we researched cases in German and international online press archives using the operationalization criteria described above. The search was initially restricted to major newspapers like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* internationally and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the weekly *Spiegel* in Germany. The research was later expanded to include the websites of broadcasters (e.g., BBC) and news agencies (Reuters, Associated Press).[7] This procedure ensured that we were able to confirm cases using multiple sources and thus improve the reliability of the data. Nonetheless, collecting case data in this manner is not entirely unproblematic as the different sources contradict one another in places, sometimes giving different information about the sequence of events, the number of victims, or the age of the perpetrator. Also, the scientific reliability of the data is open to challenge (Moore et al. 2003; Robertz 2004; Kelley and May 2011; Scheithauer and Bondü 2011). We believe, nevertheless, that the data collected using this method is solid enough to advance knowledge and stimulate further research in the field, and are explicitly open to receiving criticism and corrections.

1.2.3   Trends and Characteristics

The data analysis is based on our chronological case list containing selected details on all 120 identified incidents and their perpetrators (see Appendix, Table 1).

---

[6] One central weakness of this operationalization is certainly its broad focus, encompassing cases that were long planned and involved a large number of victims (such as Columbine, Erfurt, or Blacksburg) alongside incidents of violence that occurred in affect and more or less spontaneously with a significantly smaller number of victims (e.g., Pinellas Park or the Campbell County High School shooting). To what extent these different constellations are based on similar socio- and psycho-dynamics is a matter for further research.

[7] The following sources also turned out to be very useful: the National School Safety Center's school-associated deaths database (United States; lists only cases since 1992), the privately-run website www.columbine-angels.com, and the free online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Information from the latter two sources was included only if confirmed elsewhere (newspaper reports, etc.).
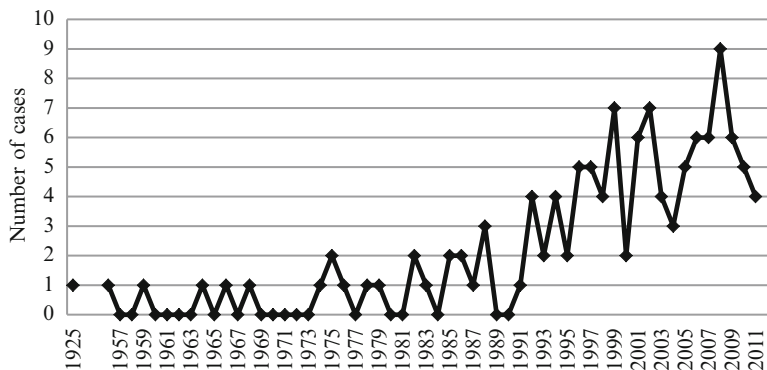
Fig. 1.2 School rampage incidents worldwide

1.2.3.1 Trends over Time

First of all, we graphed the cases by year. Figure 1.2 shows that, from the first known case in 1925 until the end of the 1970s, school shootings were isolated and sporadic occurrences. A slight increase is observed in the 1980s, although there were no cases in 1989 or 1990. A comparatively strong increase in the frequency of incidents follows in the course of the 1990s (with at least two per year from 1992 on). Seven school rampage attacks in 1999 marked a provisional peak. A decline to just two cases in the following year could have been a result of tightened control and prevention measures in the United States, caused by increasing public awareness after the rise in prevalence during the 1990s and, above all, after the shooting at Columbine High in 1999 (Muschert 2007). But frequency increases again after 2000, with the seven-case peak of 1999 already matched in 2002. After this the numbers fluctuate, but remain constantly above the level of three incidents per year; the largest concentration of cases is in 2008 with *nine* globally. The frequency of the phenomenon has *clearly increased* over the past decades, as Fig. 1.3 strikingly confirms.

On average there were 5.7 cases per year during the first decade of the 2000s, 3.6 during the 1990s, and 1.1 during the 1980s.[8] While this represents a significant rising trend, it must be noted that school shootings remain an exceptionally rare occurrence. Dramatic media reporting suggesting an epidemic of school rampage violence is not confirmed by the actual figures (Donohue et al. 1998; Brooks et al. 2000; Kelley and May 2011).[9]

---

[8] 2000s: Figures for 2001–2010.

[9] Placing the number of school shootings in relation to the total student population further relativizes the findings and shows them in a more realistic light. For example, there were about 11.7 million students at general and vocational schools in Germany in 2009/2010 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010), and two recorded school rampage attacks in 2009, putting the percentage of perpetrators in the school population at 0.000017%.
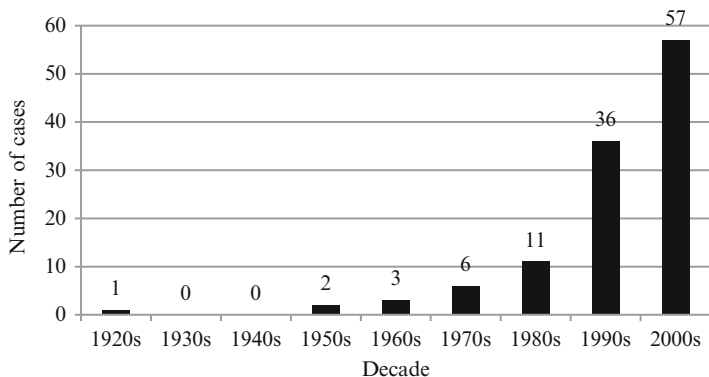
Fig. 1.3 Rampage school shootings worldwide by decade

1.2.3.2 Geographical Distribution

As Table 1.2 shows, more school shootings have occurred to date in the United States than in all other countries combined. By the end of 2011, the US total had reached 76 (63% of all recorded cases), while there had been 44 cases in the rest of the world (37%). It is also conspicuous that school shootings occur predominantly in highly developed industrial countries; the three with the highest totals, the United States, Germany, and Canada, are among the world's most economically prosperous nations. This finding is of great relevance in relation to possible background factors (especially socio-cultural and socio-structural) because even within these countries school shootings generally *do not* occur in the poorest regions: schools in densely populated cities with great social inequality and high rates of crime are almost unaffected. Instead, the problem affects rural and suburban educational institutions largely attended by students from white middle-class families (McGee and DeBernardo 1999; Moore et al. 2003; Newman et al. 2004). Most school shootings in Germany have occurred at more academically oriented schools (*Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, the top two tiers in Germanys three-tier system), where students from families with high socioeconomic status are overrepresented (Baumert et al. 2003).

1.2.3.3 Occurrence in the United States and the Rest of the World

It is revealing to compare the historical trends inside and outside the United States (see Fig. 1.4). Strikingly, school shootings do not occur regularly outside the United States until the very end of the 1990s. Moore et al. (2003) attribute this to the rising incidence in the United States in the 1990s and point to the elementary significance of identification and imitation effects for genesis (see also Schmidtke et al. 2002; Robertz 2004; Newman et al. 2004; Hoffmann et al. 2009). In particular, the shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999, attracted enormous media interest (Larkin 2007; Muschert 2007, 2009; Frymer 2009). Many subsequent perpetrators (in the United States and elsewhere) paid close attention to

Table 1.2 Geographical distribution of rampage school shootings

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

that reporting and saw their acts as continuing the ideas and actions of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold as disseminated by the media (Robertz and Wickenhäuser 2007; Larkin 2009; Kiilakoski and Oksanen 2011; Böckler, Seeger, and Sitzer 2012).

1.2.3.4 Severity

With 13 dead and 23 wounded, the Columbine shooting surpassed Charles Whitman's 1966 attack as the worst incident of its kind and became "one of the great American traumas of the past century" (Muschert and Larkin 2007).[10] As Fig. 1.5 shows, alongside the absolute number of incidents, their gravity in terms of number of victims per incident also increased over the past decades.[11]

---

[10] Muschert and Peguero (2010, p. 119) refer to a "Columbine effect": "a term that refers to how school rampage shootings change the way we think about school violence and security."

[11] Nevertheless, the probability of a child or adolescent being killed in a school shooting remains minuscule. In the United States, as the country with by far the largest number of cases, less than 1% of murders of young people aged between 5 and 18 years occur in the school context (Modzeleski et al. 2008).
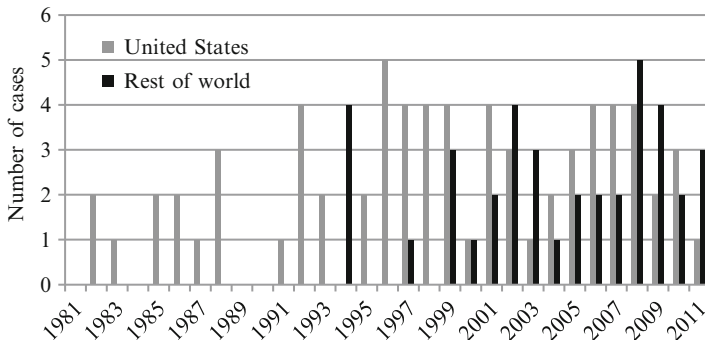
Fig. 1.4 School shootings in the United States and the rest of the world since 1981
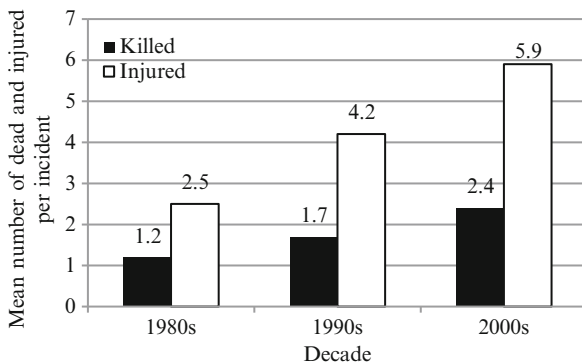
Fig. 1.5 The severity of school shootings over time

It must be noted, however, that victim totals diverge widely between individual cases. In 16 of the 120 recorded cases (13%), four or more people (not counting the perpetrators) were killed (on differences in victim characteristics, such as age, gender, teacher/student, police, etc., see Robertz 2004; Robertz and Wickenhäuser 2007). In what is to date the worst incident of all, 23-year-old Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 at Virginia Tech University in 2007 and injured another 25 (Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel 2009). The number of injured per incident varies similarly widely. In 42 cases (35%), five or more people (not counting the perpetrators) were injured seriously enough to require medical attention. The considerable variations in victim numbers are in part caused by differences in the planning and execution of
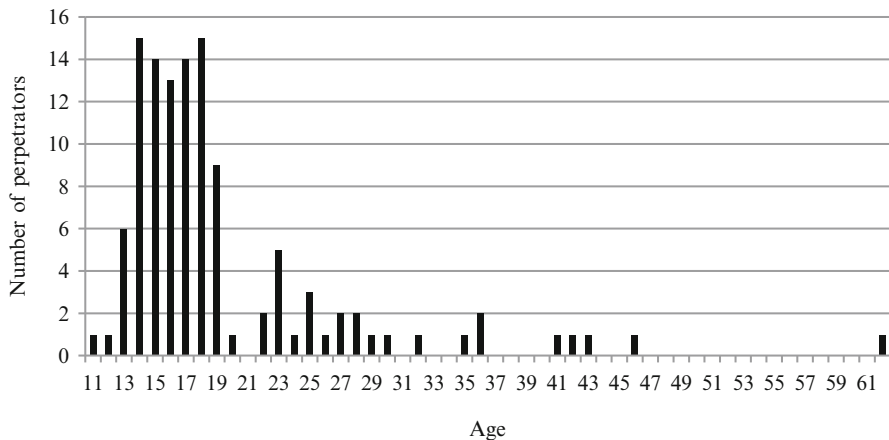
Fig. 1.6 Age of school shooters

attacks. Some perpetrators, like Seung-Hui Cho, acted with great determination and focus, while others gave themselves up or were overpowered.[12] Of the 123 perpetrators, 33 (27%) committed suicide.[13]

1.2.3.5   Age of Perpetrator and Month of Attack

Three-quarters of the perpetrators (88 or 76%) were in the early or middle phase of adolescence at the time of the incident (aged between 12 and 21) (see Fig. 1.6). Only 27 (23%) of the 116 perpetrators for whom data was available were older than 21.[14] Of this subgroup, 14 (12%) were in late adolescence (22–27 years), while 13 (11%) can be formally classified as adults.

The mostly adolescent (and in 97% of cases male) perpetrators were more likely to attack their current or former fellow students and/or teachers during the first half of the year (see Fig. 1.7). The period from January to June accounts for 72 attacks (60%), the second half of the year (July to December) for 48 (40%).

The concentration of cases in the first half of the calendar year appears to be connected with the course of the school year. Students are more likely to plan a shooting during the tense pre-report period at the end of the school year when the pressure to achieve and associated psycho-emotional stresses are usually highest

---

[12] This underlines the absence of a specific profile of attack or perpetrator (O'Toole 1999; Vossekuil et al. 2002; Borum et al. 2010). Instead, cases must be regarded as heterogeneous and subjected to accordingly differentiated analysis (Hoffmann 2007; Scheithauer and Bondü 2011). Using the empirical data, it may prove possible to develop subtypes or a typology of incidents and perpetrators (see also Langman in this volume).

[13] Three of the 120 recorded incidents involved two perpetrators.

[14] The age of 7 of the 123 perpetrators could not be ascertained. One was just 11 years old.
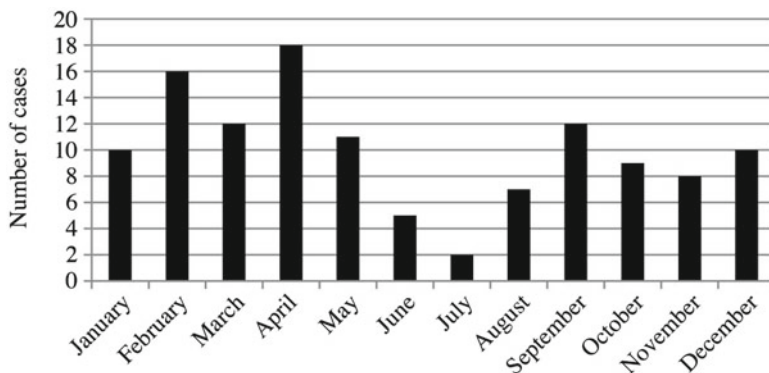
Fig. 1.7 Monthly distribution of school shootings

(Robertz 2004).[15] Few cases occur in the summer months because this is the time of summer holidays in the northern hemisphere and schools are closed.

Certain shootings were committed directly on an exam day: 36-year-old Frederick M. Davidson killed three professors in 1996 on the day of his final examinations at San Diego State University (Perry 1997); 19-year-old Robert Steinhäuser chose an equally symbolic date, committing his shooting at Johann Gutenberg Gymnasium in Erfurt, Germany, on April 26, 2002, during the final-year *Abitur* exams from which he had been excluded (Gasser et al. 2004). Exam days and the approaching end-of-year report may be associated with heightened feelings of stress and fear of failure. It can also be argued that perpetrators tend to choose particular dates for their special significance in the school calendar. In such cases the attack is plainly directed against the school as an *institution*, against its rules and norms, and equally against teachers and/or fellow students for whom such a day is also associated with special fears and hopes (Newman et al. 2004).

Interestingly, attacks are overrepresented in April, with 18 cases (15% of recorded incidents). April not only lies in the critical exam and pre-report phase of the school year, but is also the month in which Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold committed their notorious shooting. In 2000 and 2001, Canada and the United States experienced rampage school shootings on April 20, the anniversary of Columbine. The detectable clustering of rampage shootings in April strengthens the impression that for many subsequent perpetrators Columbine served as a template for action, an inspiration, or even an

---

[15] Empirical findings to date suggest that most school shooters were academically good or very good at school. According to Vossekuil et al. (2002), only 5% were failing in advance of their attacks. This says nothing, however, about subjective experience of pressure to achieve that perpetrators may have found stressful or burdensome. Heitmeyer (2002) points out that adolescents from prosperous and achievement-orientated backgrounds are often under considerable parental pressure to at least maintain the social status of their family (see also Heitmeyer et al. 1998). School shooters generally come from white middle-class families that are lacking in support and emotional recognition (McGee and DeBernardo 1999; O'Toole 1999; Fast 2008). These observations suggest that further research on perpetrators' family relationships would also be worthwhile.

achievement to beat, and thus in a sense functioned as the "archetypical case" (Muschert 2007, p. 63) for international dissemination (Larkin 2009; Böckler and Seeger 2010).

1.3   Structure of the Book

The contributions in this volume both tackle general questions and analyze specific individual cases in detail. The volume is divided into four thematic sections. Section 1 begins by laying out the central theories, explanatory models, and empirical findings on the phenomenon of school shootings. This general discussion is concretized in Sect. 2 by case studies of attacks in Littleton (United States), Red Lake (United States), Jokela (Finland), Krugersdorp (South Africa), and San Diego (United States). The cases were selected to reflect the widest range of different case constellations and, in so doing, to capture the diversity of the phenomenon and illuminate the complex interaction of underlying psychosocial factors from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. In Sect. 3 we move on to examine public and media perceptions of school shootings and their perpetrators, and consider what kinds of reporting and what dispositions of recipients might encourage potential copycat acts. Finally, Sect. 4 examines concepts for prevention and intervention ranging from threat assessment to primary prevention approaches.

1.3.1   Theories, Models, and Empirical Findings

Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Nils Böckler, and Thorsten Seeger open Sect. 1 with a discussion of the role of societal processes in the genesis of school shootings, examining empirical theories from the perspectives of youth, control, and disintegration theory. They demonstrate that school shootings are often associated with individual negative recognition balances and loss of control in the central socialization spheres of school, family, and peer group, but go on to highlight the role of society as well. According to Heitmeyer and colleagues, society finds itself confronted with the impossibility of systematically controlling the phenomenon. Because escalation processes are generally out of sight and apparently devoid of any rationality, the public frequently responds with simplistic explanations and demands repressive countermeasures in order to maintain at least the illusion of control—in the process forgetting the potentially destructive and counterproductive repercussions of such a demonstrative striving for control.

In "Adolescent Culture and the Tragedy of Rampage Shootings," *Katherine Newman* demonstrates how school shootings are to a great extent driven by the culturally rooted status struggles of adolescents. Alongside material resources and physical attractiveness, she argues, strategies of self-assertion and self-presentation play an absolutely central role in the struggle to achieve an acceptable place in the peer hierarchy. Especially within the lifeworlds of male adolescents, media-communicated cultural scripts of masculinity thus become the yardstick of their own

action. Newman describes how failure to live up to these prevalent norms creates increasing pressure within adolescents when feelings of powerlessness, desperation, and shame have to be overcome, and uses diverse examples to illustrate the social mechanisms that reproduce, stabilize, and intensify this logic. Relevant case studies show how a school shooting can be read as a radicalization of society's ideals of masculinity and as a dramatic form of adolescent identity management.

Eric Madfis and Jack Levin propose a five-stage sequential model in which several criminological theories are brought to bear collectively to demonstrate their cumulative effect. The authors systematically trace the successive narrowing of alternative courses of action and the sequence of radicalization phases in the lives of the perpetrators. After demonstrating how long-term frustrations (chronic strains) experienced in adolescence and earlier life phases can lead to social isolation, Madfis and Levin argue that the lack of socio-emotional support increases the risk of acutely stressful life events being experienced as catastrophic and impossible to cope with constructively. Empirical analysis of an international sample of cases demonstrates that such a fatal combination of chronic, uncontrollable, and acute stresses can lead to the individual decision to carry out an attack.

Frank J. Robertz focuses on the relevance of fantasy in multiple killings by adolescents, outlining a model of genesis that connects social factors (like outsider status at school) with psychological processes (fantasies of violence and power to compensate psychosocial injury). In so doing he differentiates theoretically and empirically between normal, harmless violent fantasies and the murderous imaginings with which school shooters have sought to compensate profound experiences of contempt and powerlessness. According to Robertz, the process by which the individual intensifies destructive fantasies to the point where they are ultimately transposed into reality is frequently accompanied by distorted individual ideas of justice and morality whereby the perpetrator sees the anticipated school shooting as a legitimate means to take revenge for personal humiliations and an opportunity to elevate themselves into the realm of the god-like.

In the closing article of the first section *Peter Langman* presents an empirically based typology of school shooters, drawing on their personal writings, police files, court records, and newspaper reports. His comparative study of 35 international cases identifies three characteristic types of juvenile perpetrator: traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic. Langman emphasizes that school shootings exhibit neither a standard sequence of events nor a uniform perpetrator profile. Rather, the perpetrators differ in significant aspects of their personality, family history, mental health status, and selection of victims.

1.3.2 Case Studies and Perspectives

The first case study concerns the most infamous incident to date: the shooting at Columbine High in 1999. *Ralph W. Larkin* outlines the fateful events as the culmination of conflict between elite and outcast students, portraying the adolescent per-

petrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold as outsiders who found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the school and suffered repeated experiences of humiliation and contempt at the hands of their higher-status peers. Larkin interprets the enormous power and violence exercised by privileged elite students, especially by members of the school sports teams, as an institutionally legitimated expression of a hegemonic ideology. Additional cases supply empirical confirmation for his thesis, generated from the Columbine case, that school shootings function as violent protest against such social conditions and are largely shaped by the perpetrator's wish for retribution.

Mary Ellen O'Toole analyzes the high school shooting at Red Lake, Minnesota, on March 21, 2005, which (alongside Columbine) was one of the most lethal school-associated shootings in US history. O'Toole demonstrates that the adolescent Jeffrey Weise planned the shooting long in advance and characterizes it as coldly thought-through and conceived to maximize lethality. During the shooting, Weise behaved in a predatory, hypo-emotional manner as he walked through corridors and into classrooms to shoot and kill. The Red Lake case also confirms that school shooters frequently announce their intentions directly or indirectly in the form of leaking behavior, which is thus an important starting point for prevention efforts.

The next contribution examines the school shooting in Jokela, Finland, on November 7, 2007, where eight people were killed. *Atte Oksanen, Johanna Nurmi, Miika Vuori, and Pekka Räsänen* focus chiefly on the social roots of the tragedy, describing the perpetrator as a shy and lonely young man who felt bullied and ostracized in the small community. Inadequate social ties and integration successively radicalized 18-year-old Pekka-Eric Auvinen's attitudes toward society. The contribution examines the perpetrator's views as expressed in internet hate communities and a posthumous media manifesto, as well as the traumatic consequences of the incident for the affected community.

The last two cases examined in this section of the volume address outliers in certain respects. First of all, *Duncan Cartwright* examines an attack at a high school in Krugersdorp, South Africa, in 2008, where 18-year-old Morné Harmse used a samurai sword as his weapon. Cartwright illuminates the event and the life history of the young perpetrator from a psychoanalytical perspective, describing a childhood characterized by loneliness, denial of emotional needs, and traumatic experiences of violence, along with the ensuing consequences for development. Cartwright discusses the elementary importance of fantasies of vengeance, power, and violence, of shame, alternating self-states, and impaired capacity for mentalizing in the complex processes leading to the attack in detail, both in theory and in relation to the specific case.

The special interest of the last case discussed is that it was historically one of the earliest school shootings, and that it was committed by a young woman. On the morning of January 29, 1979, 16-year-old Brenda Spencer aimed her .22 rifle through the broken pane of the front-door window and began to fire at the elementary school across the street, killing the principal and the janitor and wounding eight children on their way into school. *Jonathan Fast* argues that narcissism, accumulated and unprocessed shame, a passion for guns, and the positive presentation of violent females in

the media (e.g. Patty Hearst, Charlie Manson's female accomplices) played a part in shaping Brenda Spencer's expression of violence. Her claim of paternal incest and her father's subsequent marriage to a girl of Brenda's age, who had been incarcerated with Brenda, are also examined.

1.3.3   Media Reporting and Media Effects

In the opening contribution of Sect. 3, *Glenn W. Muschert* analyzes media reporting of school rampage shootings and traces its various effects on public and political perceptions of the issue. His argumentation is rooted in the thesis that school shootings represent a special form of "mediatized violence." Because the acts in question occur so extremely rarely, most people acquire their understanding of them exclusively through media channels. Consequently, public debates about the problem itself, as well as demands for the implementation of countermeasures, are inseparably bound up with media discourses. From a scientific perspective it is thus highly relevant to investigate the different phases of media reporting over time, together with their patterns of interpretation: how are the events and their perpetrators and victims portrayed in the media, and how does reporting change as time passes? Muschert draws on his own empirical research to supply answers to these questions, and demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of public debates.

A literature review by *Peter Sitzer* supplies an overview of the academic debate on the relevance of media content for the genesis of school shootings. His contribution opens by showing that the assertion that violent media content has a general violence-promoting effect is contested, before moving on to examine the question of whether school shooters can be regarded as a risk group with special susceptibility for the negative effects of violent media content. After demonstrating that existing studies are unable to provide a conclusive answer to this question, Sitzer describes empirical findings which supply clear indications that the public presentation of school shootings—especially in the mass media and on the internet—disseminates scripts that could be linked to copycat acts and draws on the concept of cultural scripts of hegemonic masculinity to explain why the overwhelming majority of school shootings are staged by male adolescents, demonstrating the potential significance of prior interest in violent media content and school shootings in this connection. The contribution concludes with an exploration of the communicative dimension of the public staging of these acts in the context of the intense media attention they generally attract.

Nils Böckler and Thorsten Seeger present the findings of a qualitative online study showing that school shooters and their attacks inspire admiration among certain adolescents. In the study, adolescents who consume the audio-visual self-presentations of perpetrators on YouTube were surveyed about their thoughts and feelings on the subject. Böckler and Seeger identify a group of adolescents who feel represented by the shooters' presented self- and world-schemas and use the identity constructions offered therein to formulate and develop their own identities.

The contribution concludes by discussing the extent to which possible early detection of potential school shooters in the worldwide web represents an effective and sensible prevention strategy.

1.3.4 Prevention and Intervention Concepts

Rebecca Bondü, Herbert Scheithauer, Vincenz Leuschner, and Dewey Cornell open the final section with an overview of the different approaches and strategies employed internationally for prevention, early detection, and intervention in the field of school shootings and targeted school violence. After an initial discussion of the fundamental difficulties of preventing such acts of violence, the authors differentiate between primary and secondary—general and indicated—prevention approaches. Whereas the former address the general population in seeking to reduce risk factors in people's everyday lives or to counteract them through protective factors, indicated prevention seeks to identify concrete warning signals and attempts to detect danger posed by an individual at the earliest possible stage. Bondü and colleagues conclude by presenting emergency response measures, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different strategies, and describing concrete examples from practice.

A series of widely respected studies on school shootings and targeted violence in schools commissioned by the US government (O'Toole 1999; Fein et al. 2002; Vossekuil et al. 2002) recommend the use of preventive threat assessment methods, but do not state in detail how such a strategy can practicably be implemented in schools. On the basis of numerous interviews with school principals, school psychologists, and law enforcement officers, *Dewey Cornell* and colleagues developed the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, which provide for the systematic establishment of school-based teams of school administrators, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers to investigate violent threats by school students and respond appropriately. A standard decision tree is used to reach a decision. While less serious cases can be cleared up quickly, more complex ones confronting authorities with substantial threat require detailed evaluation and the development of a safety plan. Cornell's contribution supplies the reader with a thorough introduction to the development and field testing of the Virginia Guidelines.

Jens Hoffmann and Karoline Roshdi address the issue of risk analysis and threat management. Drawing on their own studies of targeted school violence in Germany and a survey of the international research literature, they demonstrate that a school shooting must be understood as the end point of a process of crisis that is intertwined with diverse psychological, interpersonal, and situative aspects. Hoffmann and Roshdi elaborate a multistage model that reflects the perpetrator's internal perception and feelings while also identifying potentially observable behavior that suggests violent fantasies and planning phases. They also describe three prevention and intervention programs they have developed—System Safe School, Local Networks, and DyRiAS-School—which comprise risk analysis, sensitization,

information for school staff, and crisis management, and are currently in use in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

In the next contribution, *Vincenz Leuschner, Miriam Schroer-Hippel, Rebecca Bondü, and Herbert Scheithauer* present the NETWASS project (Networks Against School Shootings), which pursues a preventative approach based on the school level. On the one hand, teachers are trained to deal constructively with students in troubled personal situations, while on the other, schools establish crisis prevention teams equipped to identify warning signs (especially leaking behavior in the form of threats, preoccupation with violence or weapons, suicidal intentions) and provide timely help tailored for the specific case. The project is currently being tested and evaluated in more than 100 schools with 5,000 teachers in the German states of Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, and Brandenburg (pre/post-follow-up design). As well as the theoretical and empirical foundation and structure of their approach, Leuschner and colleagues also present preliminary evaluation results.

The next two chapters both present discussion and research findings relating to crisis management and prevented school shootings. *Jeffrey A. Daniels and Jonathan W. Page* compare the institutional cultures of schools where shootings have been successfully prevented with those in educational facilities where it was *not* possible to prevent a school shooting. Building on these findings, they offer an overview of the prevention-oriented Safe School Communities Model (SSCM), which seeks to strengthen the individual and interpersonal communication, conflict-solving, and problem-solving abilities of students and staff. Daniels and Page also emphasize the importance of having clear rules and standards of behavior in social interaction, a fundamental student self/other awareness, positive adult interactions with all students, and integration of school activities in the local community.

Camélia Dumitriu reports on an interdisciplinary research project on crisis management planning for acts of extreme violence in schools. The project was funded by the SSH Research Council of Canada and carried out by a research team from the University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM, Montreal School of Business) who collaborated on certain questions with researchers from Australia, Argentina, Germany, Romania, and the United States. Interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders for ten selected school shootings in different six countries. Dumitriu explains the main decisions made by management during the crisis management process and identifies prevention measures that should be put in place.

While the first six chapters of this section focus largely on indicated prevention strategies, the last two contributions turn to the necessity for primary prevention and address the socially and culturally critical accounts that see decisive factors for the genesis of school shootings as being rooted in society and reproduced through manifold social practices. *Carsten Rohlfs and Marius Harring* understand school shootings as an extreme and devastating coping pattern deployed by adolescents whose capacity for acting and strategies for coping have been exhausted by grave lifeworld stresses and ensuing feelings of insecurity, demoralization, and deprivation. They conclude that strengthening the resilience, participation, and self-efficacy experiences of adolescents would effectively prevent other forms of marginalized identity-

assertion along with school shootings, and should be an important objective of a democratic society. According to Rohlfs and Harring, the promotion of social, emotional, and communicative competence in children and adolescents is especially promising if accompanied by a reciprocal culture of participation in the central instances of socialization. The authors discuss how this could function in the context of German schools, what concepts have been used in the past, and where there is still specific need for action and optimization.

In the final chapter, *Douglas Kellner* examines the background to school shootings and the possibilities for preventing them from a critical historical perspective, arguing that grave acts of violence such as terrorist attacks or school shootings must be understood in their complex historical and societal context and consequently demand a multi-perspectival approach. Relevant factors include aspects of male socialization, the construction of ultramasculine identities, the prevalence of gun culture and militarism, and a media culture that promotes violence and retribution while disseminating and sensationalizing spectacle and a culture of celebrity. Kellner concludes that there is a need for critical media literacy for the upcoming generation and—more ambitiously still—a fundamental reconstruction of education and society if the school shooting problem is to be prevented in its complex entirety. He finds important inspiration and illumination in critical and radical education theories, as shaped by thinkers such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Herbert Marcuse.

References

Bannenberg, B. (2007). So genannte Amokfälle. *Forschungsmagazin der Universität Bielefeld, 30*, 36–40.

Baumert, J., Watermann, R., & Schümer, G. (2003). Disparitäten der Bildungsbeteiligung und des Kompetenzerwerbs: Ein institutionelles und individuelles Mediationsmodell. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft, 6*(1), 46–71.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2010). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Sitzer, P. (2012). Media dynamics in school shootings: a socialization theory perspective. In G. W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age* (pp. 25–46). Bingley: Emerald.

Bondü, R., Meixner, S., Bull, H. D., Robertz, F. J., & Scheithauer, H. (2008). Schwere, zielgerichtete Schulgewalt: School Shootings und "Amokläufe". In H. Scheithauer, T. Hayer, & K. Niebank (Eds.), *Problemverhalten und Gewalt im Jugendalter: Erscheinungsformen, Entstehungsbedingungen und Möglichkeiten der Prävention* (pp. 86–98). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2010). Explaining and preventing school shootings: Chances and difficulties of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H. G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 295–314). New York: Springer.

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 27–37.

Brooks, K., Schiraldi, V., & Ziedenberg, J. (2000). *School house hype: Two years later*. Washington, DC, & Covington, KY: Justice Policy Institute & Children's Law Center.

Donohue, E., Schiraldi, V., & Ziedenberg, J. (1998). *School house hype: The school shootings, and the real risks kids face in America*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.

Dornes, M. (2007). *Die emotionale Welt des Kindes* (5th ed.). Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. New York: Overlook.

Faust, V. (2007). Amok. *Psychiatrie heute: Seelische Störungen erkennen, verstehen, verhindern, behandeln.* Retrieved June 12, 2012 from http://psychosoziale-gesundheit.net/pdf/amok_faust.pdf.

Fein, R. A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W. S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center.

Frymer, B. (2009). The media spectacle of Columbine: Alienated youth as an object of fear. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1387–1404.

Gasser, K. H., Creutzfeld, M., Naher, M., Rainer, R., & Wickler, P. (2004). *Bericht der Kommission Gutenberg-Gymnasium*. Erfurt, Germany: Freistaat Thüringen.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies: Lessons from a study of rampage school shootings. *Sociological Methods & Research, 31*(2), 174–217.

Heitmeyer, W. (2002). Soziale Desintegration, Anerkennungszerfall und Jugendgewalt in Deutschland. In S. Kreitz-Sandberg (Ed.), *Jugendliche in Japan und Deutschland: Soziale Integration im Vergleich* (pp. 202–226). Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Heitmeyer, W., Collmann, B., & Conrads, J. (1998). *Gewalt: Schattenseiten der Individualisierung bei Jugendlichen aus unterschiedlichen Milieus* (3d ed.). Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Henry, S. (2009). School violence beyond Columbine: A complex problem in need of an interdisciplinary analysis. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1246–1265.

Heubrock, D., Hayer, T., Rusch, S., & Scheithauer, H. (2005). Prävention von schwerer zielgerichteter Gewalt an Schulen – Rechtspsychologische und kriminalpräventive Ansätze. *Polizei & Wissenschaft, 1*, 43–57.

Hoffmann, J. (2007). Tödliche Verzweiflung—der Weg zu zielgerichteten Gewalttaten an Schulen. In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen: Früherkennung/Risikomanagement/Kriseneinsatz/Nachbetreuungt* (pp. 25–34). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hoffmann, J., Roshdi, K., & Robertz, F. J. (2009). Zielgerichtete schwere Gewalt und Amok an Schulen – eine empirische Studie zur Prävention schwerer Gewalttaten. *Kriminalistik, 4*, 196–204.

Holmes, R. M., & Holmes, S. T. (1998). *Serial murder* (2d ed.). New Delhi: Sage.

Imbusch, P. (2006). Terrorismus. In W. Heitmeyer & M. Schroettle (Eds.), *Gewalt: Beschreibungen—Analysen—Prävention* (pp. 487–510). Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung.

Kelley, E., & May, D. (2011). Increases in school shootings: Reality or myth? *International Journal of Sociological Research, 4*(1), 45–57.

Kellner, D. (2008). *Guys and guns amok: Domestic terrorism and school shootings from the Oklahoma City bombings to the Virginia Tech massacre*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Kidd, S. T., & Meyer, C. L. (2002). Similarities of school shootings in rural and small communities. *Journal of Rural Community Psychology, E5*(1). Retrieved June 12, 2012 from http://www.marshall.edu/jrcp/sp2002/similarities_of_school_shootings.htm.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011). Soundtrack of the school shootings: Cultural script, music and male rage. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 19*(3), 247–269.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 202–214.

Levin, J., & Madfis, E. (2009). Mass murder at school and cumulative strain: A sequential model. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1227–1245.

Lindgren, S. (2011). YouTube gunmen? Mapping participatory media discourse on school shooting videos. *Media, Culture & Society, 33*(1), 1–14.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger. *Forensic Examiner, 8*, 1–16.

Modzeleski, W., Feucht, T., Rand, M., Hall, J., Simon, T., Butler, L., & Hertz, M. (2008). School-associated student homicides – United States, 1992–2006. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 57*(2), 33–36.

Moore, M. H., Petrie, C. V., Braga, A. A., & McLaughlin, B. L. (Eds.). (2003). *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Morton, R. J. (2008). *Serial murder: Multi-disciplinary perspectives for investigators*. Quantico, VA: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.

Muschert, G. W. (2009). Frame-changing in the media coverage of a school shooting: The rise of Columbine as a national concern. *The Social Science Journal, 46*(1), 164–170.

Muschert, G. W., & Larkin, R. W. (2007). The Columbine High School shootings. In S. Chermak & F. Y. Bailey (Eds.), *Crimes and trials of the century* (Vol. 2, pp. 253–266). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Muschert, G. W., & Peguero, A. A. (2010). The Columbine effect and school antiviolence policy. In M. Peyrot & S. L. Burns (Eds.), *New approaches to social problems treatment (Research in Social Problems and Public Policy)* (pp, Vol. 17, pp. 117–148). Bingley: Emerald.

Muschert, G. W., & Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and control of violence: Communication in school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 345–361). New York: Springer.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Perry, T. (1997). Ex-San Diego State student pleads guilty to murdering 3 professors. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 28, 2012 from http://articles.latimes.com/1997-05-28/news/mn-63111_1_san-diego-state.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School Shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Robertz, F. J., & Wickenhäuser, R. (2007). *Der Riss in der Tafel: Amoklauf und schwere Gewalt in der Schule*. Heidelberg: Springer.

Rugala, E. A. (Ed.). (2004). *Workplace violence: Issues in response*. Quantico, VA: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Scheithauer, H., & Bondü, R. (2008). *Amoklauf: Wissen was stimmt*. Freiburg, Basel, & Vienna: Herder.

Scheithauer, H., & Bondü, R. (2011). *Amokläufe und School Shooting: Bedeutung, Hintergründe und Prävention*. Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht.

Scheithauer, H., Bondü, R., Meixner, S., Bull, H. D., & Dölitzsch, C. (2008). Sechs Jahre nach Erfurt – Das Berliner Leaking-Projekt: Ein Ansatz zur Prävention von School Shootings und Amokläufen an Schulen. *Trauma & Gewalt, 2*, 2–13.

Schmidtke, A., Schaller, S., Müller, I., Lester, D., & Stack, S. (2002). Imitation von Amok und Amok-Suizid. *Suizidprophylaxe, 29*, 97–106.

Schülein, J. A. (1998). Psychoanalyse und Soziologie oder: Das Unbehagen am Diskurs. *Psychosozial, 72*, 111–120.

Statistisches Bundesamt. (2010). *Anzahl der Schülerinnen und Schüler geht um 1,3% zurück.* Pressemitteilung Nr. 105. Retrieved March 16, 2010 from https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2010/03/PD10_105_211.html.

Sumiala, J., & Tikka, M. (2010). "Web first" to death: The media logic of the school shootings in the era of uncertainty. *Nordicom Review, 31*(2), 17–29.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Virginia Tech Review Panel. (2007). *Mass shootings at Virginia Tech, April 16, 2007.* Retrieved June 29, 2012 from http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techPanelReport-docs/FullReport.pdf.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States.* Washington, DC: US Secret Service and US Department of Education.

Webber, J. A. (2003). *Failure to hold: The politics of school violence.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Part I
Theories, Models, and Empirical Findings

Chapter 2
Social Disintegration, Loss of Control, and School Shootings

Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Nils Böckler, and Thorsten Seeger

2.1   The Argument

Premeditated school shootings involving the killing of numerous people are relatively rare events in modern societies. As recurrent phenomena, however, they attract a high degree of public attention and traumatize the societies in which they take place.

Public and political evaluations of such deeds regularly resort to familiar, ritual explanations in order to downplay losses of control. These initial assessments either define such crimes as semi-supernatural events, or else they pathologize them. What both these variants have in common is that they provide interpretations that exonerate society and create detachment in order to downplay the social causes and to return to "normality" as soon as possible: An "affliction" is a fateful thing about which nothing can be done, and pathological criminals can be isolated from an otherwise supposedly intact society. Both interpretations disregard the constitutive criteria of violence, as violence is a highly effective resource that is available to everyone. It always has a history, and regardless of the persons against which it is directed, it is invariably an exercise of power. Equally disconcerting is the insight that violent acts can happen at any time and can scarcely be prevented—in other

W. Heitmeyer (✉)
Faculty of Educational Science and Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: ikg@uni-bielefeld.de

N. Böckler • T. Seeger
Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence,
University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: ikg@uni-bielefeld.de

words, that they generate losses of control. To avoid having to engage with the causes of structural loss of control and to provide reassurance, the dominant public discourse aims to disassociate such phenomena from normal society.

Against these ritual explanation patterns we aim to show that school shootings are related to a *systematic loss of control*.

- On the individual level loss of control relates to the situation of the perpetrators and their loss of control over their own lives. This is (a) evoked through negative recognition and *erosion of recognition* in families, schools, and peer groups as agents of socialization, which (b) raises issues of *social disintegration*.
- Societal loss of control consists in the following factors: (a) *failure* to respond to the *crucial factors influencing* the scientifically known setting of the act; (b) the largely unexplained systematic *interaction* between the processes triggering the act; and (c) insufficient knowledge of the *trigger causes*.

To analyze this theory of double loss of control, we propose a three-part composite theory that builds on the social disintegration theory (SDT) with its recognition elements; *ideas of youth theory* about the conditions under which young people grow up in modern societies; and *considerations of control theory* about the necessity, limitations, and ambivalence of control. Existing empirical studies were analyzed with these factors in mind in order to find corroboration for our overarching theory of double loss of control.

2.2 The Three-Part Composite Theory

2.2.1 Social Disintegration Theory and its Relevance for Explaining School Shootings

The disintegration approach focuses on the interaction between social conditions and individual behavior patterns and thus does not simply assume that young people are maladapted to society.

- Anhut and Heitmeyer (2005) identify the social integration of individuals and groups as a decisive factor that prevents them from manifesting deviant behavior.
- Individuals feel themselves to be part of society when they experience positional, moral, and emotional recognition.
- Disintegration and concomitant recognition deficits, in contrast, result in a loss of positive self-reference; as a result, individuals desire to prevent such deficits, or at the very least compensate for them.

The disintegration approach centers on explaining diverse phenomena of violence. From a conflict theory perspective (Anhut, 2002), violence can be viewed as a specific, problematic pattern of dealing with states of individual or social disintegration. Disintegration marks the failure of social institutions and communities to deliver basic material needs, social recognition, and personal integrity. The disintegration approach

accordingly explains these phenomena as resulting from a society's unsatisfactory integration performance. One basic assumption of the disintegration approach is that the probability and intensity of violent behavior increase in line with experience and fears of disintegration, while the ability to control it decreases. No direct, determinist connection at the individual level is assumed; instead, individual factors, milieu-specific mobilizations, and opportunity structures determine the choice of specific patterns of coping (apathy and resignation also being conceivable "solutions"). SDT (Anhut & Heitmeyer, 2005; Heitmeyer & Anhut, 2008) highlights different kinds of integration and disintegration and expands the idea of goal-means discrepancy into noneconomic areas where lack of recognition plays an important role.

2.2.1.1 Social Recognition: The Basis of SDT

From the disintegration perspective, recognition comes about as a consequence of satisfactorily solving three specific problems of social integration. This means we are dealing with three dimensions.

The social-structural dimension refers to participation in society's material and cultural goods. This kind of integration into the system is guaranteed by sufficient access to work, housing, education, and consumer goods. Its necessary subjective counterpart is the individual's satisfaction with his or her occupational and social position. In this context, it is not only the material situation that is important. The social aspect is also relevant, as are individual satisfaction with one's own activities and the experience of positional recognition regarding one's own position, roles, and field of activities.

The institutional dimension refers to institutional (and political) forms of participation. A balance between conflicting interests has to be struck without wounding personal integrity. From the disintegration perspective, this calls for adherence to basic democratic principles that guarantee the (political) opponent's equal moral status and are accepted as fair and just by those involved. However, the negotiation and formulation of these principles in individual cases also presupposes corresponding opportunities and willingness to participate on the part of those involved. Problems of disintegration arise when individuals perceive a loss of moral recognition because of feelings of powerlessness and insufficient realization of basic norms.

Finally, the socioemotional dimension (cultural-expressive social integration) concerns collective and private aspects of life. Here we are dealing with establishing emotional and expressive relations between people for the purpose of self-realization and making sense of life. This calls for considerable attention and attentiveness, but also for space to be oneself and balancing of emotional support with normative demands so as to avoid crises of meaning, disorientation, lowered self-esteem, loss of values, identity crises, and loss of emotional recognition.

These three forms of integration are required: social-structural integration (e.g., having a job), institutional integration (e.g., voter participation), and socioemotional integration (e.g., social support by family, friends). Clearly the disintegration approach discusses the establishing of social integration as a voluntary matter. The disintegration perspective sees the successful accomplishment of these tasks as

resulting in positional, moral, and emotional recognition and self-definition as belonging to the relevant social group. On the basis of social integration, voluntary acceptance of norms can also be expected. In contrast, in states of disintegration, the effects of one's own action on others no longer have to be taken into account. This encourages the development of antisocial attitudes and creates a risk that violence thresholds will be lowered.

2.2.1.2 Social Processes and the Effect of Disintegration

Which social processes does the disintegration approach consider to be responsible for an increase or decrease in social integration or a loss of recognition, and which effects are associated with the experience of social disintegration or a loss of recognition? An increase or decrease in the degree of social integration and the accompanying changes in recognition options only provisionally expresses the extent to which the potential for dysfunctional ways of coping with disintegration is expanded or reduced.

The forms of coping that individuals choose are determined by the coincidence of their experiences (competencies, patterns of accountability, and so on) with specific opportunity structures such as integration into social milieus (group pressure, compulsion to conform) and the function of the chosen pattern of behavior in compensating for lack of recognition. In order to answer the question as to the functionality of the chosen pattern of behavior in compensating for lack of recognition, we must be clear how losses of recognition work.

Three basic active principles can be identified: (1) avoidance of inferiority and harm to self-esteem, (2) restoration of norms, and (3) lack of alternative learning processes. In the social-structural dimension, social polarizations reduce access opportunities and achievable gratifications in individual-functional system integration. An additional process of individualization propagates the concept of individuals as autonomous, competent, and successful, thereby intensifying the pressure on people to present themselves as successful. Yet despite the pressure to acquire status, the opportunities and risks of social positioning are spread unevenly. This leads increasingly frequently to disappointment for the losers in the modernization process; it unleashes feelings of resignation, impotence, and rage and causes a lack of positional recognition that undermines self-confidence. That is why people tend to endeavor to avoid this kind of harm.

There are several possibilities for coping with this situation. Apathy and resignation are patterns of reaction. Another option for maintaining a positive self-image in the face of ongoing stress is to blame others for one's own fate and to invoke prejudice and hate in order to compensate. Finally, *violence* is a possible outlet to compensate for feelings of weakness or to maintain a sense of self-esteem. There is thus a wide range of possible functional solutions to lack of recognition. Institutionally, ideas of rivalry and competition at school and work, instrumental work and social relationships, and a consumer-oriented lifestyle driven by wealth, status, and prestige encourage self-interested tendencies like having to get one's own way, social climbing, and exclusion.

We find two dominant forms of lack of moral recognition. First, the feeling that one's own life is not of equal value and that one is denied equal rights (refusal of membership in social groups or formal membership of a group or society without acceptance). Second, the impression that basic principles of justice are being violated—for instance, where the individual feels that he or she or his or her own group makes a relevant contribution to the collective social good yet still experiences inferior treatment. In addition to cases where the individual feels he or she has been treated disadvantageously or unjustly, we must also include cases where the person is not disadvantaged but formulates the feeling of injustice on behalf of others. Here, violence may be employed as an option for restoring justice or to regain respect (assertion of identity). Unlike the "avoid inferiority/damage to self-esteem" pattern of motives, however, this is not necessarily done at the cost of persons or groups susceptible to discrimination; rather, it tends to be aimed against persons or groups who appear to be privileged.

In the socio-emotional dimension, ambivalent individualization processes lead to growing instability in relationships between couples, as a result of which family disintegration can have a harmful effect on the conditions in which children are socialized. Emotional stress on parents is caused especially by the combination of individuals increasingly demanding relationships based on equal rights while simultaneously experiencing many forms of inequality. This emotional stress often leads to frustration, insecurity, and a generally higher potential for tension and conflict. Unstable family relationships in turn detract from children's experience of self and the recognition that is required to build a positive self-image. Consequently, aggressive and autoaggressive tendencies and conspicuous behavior in children can be directly connected to the extent of family disintegration. Denial of emotional recognition means experiencing no esteem or attention, or too little, in important intimate social relationships, receiving no emotional support in situations of emotional stress, having nobody to discuss problems with, having no autonomy, and so on.

In relation to the question of how affinity for violence originates, particularly in children and juveniles (and how it is subsequently reproduced in adulthood), two paths appear to be significant. First, direct learning of violence can be observed, including in the form of a repeatedly reinforced cycle of violence in which experiences of violence in childhood and the subsequent use of violence against family members in adulthood are repeated. Alongside this form of direct learning from role models is a second form, which can be labeled as the lack of alternative learning processes. Violence is employed as a pattern of dealing with conflict because other means of coping are unavailable due to the lack of specific social competencies and the existence of development deficits such as lack of empathy, identity disorders, and disorders of self-esteem. In this case children do not learn a constructive model for integrating negative feelings and for being able to deal with them in a constructive way. Development deficits in the shaping of relationships, systematic overtaxing, low tolerance of frustration, a low sense of self-esteem, and vulnerability are the consequence. Children in these situations are relatively helpless in the face of

difficult family and school relationships and may turn to violence to defend themselves, compensate for weakness, or retain vestiges of self-esteem.

It is thus possible to identify three basic principles of the effect of violation of recognition: the quest to avoid injuries to self-esteem, the need to restore norms and assert identity, and the lack of an alternative pattern for dealing with conflict. However, this does not yet say anything about which pattern of reaction will emerge in an individual case. As we have seen, violence can become a pattern of coping with problems regardless of the specific causes of lack of recognition.

This raises the fundamental question as to the nature of specific configurations of effects, for example, whether specific lack of recognition in certain integration dimensions predisposes some people to specific patterns of reaction. In principle, three configurations of effects are conceivable.

2.2.1.3 Configurations of Effects

First, it could be that lack of recognition that stems primarily from one integration dimension also causes one specific pattern of reaction. This would mean that the choice of a particular pattern of coping depends primarily on which promises to most effectively limit or compensate for the recognition deficit that has arisen.

Second, it would be imaginable that in principle every pattern of coping could be a reaction to different prior losses of recognition. In that case, a possible nucleus of loss of recognition would emerge only in the choice of specific variations of a pattern of reaction.

Third, there is much support for the third pattern of interpretation, according to which it seems to be possible to compensate for lack of recognition in individual integration dimensions by recognition gains in other dimensions. In that case, the crucial factor would be the balance of recognition. The choice of a specific pattern of action or a variation of it would then no longer be attributable to a specific lack of recognition in one or more integration dimensions. That would mean that although the chosen pattern of coping was subjectively the one that the person expected to have the biggest effect in a given situation, the person's experiences, competencies, and patterns of accountability, along with individual and social opportunity structures, such as integration into social milieus, were likely to be of crucial significance in deciding which choice was ultimately made.

To sum up, SDT postulates that school shootings are strongly rooted in the need for recognition. According to this theory, school shootings are an extreme—and lethal—way of expressing resistance to experiences of contempt and failure in the battle for recognition. The shooting represents the culmination of unstable recognition relationships and serves as an attempt by the perpetrator to restore his or her injured identity. Against the background of SDT, therefore, it would seem advisable to examine the conditions under which young people grow up.

2.2.2 *The Youth Theory Facet: The Ambivalence of Growing Up*

Growing up in modern societies, where school shootings primarily occur, has two facets (Heitmeyer, Collmann, & Conrads, 1998). Young people now have more options for shaping their lives than they did in the past, but they are also under increasing pressure to do so—without having a clear idea of what opportunities and options they have, nor which they should choose in order to gain status and recognition in society. There are three possibilities for attaining such recognition: through achievement (e.g., at school), through outward attractiveness, and through demonstrations of strength. The socially accepted paradigm holds that recognition and status can be attained only if one is able to "control" others and if one is different from others. Those who are inconspicuous are not noticed, and those who are not noticed are nothing.

The ideology of the upwardly mobile society states that young people must at the very least attain the status of their family of origin, and should ideally advance to a higher one. This, however, is increasingly difficult to achieve, as precarious life-plans and biographies are the rule rather than the exception in today's society. Ambivalence thus becomes the central paradigm of life: There are more opportunities for shaping one's life, but the predictability of individual life-plans is decreasing, and precarious situative processes are becoming the norm.

Normality in modern society means that a person strongly identifies with the core approved values such as achievement, self-assertion, and upward mobility. Young people too have received this message and are under considerable pressure from it. Failure to meet these standards of normality—these fixed and rigid norms—is all the more painful the more intensely individuals assimilate and internalize them, such as when they seek to graduate from high school with the highest grades regardless of the cost. This sense of normality will inevitably be challenged and shaken by lack of success or when status pressure comes into play in situations where few corresponding positions of status are available. One possible consequence is that individuals who have "failed" lose control of their reactions—especially in the case of incidents, such as expulsion from school, that have far-reaching consequences for their future lives. The Erfurt school shooting in 2002 clearly showed the fragile nature of social normalcy and the speed with which it can be fundamentally shaken.[1]

Thus it is necessary to identify the factors that engender violence and examine why individuals may devalue life—including their own—so radically and place so extreme a premium on the demonstration of power. To do so, it is important—following SDT—to examine sources of recognition and the processes by which it erodes.

---

[1] Nineteen-year-old Robert Steinhäuser attacked his school, the Johann-Gutenberg-Gymnasium in Erfurt, Germany, on April 26, 2002, during the final examinations from which he had been excluded. He committed suicide after killing 16 and wounding another 7.

2.2.3   The Aspect of Control Theory

Control is a multilayered concept. At its core, control implies mastery over processes and behaviors both on the individual and the social levels. *Control* can be used to mean regulation. This applies in the case of individuals—in the present case, young people—who are expected to have a "grip" on their lives; i.e. to meet specific developmental targets, successfully integrate themselves in different spheres of socialization such as the core areas of the family, the school, and the peer group, and to find recognition there in order to construct a stable identity. Their task is to develop an awareness, to plan out their own lives with some degree of autonomy— or, in the terms of Tittle's control-balance theory (1995), to develop a balanced relationship between control by others and control over others.

The ambivalence of growing up and the dangers of negative recognition balances or the erosion of recognition can trigger considerable problems that cause things to "get out of control." As control itself is an ambivalent construct, there is a danger that loss of control, in conjunction with destructive, violent fantasies stimulated by the media, may result in an over-identification with control-exercising role models. Here the focus shifts from controlling one's own life-plans to controlling other people. The quest for recognition and control causes individuals to redefine themselves in their fantasies in order to regain control over their own damaged social identity by violent means. The personal writings of the school shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold provide numerous indications of this process.[2]

On the level of society, both socializing institutions like family, school, and peer group and specific controlling institutions like the police and the legal system aim to *constrain* behavior according to the normative specifications of society. Various control styles can be employed to this end, from punitive approaches through therapeutic or supportive strategies to measures for identifying perpetrators (Cohen, 1985; Horwitz, 1990). This, however, says nothing about how efficacious these control styles prove to be on closer analysis of the setting (Sect. 2.3) and the processes (Sect. 2.4ff.).

2.3   Action Settings that Promote Violence

The investigation leads us to a theoretical exploration of social disintegration, and thus to the problem of recognition and, in the negative case, erosion of recognition, as a consequence of which adolescents do not receive satisfactory answers to such fundamental questions as: Who needs me? Who listens to me? Where do I belong? Am I worth as much as the others? Am I being treated fairly? Are my feelings accepted?

---

[2] The quotes given in the article from the personal writings of Harris and Klebold serve merely to illustrate and should not be taken as systematic empirical proof. Spelling and grammatical mistakes and use of emphasis are as in the originals.

If we accept that nobody can live without recognition in the long term, it may be assumed that young people in particular, growing up under the ambivalent conditions described above, live in a fragile state of normalcy. Thus close attention must be paid to the overall setting of (1) sources of recognition in the social environment; (2) the shooters' decision-making competence and capacity to act; (3) influencing factors such as, most importantly, media consumption; and (4) weapons skills. The *synergy* between these four components must be studied for the purposes of evaluating whether and how escalation processes may develop in a subsequent phase.

Sources of recognition represent the most important point of departure here. Three fields of experience are of paramount relevance for young people.

- The school provides manifold sources of recognition, especially through good performance, in order to achieve the prerequisites for gaining recognition through status in later life. At the same time, however, school is permeated by activities signaling contempt on the part of teachers and especially other students.
- The importance of the family varies with the child's age, but remains a source of recognition through love, in other words, a source of emotional recognition. At the same time, withdrawal is relevant under certain conditions, such as when parents exhibit pronounced status behavior—i.e., when emotional recognition is contingent on performance and ambitions for advancement.
- The peer group is of primary relevance both in single-gender and mixed-gender groups, especially during adolescence. Group affiliation, strength, and attractiveness represent sources of recognition.

From the perspective of disintegration theory, we must now turn to the recognition balance. Is it positive, or does the child have to deal with a subjectively felt recognition deficit?

As we are always dealing with interaction processes between the child/adolescent and their teachers, parents, or peers, these contacts and relationships are always associated with feelings of powerlessness when recognition has eroded. As all people, according to SDT, always strive to counteract the undermining of their own self-worth and to construct or maintain a positive identity, the question arises how they can successfully escape from this powerlessness or inferiority. The competences for coping with such conflicts are widely scattered. In terms of SDT, one problem for socially compatible solutions arises in the absence of alternative conflict-solving patterns—patterns which are primarily developed within the family through emotional recognition, secure social bonds, and the absence of experiences of corporal punishment and other violence. As an "alternative" variant, children may attempt to surmount a negative recognition balance and concomitant powerlessness by means of demonstrations of power. Violence is the most effective variant, preceded by violent fantasies that represent a transitional stage between feelings of powerlessness and the beginning stages of planning violent acts.

Such plans may have a long timeframe. In the case of Columbine High, the perpetrators spent more than a year planning the strategies they believed would be effective. In the case of Emsdetten in Germany, the shooter first reconstructed the

school corridors on a computer (Engels, 2007).[3] Violent computer games provide behavior patterns that help to determine the *modus operandi*. Such influences, therefore, may be able to influence the "strategies" chosen by the perpetrators. In general, however, they are not the crucial factor in prompting the perpetrator's decision to end his or her own life and the lives of others. What is more important for this decision is the fact that the future shooter was unable to find answers to the fundamental questions outlined above.

The decision to commit an act of violence ("whether to act") is prompted not by the availability of violence in the media or by the use of such media, but rather by the unbearable negative recognition balance. This alone, however, is not sufficient to prompt the crime; a justification of violence ("why to act") is necessary for lowering the inhibition threshold for violence. In other words, it is necessary to allocate the blame for the negative recognition balance. The school and the peer group are the core targets in the apportioning of blame. And they are available at predictable times and in predictable places as the field of action for a demonstration of power aiming to maximize the number of victims. The Columbine shooters, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, aimed at a figure of 500 victims. Finally, the setting includes the capacity for acting, i.e., weapons skills ("how to act"), which increases the effectiveness of the action.

2.4 Analytical and Empirical Results: Loss of Control Through Cumulative Erosion of Recognition

2.4.1 Recognition in the Family: Loss of Control by Parents and Children

Young school shooters are primarily the children of white, middle-class families in rural or suburban areas (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2003; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004) whose chances of attaining positional recognition in school are usually good in terms of SDT but may deteriorate in response to internal conditions in their families. At first glance, these families appear "conspicuously inconspicuous" (Hoffmann, 2007, p. 28). The family type may vary, and school shooters grow up in intact nuclear families, single-parent families, and foster families alike (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). In this context, Newman and colleagues (2004) point out that the formal composition of the family is less significant than the way in which people interact within the family on an everyday basis. The emotional quality of interpersonal relationships within the family is a particularly important issue. According to SDT, such interpersonal relationships are of paramount importance for individuals in their quest for recognition.

---

[3] On November 20, 2006, 18-year-old Sebastian Bosse injured 37 people at the Geschwister-Scholl-Realschule in Emsdetten, Germany, before committing suicide.

Here the results of the various empirical studies correlate. As a rule, the relationships within a school shooter's family are described as problematic and dysfunctional (Fast, 2008; Kidd & Meyer, 2005; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Newman et al., 2004; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000). The young people often feel insecure in their families, and in some cases they had suffered physical or sexual abuse (Fast, 2008; Verlinden et al., 2000; Langman, in this volume). However, the dominant factor seems to be a familial atmosphere characterized by emotional indifference and lack of parental involvement (e.g., O'Toole, 1999). Parents frequently know little about their children and take little interest in their lives and personal problems. In this situation, the denial of emotional recognition begins to develop its destructive potential.[4] Parents are unaware of the interests and predilections of their growing children and know nothing about their friends or performance at school. As an exacerbating factor, the family may have moved shortly before the shooting—and/or frequently in the past—which for some adolescents is a cause of regret and resentment.

In addition to these fundamental factors, some researchers also focus on the dynamics in the perpetrators' families. In their analysis of 16 cases, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) conclude that there are often intense conflicts about power and control between the parents and their children. These conflicts are accompanied by constant feelings of anger and hostility that overtly or covertly dominate life within the family. McGee and DeBernardo also discuss the role of the father in the school shooter's life. As a rule, the fathers are largely absent or play only a minimal role in the upbringing of their growing children. Within these family dynamics, adolescent children are treated inconsistently or with hostility: between occasional, severe punishments for alleged misconduct, they are simply ignored most of the time. Empirical studies show that inconsistent child-rearing behavior may have extremely problematic consequences for children's readiness to resort to violence (Heitmeyer et al., 1998).

On the basis of an analysis of 18 cases, O'Toole (1999) notes that the future school shooter has "taken command" in the parental home, with a role reversal taking place in the parent–child relationship because the parents are afraid of their children. For example, the child alone decides about the nature and duration of television watching and internet use and wins all the freedoms it wants to have. In this way, the child successfully eludes parental supervision and control. The parents evidently tolerate or deny their child's sometimes borderline or abnormal behavior. They either ignore the school's notifications about problems or poor performance, or they downplay the issues when talking to teachers. This too is noted by O'Toole as a glaring deficit in parental supervision and control, which may be further exacerbated by the presence in the family home of firearms that are not stored with the

---

[4] For example, in one of his videos (the Basement Tapes), Eric Harris complains that he spends hardly any time with his parents or his brother, with the result that there are no deeper emotional bonds between him and his family (JC-001-010377). Similar subjective deficits in emotional recognition are also revealed by the writings of Dylan Klebold: "my parents piss me off & hate me … want me to have fuckin ambition!! How can i when i get screwed and destroyed By everything??!!!" (personal testimony, Dylan Klebold, 1997, JC-001-026400).

required security precautions, but are freely accessible to the child. SDT would suggest that the child's controlling behavior must be understood as an expression of the unfulfilled desire for attention and emotional recognition.

2.4.2 Recognition in the Peer Group: Loss of Control over Social Relationships

School shooters are often described as immature, introverted loners with inadequate social skills and few, if any, close friends (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Newman et al., 2004; O'Toole, 1999; Verlinden et al., 2000). According to the study by the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education, approximately 75% of school shooters felt harassed, persecuted, threatened, attacked, or hurt by their fellow students prior to the shooting (Vossekuil et al., 2002). Leary and colleagues (2003) conclude that the perpetrators suffered bullying in the run-up to 12 out of 15 school shootings in their study and had been mocked or excluded because of their weight or appearance. Here, too, there are numerous clear indications for the significance of social disintegration and denial of emotional recognition.[5]

While the shooters are described as loners in a majority of the studies, and describe themselves as loners under questioning after the offense (Leary et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2004; Robertz, 2004; Verlinden et al., 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002), Hoffmann (2007) warns against generalizing from these findings and points out that some of the young people were "well integrated" in cliques prior to the shooting. With reference to the relevant literature, however, one must consider the possibility that—as we have seen in the case of the family background—such peer relationships are only superficially unremarkable and are experienced by the young people themselves as inadequate, fragile, and insufficiently functional (Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2007; Verlinden et al., 2000). In most cases, the available attachment figures were significantly younger than the shooters themselves (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999) or were also loners who shared the shooter's marginalized status in the social hierarchy of the school (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2004; Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2007; Verlinden et al., 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

According to McGee & DeBernardo (1999), the cohesion of these cliques is characterized primarily by two common features: (a) their members are rejected by the majority at school and in leisure activities, and (b) they often share an interest

---

[5] Both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold expressed the anguish they suffered through being despised by their peers: "Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, how fucking weak I am and shit, … people make fun of me … constantly … Therefore I get no respect and therefore I get fucking PISSED" (personal testimony, Eric Harris, 1998, JC-001-026014). "I hate you people for leaving me out of so many fun things. And no don't fucking say 'well thats your fault' because it isn't, you people had my phone#, and I asked and all, but no. no no no don't let the weird looking Eric KID come along, ooh fucking nooo" (personal testimony, Eric Harris, 1999, JC-001-026018). "i HATE my life, i want to die really bad right now … nobody accepting me even though i want be accepted" (personal testimony, Dylan Klebold, 1997, JC-001-026390).

in a rigid, eccentric, and nihilistic worldview. This attitude, which is often colored by political, religious, occult, or militaristic views, grants young people access to social affiliation based on a shared, definite value system and gives them a feeling of dominance over their conventionally minded fellow students and peers. Future shooters frequently display attitudes of intolerance and boredom toward everyday leisure activities such as individual or team sports. They also frequently avoid the times and places of social gatherings (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; O'Toole, 1999). These behavior patterns and attitudes may explain the findings of Hoffmann (2007), who emphatically points out that hardly a single case of extreme, targeted violence at schools in Germany exhibits a purely one-sided incident of bullying in advance of the offense. Rather, the future shooters frequently provoked the anger and contempt of other students through their actively challenging and provocative behavior. Moore and colleagues (2003) come to similar conclusions for the United States.

2.4.3   School Shootings as Indicators of Institutional Losses of Control

The action setting that promotes violence, therefore, has a central location, namely the school. We must now investigate the extent to which the organizational structures of the school contribute to this factor (see also Chap. 19 in this volume).

Fox and Harding (2005) view school shootings as indicators of institutional losses of control ("organizational deviance"). Their case studies at two American educational facilities where school shootings had occurred show that the school's organizational structures are substantially implicated when serious social and emotional problems remain undiscovered and the institution is unable to respond in a timely manner. According to Fox and Harding, such dysfunctional communication structures are largely due to institutional conditions which, in terms of SDT, may also lead to grave violations of recognition.

For one thing, the school represents a formal agency of selection and qualification that assigns status by various means, such as giving grades and allowing students to move up to a higher year, thereby helping to determine both the students' present status and their future social position. For another, the school functions as a social system that is fundamentally marked by the immediate conditions under which its students grow up—and this is reflected in the communicative relationships among the students. Because the school has a social function, which is fed primarily by the functionality of the system, it pays particular attention to the system as such. This culminates in the expectation that social elements should adapt to functionality (Schubarth, 2000, p. 45). Although children spend a large proportion of their time at school and the school thus acquires considerable subjective significance as the scene of personal social relationships, institutional resources are not geared towards identifying or adequately addressing the emotional needs of the students (Fox & Harding, 2005). Rather, schools demand a high degree of

social adaptation and discipline while requiring students to suppress their own needs (Hurrelmann, 2005; Tillmann, 2006).

The result may be deficits of both emotional and moral recognition. Young people's opportunities for participation and codetermination are primarily governed by institutional criteria which are perceived by students largely in the context of their interactions with teachers. Unlike informal social relationships, student–teacher interaction is constrained by a formal framework. There is an imbalance in power in which the opportunities for articulating personal needs and exercising influence according to personal desires are unequally distributed.[6]

The few remaining resources that can be channeled into the students' emotional and social requirements are usually spent exclusively on those students who are obviously in acute danger of failing the year or who exhibit severe dissocial behavior in school and thus create disorder in the institution. However, research to date shows that school shooters generally remain "under the radar" (Newman et al., 2004, p. 77). The academic performance of most was normal to above-average prior to the event (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002). In fact, the empirical study by Vossekuil et al. (2002) shows that 41% of shooters regularly received good or very good grades, while only 5% were failing at school prior to the shooting. In terms of SDT, then, these results show that, objectively at least, the shooters largely had good cumulative positional recognition and opportunities for integration.

Levin and Madfis (2009), however, show that adolescents in particular associate personal success and the value of their own lives not with academic achievement and abilities but with their popularity within the peer group, which becomes their all-important standard in the process of striving for autonomy and independence from their parents. Examination of the social integration of future shooters revealed abnormalities in their behavior within the student body. Only a very small number, however,

---

[6] Excerpts from the suicide note of the German school shooter Sebastian Bosse show that this situation gives rise to severe conflict potential. "I want my face to be burned into your brains! I don't want to run away any more! I want to do my part for the revolution of the dispossessed! I want REVENGE! I've been thinking about how most of the students that humiliated me have already left the school. I have two things to say about that: (1) I wasn't only in one class, I went to the school as a whole. No way are the people at the school innocent! Nobody is! They've got the same program running in their heads as the earlier years! I am the virus that wants to destroy these programs, and where I start is totally irrelevant. (2) Most of my revenge will be directed against the teachers, because they are people who intervened in my life against my will and who helped to put me where I now stand: On the battlefield! Almost all these teachers are still at this damn school! Daily life the way it takes place these days must be the most pathetic thing the world has to offer! S.C.J.R.D.—School, college, job, retirement, death. That's the life "normal" people have today. But what does normal even mean? S.C.J.R.D. starts at the age of six here in Germany, when children start school. That's when children start on their personal path of socialization, and in the years to come they are forced to adapt to the majority. If they refuse, they get into trouble with teachers, parents, and finally with the police. Compulsory schooling is just a euphemism for coercive schooling, because they are forced to go to school … Anyone who is forced to do something loses some of his freedom. We are forced to pay taxes, we are forced to observe speed limits, we are forced to do this, we are forced to do that. Therefore there's no freedom!" (Sebastian Bosse's suicide note, translated from Rötzer 2006).

had exhibited criminal activity, disobedience to school authorities, or violence against other students prior to the shooting (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2004).

The schools thus generally fail to recognize the desperate emotional state of these adolescents prior to the shooting, nor do they notice when they become the victims of attacks by other students that potentially cause considerable harm to their mental and physical integrity. The probability of becoming involved in conflicts with peers is particularly high in school, which simultaneously offers few possibilities for avoiding such conflicts (Klewin & Tillmann, 2006). Bullying, for example, is possible only within social networks such as a school class (Schäfer & Kulis, 2005). Thus victimization experiences are particularly stressful in the school context because it is almost impossible to escape from them. Because of compulsory schooling and the increasing importance of gaining qualifications to further one's future career, victims of bullying find it very difficult to evade aversive treatment by their peers. According to Hayer and Scheithauer (2008), parents and teachers generally hear about episodes of bullying at a very late stage and then frequently attempt to downplay the incidents.[7] Additionally, many students are reluctant to help victims of bullying because victimized adolescents are frequently unpopular and because their fellow students are afraid of becoming victims of verbal or physical attacks themselves. This creates a vicious circle of victimhood, as each new attack typically lowers the victim's status in the peer group still further.

2.5   School Shooting as the Radicalization of Social Norms and Values?

2.5.1   The Battle for Recognition and Control: Adolescents Under (Status) Pressure

One conspicuous feature of school shootings is that they occur primarily in highly developed industrial nations. The two countries with the highest incidence—the United States and Canada—are two of the world's wealthiest nations. In Europe, too, school shootings occur most frequently in countries in the wealthier north-west of the continent, with Finland and Germany leading the field (Böckler & Seeger, 2010).

In countries with a highly developed economy, young people remain in a transitional phase lasting many years in which they must undergo schooling and vocational training before being able to lead independent lives as productive adult

---

[7] Thus Sebastian Bosse wrote in his blog: "Most people don't know about it. They thought I was going to school every day. I don't play along, just go back home. The only time that anyone really noticed anything was when they pressed a red-hot key against my hand … the principal reported it to the police. But nothing else happened. All the other things that happened, nobody wanted to see them, or nobody really did see them" (Bosse, blog entry dated May 26, 2005, 1.27 a.m.).

members of society (Newman et al., 2004). The youth theory angle of our composite theory stresses this *ambivalence* of adolescence. During this phase, they cannot predict whether they will one day be successful in their competitive societies. As a result, adolescents sometimes engage in bitter struggles for recognition and status during their school years. Katherine Newman and colleagues (2004) note that young people tend to adopt and follow extreme versions of the values and norms of their surrounding culture.

For American adolescents, this means that interpersonal competition and achievement as a measure of a person's social "worth," which are deeply rooted in their culture, are highly significant factors. The hierarchy in the social system of American high schools is not based primarily on the students' intellectual gifts and achievements, but is overwhelmingly derived from superficial values and characteristics, such as physical attractiveness, athletic prowess, clothing, and ownership of certain status symbols (Newman, in this volume). As youth theory shows, failure has the most traumatic impact on those young people who strongly identify with the system of values and norms.[8] According to SDT, future school shooters do have the hope of attaining positional recognition through academic achievement. However, not all cases are equal. Academic achievement, which was not a problem for the perpetrators of the Columbine shooting, was a core issue in the case of the shooting in Erfurt, Germany.

The findings of Newman and colleagues (2004) correlate with the results of the study by Larkin (2007), who examined social life at Columbine High School. Individuals who rank lower in the social hierarchy have a higher probability of being attacked in some way—either through mocking remarks or through physical violence—by higher-ranking fellow students. In particular, male adolescents who are physically weak and not on any of the school's sports teams are regularly harassed by the "jocks" and sometimes even suffer systematic psychological and physical abuse (for more detail, see the Chaps. 3 and 7 in this volume).

Future school shooters are generally very low down in the social hierarchy of the school and thus have a level of negative cumulative recognition that prevents them from attaining a position of higher status within the "jockocracy" (Katz & Jhally, 1999). The shooting represents a way of exacting retribution and revenge for the perceived unfairness of this system and a means of drawing the attention of the public and the media to their suffering and to what they perceive as a colossal injustice. In the terminology of SDT, there is a lack of *moral recognition*, because the school setting and the social relationships that predominate in schools do not respond to a situation that is perceived as unfair. According to SDT, however, the desire to

---

[8] For example, Eric Harris expressed his identification with achievement-based norms and values in a school essay about a year before the shooting. The essay also reveals his need for positional recognition: "Being a leader is a very admirable quality. I respect people who are good strong leaders and know what they are doing, and I do not respect people who are weak, uneducated leaders. This is why I want to be a strong leader. I am hoping team sports and other classes will help me achieve this quality. If I am considering a military career, then leadership is an extremely important quality. I am expecting to learn how to be organized and responsible, how to treat people equally, how to listen attentively and how to solve problems logically. I am hoping my senior classes and experiences will help my goals" (school essay, Eric Harris, 1998, JC-001-026724).

restore norms perceived as just is not linked to the recognition experience of being heard and gaining respect.[9]

The shooters deliberately choose their spectacular act of violence because they can no longer bear to perceive themselves as weak and powerless. Additionally, they aim to demonstrate their "strength" in public and especially in full view of their tormentors—the "higher status peers" (Larkin, 2007; Newman et al., 2004). In the words of Newman and colleagues: "School shooters are looking for status-winning, manhood-enhancing departures" (2004, p. 150). These motives are rooted in a culture that is dominated by competition and by a pronounced masculinity that is associated with violence. In this culture, only a few people belong to the class of "celebrities," of which adolescent school shooters want to be a part, albeit posthumously (Larkin, 2007). Against this background, a student's rampage shooting can be viewed as a desperate attempt to gain or regain control over their own social identity. The shooting turns an erstwhile nobody into a "deviant superstar" (Robertz, 2004, p. 181) and creates hope of achieving the ultimate, historical recognition of their hitherto insignificant personality.

2.5.2 Cultural Scripts of Manly Self-Assertion: Power over Others Equals Control

Adolescent school shooters grow up in Western industrial nations under sociocultural conditions dominated by intense interpersonal competition. They are involved in fierce competition for jobs, status, and prestige, and the risk of "losing" and failure is very high for the individual (Larkin, 2007). This social and cultural climate, backed up by the media, propagates types of behavior that emphasize attributes such as strength and assertiveness. Newman and colleagues (2004) are particularly emphatic in asserting that American society is dominated by a specific, stereotypical image of masculinity according to which being a man means fearlessly and steadfastly facing the challenges of life and of one's surroundings. In their view, the media is one of the main vehicles that propagate this cultural script, as films and sports coverage regularly portray masculinity in connection with aggression, or even with violence involving severe injury to others, as an acceptable means of attaining one's own goals.

Like Newman and colleagues (2004), Katz and Jhally (1999) also identify a significant connection between media portrayals of masculinity and the phenomenon

---

[9] Eric Harris viewed his crime as a moral measure for restoring justice. According to his own testimony, the crime could have been prevented if he had received more social recognition. "I'm showing too much of myself, my views and thoughts, people might start to wonder, smart ones will get nosey and something might happen to fuck me over, I might need to put on [a mask] here to fool you all some more. fuck fuck fuck It'll be very hard to hold out until April. If people would give me more compliments all of this might still be avoidable, … but probably not. Whatever I do people make fun of me, and sometimes directly to my face. I'll get revenge soon enough. Fuckers shouldn't have ripped on me so much huh" (personal testimony, Eric Harris, 1998, JC-001-026015).

of rampage school shootings. As the association of masculinity with violence is a cultural norm, a school shooter is, in a sense, acting in accordance with this propagated norm. Shooters are generally male, but are also frequently outsiders at their schools, which means that they are unable to make friends or win favor with the opposite sex (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999).

Not infrequently, too, they lack the physical attributes that are associated with masculinity and thus often become the victims of verbal or physical attacks by other—mostly male—students (Newman et al., 2004). Moreover the shooters' sexual orientation and/or ability to match up to the socially predominant (heterosexual) male image is often aggressively challenged within the peer group (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). In the view of various authors, their powerlessness and their failure to live up to the normative ideas of heterosexual masculinity give rise to severe feelings of inferiority as a consequence of negative moral and emotional recognition (in terms of SDT), which they attempt to compensate by a violent attack on their peers and/or teachers in order to achieve a feeling of power, dominance, and *masculinity* (Katz & Jhally, 1999; Kellner, 2008; Larkin, 2007; Neroni, 2000; Newman et al., 2004).[10]

The aggressive behavior of adolescent boys, who are in the process of actively coming to terms with their gender role identity, is a radical means of conforming to the cultural norm of the violent stereotype of masculinity. Aggression enables them to feel powerful and superior to others and to demonstrate and consolidate their position of status.

2.6 Dynamics of Escalation: Control, Loss of Control, and Violent Quests for Control

The conditions described above are the prerequisites for a superficially unobtrusive, covert escalation Process whose precise thrust is not predetermined in the early stages. The process may result in an addiction to recognition and a quest for superiority. The aim of the school shooting, too, is to restore recognition. Whether the shooter's surroundings react negatively or positively is irrelevant here; in the eyes of the shooters, gaining public notoriety for their crimes is itself a positive outcome, and they perceive a possibility of becoming immortal through massacres like those of Erfurt or Littleton as a grand prospect.

Revenge as an expression of hate is only a superficial motive for violent acts and represents the last link in a long chain of causation. The real cause is the erosion of recognition, which the shooter may dread experiencing or which he or she may have experienced in the past.

---

[10] The *leitmotifs* of power, dominance, and masculinity are reflected in Eric Harris' reflections on the planned shooting: "itll be like the LA riots, the oklahoma bombing, WWII, vietnam, duke and doom all mixed together. maybe we will even start a little rebelion or revolution to fuck things up as much as we can. i want to leave a lasting impression on the world" (personal testimony, Eric Harris, 1998, JC-001-026856).

Processes of this kind would drain anyone's resources, but the point where erosion of recognition begins and the point where it becomes "critical" vary from case to case. There is no automatic process that inevitably culminates in violence against others, and so the outside world receives very few warning signs. This is one of the symptoms of society's loss of control, and it is one reason why school shootings, though small in number, trigger so deep a sense of insecurity in society as a whole.

The erosion of recognition, then, is a process and not an event that simply happens out of nowhere. Persons affected by this disintegration will respect core values like the inviolability of human life only if they feel that they are receiving adequate recognition from others. In other words, there is a relationship of reciprocal stabilization between an individual receiving recognition and their respecting norms. This process, however, is extremely vulnerable to interference, for example if teachers or parents violate the child's sense of justice. Such a violation can be interpreted as a violation of moral recognition in terms of SDT if the child's (sometimes articulated) feelings or experiences of injustice are not resolved.[11] As a consequence of such violation, social bonds and emotional support may be lost. Individuals may perceive the prospect of facing loneliness, as the expression of social disintegration, as so threatening that they cease to consider the consequences their actions may have for other people. Other people thus lose their social and emotional significance. Consequently, the norm of inviolability, which protects others from our actions, begins to erode, and the inhibition threshold for violence drops or vanishes completely.

The process of erosion of recognition can be traced in the Columbine shooting. As the two shooters developed fantasies of superiority (nonetheless socially acceptable) they were at the same time forced to realize that they were not receiving recognition. Rather, they were ignored, and so they secretly radicalized their attitude to their lives over a lengthy period. Their hatred erupted into violence directed primarily against students with particularly high recognition levels (athletes), but also against students who were especially despised (Hispanics). During the shooting, the murderers laughed and giggled as they demonstrated, for the first and last time, their superiority to those by whom they had been denied recognition (Larkin, 2007).

Based on the available—albeit not always explicitly empirical—data, various authors have developed models for explaining the interplay between the various risk factors that come into play during the genesis of the crime. These individual attempts at explanation generally focus on different aspects, such as the effects of social marginalization (Leary et al., 2003), the effects of the consumption of violent media

---

[11] Eric Harris appears initially to have compensated the recurring violations of moral recognition in his imagination, in which he renounced accepted social ideas of justice and accepted only his own will as the decisive authority. "My belief is that if I say something, it goes. I am the law, if you don't like it, you die. If I don't like you or I don't like what you want me to do, you die. If I do something incorrect, oh fucking well, you die. Dead people cant do many things, like argue, whine, bitch, complain, narc, rat out, criticize, or even fucking talk. So that's the only way to solve arguments with all you fuckheads out there, I just kill! God I can't wait till I can kill you people" (Eric Harris's website, 1998, JC-001-010367).

content (Kidd & Meyer, 2005), the consequences of narcissistic personality traits (Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, & Gray, 2001), and the relevance of violent fantasies (Robertz, 2004). However, they do exhibit distinct parallels in certain areas. Thus it seems helpful to place the different approaches in a logical order.

2.6.1 Social Disintegration and Inadequate Conflict Management Skills: Loss of Control over Life Situation

SDT highlights the dangers of loss of recognition in combination with the absence of socially acceptable opportunities for conflict-solving. According to Hoffmann (2003), an adolescent's shooting spree represents the culmination of a comprehensible sequence of actions and thoughts that result from a continual narrowing of options during the course of a crisis in the adolescent's life (see also Madfis and Levin, in this volume).

Robertz (2004) holds that the origins of the violent dynamic lie in a high degree of biopsychosocial vulnerability that may be caused by a lack of social backing and emotional support (also Fast, 2008; Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). This great vulnerability, which prevents the adolescent from developing adequate problem-solving skills and acquiring a flexible repertoire of responses for interacting with the social environment, results in feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, and these feelings are increasingly intensified by the adolescent's repeated failures in various walks of life (Robertz, 2004; Thompson & Kyle, 2005). Constant humiliation through bullying, social rejection, and marginalization by the peer group are the primary factors that cause adolescents to experience their lives as a torment (Leary et al., 2003).[12] Young people in particular define their identities in terms of their relationship with their peers and their own subjective position within the social hierarchy. Bullying and other forms of social rejection can therefore lead to extreme forms of deprivation and frustration during adolescence (Fast, 2008; Harding et al., 2002; Thompson & Kyle, 2005).

Even adolescents who have a positive emotional climate in their homes to fall back on will gradually cease to experience their home environment as supportive, because adolescence is a phase of life in which their parental bonds typically decrease in strength and the desire for autonomy takes priority (Levin & Madfis, 2009). Experiences of contempt and powerlessness may lead to a narcissistic grievance—a violation of self-esteem that is perceived as an existential threat (Meloy et al., 2001; Hoffmann 2003; Robertz, 2004). One way of responding to this situa-

---

[12] For example, Dylan Klebold experienced the consequences of social exclusion as follows: "this is a weird time, weird life, weird existence …I think a lot. Think …Think … that's all my life is, just shitloads of thinking … all the time … my mind never stops … i am in eternal suffering … hoping that people can accept me … that i can accept them" (personal testimony, Dylan Klebold, 1997, JC-001-026388). "i see how different i am (aren't we all you'll say) yet i'm on such a greater scale of difference than everyone else … I see jocks having fun, friends, women, LIVEZ" (personal testimony, Dylan Klebold, 1997, JC-001-026389).

tion is to search for ways to compensate, to escape from the tensions and maintain a positive self-image.

2.6.2 Compensation of Action and Control Deficits: Violent Fantasies

According to Robertz (in this volume), an unendurable inability to take action may be compensated by escaping into a fantasy world in which highly vulnerable adolescents can play the role of strong and powerful personalities that is closed to them in their real-life experience. Meloy and colleagues (2001) provide a similar description of the pre-offense experiences of adolescent mass murderers, who frequently attempt to compensate for social grievances by means of fantasies of omnipotence in which they transform their feelings of shame and self-doubt into extreme anger at their social environment. Future shooters may compensate their narcissistic grievances by assuming the character of a godlike avenger and creating a new world for themselves in which they can play the role of a lord over the highest form of power—that of life and death (Robertz, 2004).[13]

2.6.3 The Quest for Control: The How

Harding et al. (2002), Hoffmann (2003), Robertz (2004), and Kidd and Meyer (2005) suggest that media content glorifying violence plays a significant role in this process. However, while Harding et al., Hoffmann, and Robertz all believe that the media serve as an intermediary between feelings of deprivation and the genesis of violent fantasies (for example, by making available violent films and video games in which susceptible adolescents are repeatedly provided with alternative incentives and ideas for developing new and more intensive power fantasies), Kidd and Meyer describe media consumption as a causative factor that touches off a dynamic of dissocial behavior and thus predisposes the individual for a loss of control. Even young

---

[13] Two examples of Eric Harris' pre-delict fantasies: "Well all you people out there can just kiss my ass and die. From now on, i don't give a fuck what almost any of you mutha fackers have to say, unless I respect you which is highly unlikely … for the rest of you, you all better fucking hide in your houses because i'm comin' for EVERYONE soon, and i WILL be armed to the fuckin teeth and I WILL shoot and kill and I WILL fucking KILL EVERYTHING! No I am not crazy … everyone is different, but most of you fuckheads out there in society, going to your everyday fucking jobs and doing your everyday routine shitty things, I say fuck you and die. If you got a problem with my thoughts, come tell me an i'll kill you" (Eric Harris' website, 1998, JC-001-010360). "We of the Trenchcoat Mafia still march around, military-style in our trenchcoats, especially in the school hallways, honing and developing our master plan. We will conquer the entire world once we get a few things straight and make our bombs! … Our master plan is to kill at least 500 people at our high school, besiege the local neighborhood, seize the airport, and then crash a plane full of jocks and cheerleaders into the Pentagon" (Eric Harris' website, undated, quoted from Larkin, 2007, p. 162).

children, in their view, are taught by violent media content that violence is an effective and desirable way of solving problems, and they subsequently resort to violence with increasing frequency when dealing with conflicts in their social relationships. As a consequence, they experience rejection from their peers, with the result that the prosocial behaviors of these children increasingly atrophy in the absence of social learning experiences and the children repeatedly resort to forms of violence in their interactions with others.

While Kidd and Meyer (2005) assert that it is access to weapons that tempts adolescents to use them to gain the respect they long for in their social environment, Robertz (2004) believes that the crucial trigger for rampages is a vicious circle between real failures and fantasies of greatness. In his view, the adolescent must initially withdraw further and further into his or her fantasy world in order to escape from the repeated humiliations in real life and to compensate for them by fantasies of omnipotence, vengeance, and superiority. The adolescent devotes more and more time to these fantasies while reality steadily loses its relevance and his or her ability to cope with reality steadily deteriorates. Access to weapons and violent media images continually supplies new content for his or her fantasies, which become increasingly detailed and refined, until the point is reached where the fantasy alone is no longer a sufficient means of compensation and the perpetrator begins to make real preparations for real action and put parts of them into practice. This may take the form of leaking—of directly or indirectly announcing his intentions. The adolescent increasingly loses control over his or her fantasies, which increasingly become the basis for their existence. After experiencing yet more frustration and humiliation, they increasingly come to believe that putting their violent fantasies of vengeance into practice is a logical thing to do.

Undifferentiated and excessive media coverage of past school shootings frequently enables adolescents to identify with real mass murderers and offers them justifications and choreographies for putting their own plans into practice (Robertz, 2004). According to Leary et al. (2003), following through on these intentions is made easier by the fact that the adolescent's history of dwelling obsessively on issues such as murder and death has desensitized him to such a degree that the idea of putting the murderous actions of his fantasies into practice comes to seem increasingly more normal and less frightening. Additionally, an existing fascination with weapons means that the adolescent is at ease with the idea of handling them.

2.6.4 From Absolute Loss of Control to the Crime: Triggering Causes

Most authors maintain that the violent act is triggered by a final experience of frustration or loss that overtaxes the adolescent's coping ability to the extent that he or she can no longer compensate for their deficits (Harding et al., 2002; Robertz, 2004). In terms of stress theory, the individual is now confronted with demands on their own resources and competences that they perceive as being impossibly high.

The result may be a drastic cumulation of stress when acute aversive situations coincide with existing chronic tensions such as continual denials of recognition in the family, the school, and the peer group. Where these are already present, brief episodes of stress may subjectively be perceived as catastrophic and existentially threatening (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Levin & Madfis, 2009).

Prior to a school shooting, the perpetrators frequently faced experiences of loss or social rejection (Hoffmann, 2007; Leary et al., 2003; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Moore et al., 2003; Verlinden et al., 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002). These kinds of losses of status and relationships are described in the literature as situative triggering events which the future shooter experiences as severe personal failures and the loss of all hope (Hoffmann, 2007; Robertz, 2004). Moore and colleagues (2003) argue that such experiences overtax the shooter's coping capacity so greatly that a dramatic act of violence comes to seem an attractive option for channeling pent-up feelings of frustration and expressing them at last (so too Harding et al., 2002). McGee and DeBernardo (1999) conclude that the shooters were generally confronted with a large number of such psychosocial stressors within a period of two weeks to 24 h before the shooting. Various studies have identified the following events as specific, situative triggers that lead from the planning of the shooting to its execution:

- Rebukes and punishment by parents or school authorities (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Meloy et al., 2001; Verlinden et al., 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002).
- Incidents of public mockery or perceived unfair treatment by others (Leary et al., 2003; Meloy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002).
- Loss of or rejection by a partner or an idol (Leary et al., 2003; Meloy et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2003; O'Toole, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002).
- Repeated rejection or bullying by peers (Meloy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002).
- Severe illness diagnosed in the shooter or a person close to him (Harding et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

Vossekuil et al. (2002) were able to identify such events as preceding 71% of the shootings in their study. According to Adler (2000), 50% of the rampage shootings in his study occurred on the same day as such an event, while another 30% took place a few days later.

It must be borne in mind, however, that these *situative* triggering causes, like the *long-term* psychosocial stresses we described above, are not specific to school shootings as risk factors. Rather, they also play a role in other forms of problematic internalizing and externalizing behaviors in adolescents, such as suicidal tendencies and substance abuse (Hurrelmann, 2005). Thus the scope of existing findings and explanations is limited, and researchers face the fundamental problem of providing better theoretical and empirical explanations for the interactions of the various causative factors. This in turn has ramifications for possible control and prevention strategies. A control regime that rests on putative certainties about the acts and their causes is not only doomed to fail, but may also have disastrous consequences for social cooperation.

2.7   Social Control Strategies and Loss of Control

As Newman and colleagues show (2004, p. 50), exaggerated media reporting about the frequency of school shootings creates a "climate of fear" within American society with far-reaching consequences. After the school shooting at Columbine High, parents increasingly feared that their children were no longer safe at school. Although the likelihood of a student dying in an educational facility is approximately one in two million (Addington, 2009), 71% of the parents interviewed by Peterson, Larson, and Skiba (2001) feared that a similar incident could occur in their own town (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Donohue, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1998).

The primary cause for these fears—which, from a statistical perspective at least, are largely unfounded—is believed by many authors to be the way in which such incidents are reported on television and in the print media, though a portion of the responsibility is also ascribed to political vested interests (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Brooks et al., 2000; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Donohue et al., 1998). Media reporting on school shootings has great audience appeal, while politicians can exploit fears of the supposedly ubiquitous danger of school shootings in order to win voters, by demanding demonstrative, high-profile security measures and calling for a zero tolerance policy. In particular, many parents have repeatedly and emphatically called on schools to take visible measures to prevent school shootings. The authorities frequently opted for installing clearly recognizable security measures to demonstrate their willingness and ability to act. For example, government funding was made available for CCTV cameras and private security services to tighten surveillance. Other measures implemented at schools with increasing frequency after the Columbine shooting included video surveillance in schoolyards, hallways, and classrooms, metal detectors, locker inspections, and the logging of traffic through the main entrances (Muschert & Larkin 2007; Addington, 2009). Such demonstrative attempts at control are an expression of the safety imperative prevalent in modern societies, which is coming to rely less and less on socially integrative welfare strategies and is instead casting an ever-widening net of surveillance and monitoring strategies (Keupp, 2011). This is justified by the *illusory* claim to "eliminate all things unpredictable, inconclusive, ambivalent, unfamiliar, disturbing, and to create a clear and predictable world" (ibid., p. 58).

It remains largely unclear, however, whether these security measures achieve their purpose or whether they have negative effects on the schools and their student bodies. While no substantiated evaluations have been performed to date, initial empirical findings suggest that these kinds of demonstrative attempts at control are counterproductive. Studies indicate that there is a link between the use of the security measures described above and increasing levels of victimization and fear among the students (Schreck & Miller, 2003; Schreck, Miller, & Gibson, 2003). According to Addington (2009), negative consequences can be expected above all through the lack of respect for personal freedom that is inherent in random inspections and violations of privacy. These measures, then, represent a control regime

that is itself uncontrolled. Whether this kind of striving for social control over school shootings has the slightest possibility to succeed is very much an open question. Even more restrictive gun laws, which have been the focus of much discussion, are unlikely to be very effective on their own. Newman and colleagues (2004) show that school shootings are typically committed with stolen firearms or weapons procured from friends, and only very rarely with guns purchased by the shooters themselves (see also Kleck, 2009).

Additionally, little attention has been paid to the fact that the two factors discussed in Sect. 2.3 as elements of an action setting conducive to violence: the consumption of violent computer games (as a decision-making aid for improving efficiency) and access to weapons (as a prerequisite for the ability to kill) are regulated by the capitalist market rather than governmental or other restrictions. Illegal markets invariably develop alongside legal ones. The illegal media market in "killer games" and the illegal weapons market are highly efficient—both on the national and international levels—and are accessible at any time to those willing to make the effort. For this reason, they are related to a loss of control on the part of the institutions entrusted by society's to exercise control. Because illegal markets are "learning systems" they will always get around attempts to exercise control in their search for profit—especially in countries like the United States, which take weapons ownership for granted.

2.8   An Interim Conclusion

The background against which school shootings occur is characterized by great ambivalences relating to loss of control. Adolescents growing up in today's society lose control over their own lives under the influence of social pressure and structural insecurity about the possibility of realizing their life-plans. This process is based in social dynamics of integration and disintegration: The thwarted desire for recognition generates an addiction to recognition, and this addiction fosters a desire to exercise control over others. Violence is a means of exercising control.

So there are also dynamics of escalation that are almost impossible to control *systematically*—in other words, they cannot be limited or causally repressed. Thus the empirical findings suggest that school shootings represent the expression of a double loss of control on the following levels:

- On the level of the individual, in the loss of control of adolescent perpetrators over their own lives because the agents of socialization (family, school, peer group) make it impossible to achieve an adequate degree of social integration with a positive recognition balance.
- On the level of society, in a diffuse understanding of the causes underlying the violence. This makes it almost impossible to develop effective methods of prevention and intervention—in other words, to control this form of violence.

To sum up, it appears to be extremely difficult to identify potential school shooters in advance. Even when young people directly or indirectly announce their intentions, it is almost impossible to accurately assess the seriousness of these "warning signs," although there is a growing international effort to improve threat assessment procedures (O'Toole, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002; and, for Germany, Scheithauer, Bondü, Meixner, Bull, & Dölitzsch, 2008). However, the risk of stigmatizing a suspect is immensely high and there is a danger of forcing an adolescent into the role of shooter through accusations and disciplinary measures (Lamnek, 1979; also Böhnisch, 2001).

At the same time, focusing on supposedly "dangerous" students places blame on an individual with a complex social problem characterized by insecurity, unequal participation, and disintegration. This reading of the situation imputes the risk of an escalation not to the surrounding social constellations, but rather to the specific personality of the adolescent. It loses sight of the social context and the underlying cultural, institutional, and biographical factors, and this in turn triggers additional processes of marginalization and devaluation which can favor violent responses to stress.

Thus the primary and essential priority is to improve recognition and the general climate in the student body and among the teaching staff of schools and colleges. As a fundamental prerequisite, it is necessary to strive for a new *culture of recognition* and mutual watchfulness both in schools and in the general social context. Such a culture would prevent adolescents from experiencing social disintegration, losing control over their own lives, and taking refuge in extreme violence as an escape from their dramatic situation in order to achieve an illusory immortality.

References

Addington, L. A. (2009). Cops and cameras: Public school security as a policy response to Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1426–1446.

Adler, L. (2000). *Amok: Eine Studie*. Munich: Belleville.

Anhut, R. (2002). Die Konflikttheorie der Desintegrationstheorie. In T. Bonacker (Ed.), *Sozialwissenschaftliche Konflikttheorien—Eine Einführung* (pp. 381–407). Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Anhut, R., & Heitmeyer, W. (2005). Desintegration, Anerkennungsbilanzen und die Rolle sozialer Vergleichsprozesse für unterschiedliche Verarbeitungsmuster von Prekarität. In W. Heitmeyer & P. Imbusch (Eds.), *Integrationspotenziale moderner Gesellschaften* (pp. 75–100). Wiesbaden: VS.

Birkland, T. A., & Lawrence, R. G. (2009). Media framing and policy change after Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1405–1425.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Böhnisch, L. (2001). *Abweichendes Verhalten: Eine pädagogisch-soziologische Einführung*. Weinheim/Munich: Juventa (2d corr. ed.).

Brooks, K., Schiraldi, V., & Ziedenberg, J. (2000). *School house hype: Two years later*. Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute.

Burns, R., & Crawford, C. (1999). School shootings, the media, and public fear: Ingredients for a moral panic. *Crime, Law & Social Change, 32*, 147–168.

Cohen, S. (1985). *Visions of social control*. Cambridge: Polity.

Donohue, E., Schiraldi, V., & Ziedenberg, J. (1998). *School house hype: The school shootings, and the real risks kids face in America*. Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.

Engels, H. (2007). Das School Shooting von Emsdetten—der letzte Ausweg aus dem Tunnel!? In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen: Früherkennung/ Risikomanagement/Kriseneinsatz/Nachbetreuung* (pp. 35–56). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. New York: Overlook.

Fox, C., & Harding, D. J. (2005). School shootings as organizational deviance. *Sociology of Education, 78*, 69–97.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies: Lessons from a study of rampage school shootings. *Sociological Methods & Research, 31*(2), 174–217.

Hayer, T., & Scheithauer, H. (2008). Bullying. In H. Scheithauer, T. Hayer, & K. Niebank (Eds.), *Problemverhalten und Gewalt im Jugendalter: Erscheinungsformen, Entstehungsbedingungen, prävention und intervention* (pp. 37–52). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Heitmeyer, W., & Anhut, R. (2008). Disintegration, recognition, and violence: A theoretical perspective. In W. Heitmeyer & S. Legge (Eds.), *Youth, violence, and social disintegration [Special issue]* (New directions for youth development, Vol. 119, pp. 25–37). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Heitmeyer, W., Collmann, B., & Conrads, J. (1998). *Gewalt: Schattenseiten der Individualisierung bei Jugendlichen aus unterschiedlichen Milieus* (3d ed.). Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Hoffmann, J. (2003). Amok—ein neuer Blick auf ein altes Phänomen. In C. Lorei (Ed.), *Polizei und Psychologie: Kongressband der Tagung "Polizei und Psychologieam" 18. und 19. März 2003 in Frankfurt am Main* (pp. 397–414). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hoffmann, J. (2007). Tödliche Verzweiflung—der Weg zu zielgerichteten Gewalttaten an Schulen. In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen: Früherkennung/ Risikomanagement/Kriseneinsatz/Nachbetreuung* (pp. 25–34). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Horwitz, A. V. (1990). *The logic of social control*. New York & London: Plenum.

Hurrelmann, K. (2005). *Lebensphase Jugend: Eine Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Jugendforschung* (8th ed.). Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (2006). Columbine documents.

Katz, J., & Jhally, S. (1999, May 2). The national conversation in the wake of Littleton is missing the mark. *The Boston Globe*, p. E1.

Kellner, D. (2008). *Guys and guns amok: Domestic terrorism and school shootings from the Oklahoma City bombings to the Virginia Tech massacre*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Keupp, H. (2011). Verwirklichungschancen von Anfang an: Frühe Förderung als Beitrag zur Befähigungsgerechtigkeit. In G. Robert, K. Pfeifer, & T. Drößler (Eds.), *Aufwachsen in Dialog und sozialer Verantwortung: Bildung—Risiken—Prävention in der frühen Kindheit* (pp. 49–70). Wiesbaden: VS.

Kidd, S. T., & Meyer, C. L. (2005). Similarities of school shootings in rural and small communities. *Journal of Rural Community Psychology, E5*(1).

Kimmel, M., & Mahler, M. (2003). Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence: Random school shootings, 1982–2001. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*(10), 1439–1458.

Kleck, G. (2009). Mass shootings in schools: The worst possible case for gun control. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1447–1464.

Klewin, G., & Tillmann, K. J. (2006). Gewaltformen in der Schule—ein vielschichtiges Problem. In W. Heitmeyer & M. Schröttle (Eds.), *Gewalt: Beschreibung, Analysen, Prävention* (pp. 191–208). Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung.

Lamnek, S. (1979). *Theorien abweichenden Verhaltens*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lazarus, R., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.

Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 202–214.

Levin, J., & Madfis, E. (2009). Mass murder at school and cumulative strain: A sequential model. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1227–1245.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger. *The Forensic Examiner, 8*, 1–16.

Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A. G., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A. A., & Gray, B. T. (2001). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of adolescent mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*(6), 719–728.

Moore, M. H., Petrie, C. V., Braga, A. A., & McLaughlin, B. L. (Eds.). (2003). *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence*. Washington, DC: National Academies.

Muschert, G. W., & Larkin, R. W. (2007). The Columbine High School shootings. In S. Chermak & F. Y. Bailey (Eds.), *Crimes and trials of the century* (pp. 253–266). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Neroni, H. (2000). The men of Columbine: Violence and masculinity in American culture and film. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, 5*(2), 256–263.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Peterson, R. L., Larson, J., & Skiba, R. (2001). School violence prevention: Current status and policy recommendations. *Law & Policy, 23*, 345–371.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Robertz, F. J., & Wickenhäuser, R. (2007). *Der Riss in der Tafel: Amoklauf und schwere Gewalt in der Schule*. Heidelberg: Springer.

Rötzer, F. (2006). Ich will R.A.C.H.E: Der vollständige Abschiedsbrief, den Sebastian B. im Internet hinterlassen hat, bevor er auf seinen suizidalen Rachefeldzug in seiner Schule in Emsdetten zog. Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/24/24032/1.html.

Schäfer, M., & Kulis, M. (2005). Immer gleich oder manchmal anders? Zur Stabilität der Opfer-, Täter- und Mitschülerrollen beim Bullying in Abhängigkeit von Kontextmerkmalen. In A. Ittel & M. von Salisch (Eds.), *Lügen, Lästern, Leiden lassen—Aggressives Verhalten von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (pp. 237–255). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Scheithauer, H., Bondü, R., Meixner, S., Bull, H. D., & Dölitzsch, C. (2008). Sechs Jahre nach Erfurt—Das Berliner Leaking-Projekt: Ein Ansatz zur Prävention von School Shootings und Amokläufen an Schulen. *Trauma & Gewalt, 2*, 2–13.

Schreck, C. J., & Miller, J. M. (2003). Sources of fear of crime at school. *Journal of School Violence, 2*, 57–79.

Schreck, C. J., Miller, J. M., & Gibson, C. L. (2003). Trouble in the school yard: A study of the risk factors of victimization at school. *Crime & Delinquency, 49*, 460–484.

Schubarth, W. (2000). *Gewaltprävention in Schule und Jugendhilfe: Theoretische Grundlagen, Empirische Ergebnisse, Praxismodelle*. Neuwied & Kriftel: Luchterhand.

Thompson, S., & Kyle, K. (2005). Understanding mass school shootings: Links between personhood and power in the competitive school environment. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 26*, 419–438.

Tillmann, K. J. (2006). *Sozialisationstheorien: Eine Einführung in den Zusammenhang von Gesellschaft, Institution und Subjektwerdung*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowolt.

Tittle, C. (1995). *Control balance: Toward a general theory of deviance*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service/U.S. Department of Education.

Chapter 3
Adolescent Culture and the Tragedy of Rampage Shootings

Katherine S. Newman

The 1997–1998 academic year left a bloody trail of multiple-victim homicides in communities that imagined themselves violence free. Rampage school shootings had actually erupted before, but in the late 1990s, a string of six incidents created a sense that an epidemic was under way. On October 1, 1997, 16-year-old Luke Woodham of Pearl, Mississippi, killed his mother, then went to school and shot nine students, killing two. One month later, Michael Carneal, a student at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky, killed three and wounded five. Fourteen-year-old Joseph Todd shot two students in Stamps, Arkansas, 2 weeks after Michael's rampage. Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden left four students and a teacher dead and wounded ten others at the Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas. A few weeks later, 14-year-old Andrew Wurst of Edinboro, Pennsylvania, killed a teacher and wounded three students at a school dance. The killing season for that year ended on May 21 when 15-year-old Kip Kinkel murdered his parents and then went on a shooting spree in his Springfield, Oregon, school cafeteria, killing two students and wounding 25.

The next year brought us "Columbine." The sheer scale of the Littleton, Colorado, rampage was so enormous that this one word will, for years to come, conjure up horrific images of dead and wounded children. Eric Harris, age 17, and Dylan Klebold, 18, invaded the school with an arsenal of guns and bombs, killing 12 students and a teacher, wounding 23 others, and finally ending their own lives. One month later, T. J. Solomon injured six students in a school shooting in Conyers, Georgia.

K.S. Newman (✉)
Zanvyl Krieger School of the Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University,
Baltimore, MD, USA
e-mail: knewman@jhu.edu

A banner headline blazed across the front page of the *Paducah Sun* on the day after the shooting there: "Why?" That nagging question still hung in the air when we arrived in Heath and Westside more than 3 years later. By then, though, confidence that an answer could be found had drained right out of the townspeople. "Everyone who has been through this has looked for a magic bullet," Dan Orazine, the Judge Executive in Paducah, told us, "and I don't think there is one."

Based on research conducted in the aftermath of school shootings carried out at Heath High School by 14-year-old Michael Carneal, and at Westside Middle School by 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden, this chapter will attempt to provide a "why." Indeed, rather than locating the roots of this violence in bad parenting or broken families, our research has found its impetus in the social and cultural milieu in which these school shooters lived. In this chapter, we hope to demonstrate that both adolescent and adult status concerns, as well as the small town environment, helped to create conditions conducive to this kind of behavior. We also consider the importance of notions of masculinity and cultural scripts to the actions of these school shooters.

This research was supported by a grant from the National Research Council and carried out between 2000 and 2002. It involved interviews with 163 people in Heath and Westside, including families of the victims, students who were in the schools at the time of the shootings and those who were not, teachers, administrators, court officials, psychologists, news reporters, family, and fellow congregation members of the shooters.

3.1 Social Failure in Adolescent Society

"Popular" kids are at the top of the heap in adolescent culture and any understanding of how the hierarchy is experienced by those who are outside this charmed circle must still begin with them. Although, ironically, the "popular" kids are often disliked or even disdained by their less trendy classmates, they are the most powerful actors in this social system. People pay attention to the clothes they wear, the activities they value, the kids they favor (and those they despise). How do young people enter the winners' circle? Looks are paramount; it is virtually impossible to be a popular kid without being physically attractive. Money matters too—partly because it can buy the other things that count, like the right clothes or cars. Unlike physical attributes, the elements of popularity that are tied to consumption link rank ordering among teens to their parents' status. We asked teenagers in Heath and Westside, "What makes people popular?"

> A lot of the times it's like basically what your parents do. Well, that's how a lot of kids base it on—if you have money or if you don't or if you just shop at Gap. That's . . . [what] the kids in our school base popularity on (Stephanie Holder, Heath High School sophomore).

> If you're wearing really nice clothes and your mom drops you off in a nice car and you have a lot of money in your pocket, or if you're skinny and pretty and have really good hair. . . .

And if you're a guy and you're built or you're popular or whatever, the football players are going to go for you (Stacey Hunt, Westside High School sophomore).

The in-crowd in these high schools is set apart because its members have more active social lives. They go out on dates and throw wild parties, opportunities made possible by their—or their parents'—greater affluence. The critical factors were similar among middle schoolers. Even for those too young to drive or throw parties, the social hierarchies—based on clothes, looks, and athletic prowess—are much the same. In a small community, cliques and social labels acquired in middle school feed directly into high school social position.

Cultural ideals that rule the rest of society play a key role in this milieu as well. Entire industries are built on (and reinforce) women's desires to "look skinny" or have "good hair" and men's desires to build their biceps or drive luxury cars. Ironically, though, adolescents tend to valorize these superficial qualities at the expense of traits that make a real difference in their fate as adults.[1] This is particularly true where achievement in school is concerned. It is hard to get anywhere important in the adult world without completing college and, increasingly, graduate or professional school.

Yet this plain truth is rarely recognized by youths. At a time when kids are trying to grow up and differentiate themselves from adults, the easiest way to make the difference between the generations clear is to resist what all those adults are pushing: doing well in school. Time horizons matter as well. Getting better grades in ninth grade may result in a higher class rank, which may lead to admission in a better college, which may eventually provide more occupational options. Yet these considerations are abstract in comparison with the more immediate and pressing problem of getting a date or making enough spending money to show a girl a good time.[2] In a postindustrial economy where an ever-lengthening training period is needed before young people can enter the adult world, adolescents spend many years in a kind of status limbo.[3] They cannot forecast whether they will be successful adults until they are well into their twenties, and that is too long a time to wait to

---

[1]James Coleman was among the first to explore this puzzle in his classic work *The Adolescent Society* (1961). Coleman argued that the movement from a primarily agricultural economy in the nineteenth century to an industrial economy in the twentieth century brought about a decisive shift in relations between youth and adults. Whereas before, youths were essentially apprenticed to their parents and education was an extension of the process of socialization; in an industrial (and now postindustrial) society students engage in ever longer periods of general training intended to prepare them for the much more differentiated and unpredictable occupational sphere. The result is that adolescents become more dependent on the opinions of their peers (hence the "adolescent society"), and this adult influence on adolescent behavior is greatly diminished. For a less functional explanation of the same shift, see John Boli's *New Citizens for a New Society* (1989).

[2]As students got older and college seemed like a more immediate prospect, the status of those who did well in school rose, although never to the level of the really popular kids, like the athletes and the cheerleaders.

[3]Sociologist Stephanie Coontz has labeled this product of the modern economy "rolelessness," because it is a length of time during which youths are too old to listen mindlessly to the dictums of adults, but not yet old enough to have firm identities rooted in established work and family patterns (1997, esp. pp. 12–18).

establish a meaningful place in the pecking order. In the interim, they tend to substitute the most superficial values of the broader culture, reinforced by an extensive advertising industry.

By these adolescent standards, all three of the shooters in our cases were "losers." None of them qualified for the kind of respect they craved. They also lacked what would have been crucial buffers: a sense of personal identity and a like-minded group of peers who valued them for it.

Adolescence is not made up solely of rivalries and social tournaments. It is also the period when kids begin to define what they value, what they hope to achieve, and what kind of people they hope to become (Erikson, 1994). Despite the overarching pressures for conformity, teens do manage to differentiate themselves, but only with the help of supportive peer groups. Belonging to cliques and clubs diminishes the need to perform and provides insulation against teasing, bullying, or negative status comparisons from the larger group.

Early adolescence is toughest for those who are not at the top of the status totem pole precisely because they cannot measure themselves in any way other than how they fare in comparison to those who are. The lack of organized groups—clubs, debate teams, theater groups—means that jockeying for position is a lonely, fraught, individual effort, with kids clawing at one another to move up and down the rungs of a single status ladder. The most pointed teasing, the most excruciating attention to flaws in performance, and the most private disappointment cascade on middle school students. The pain is deeper and the resources, in terms of group support, are weaker than they will be in high school. These observations are confirmed by research that consistently shows junior high school students have lower self-esteem and less positive self-evaluations than high school students (Kinney, 1993, esp. p. 34; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998).[4]

During early adolescence, youths have not yet developed a firmly established sense of their personal identity and, hence, tend to see themselves through the lenses of their peers.[5] Students are often unable to differentiate their own sense of self from the social identity imputed to them by others. They lack that protective coating that comes with some sense of individual purpose. When Michael Carneal was publicly labeled as gay, he worried a lot that he might actually be homosexual even though, as he told psychiatrists later, he had never experienced sexual feelings for other boys or men. Mitchell was obsessed with winning compliments from teachers or other students to validate his persona. For Mitchell and Michael, lacking an internal way to rebuff their insecurities, the shootings provided a very public way to demonstrate to themselves and others that they were who they wanted to be.

---

[4]There is also considerable evidence that sometimes individuals or groups are able not to internalize stigma and have a variety of protective responses to avoid doing so (Crocker & Major, 1989). Why junior high adolescents are less able to do this is not clear. Kinney suggests that there are developmental reasons, but it is also possible that within a closed social system with a single source of status resistance is very difficult.

[5]This is similar to what Charles Cooley described as the "looking glass self." See Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and Social Order* (New York: Scribner's, 1902).

Given his age, Michael at least had the opportunity to find a social group that he could have called home. If middle school is a social ladder, high school is more like a social pyramid. The basic ordering of the hierarchy is unchanged—preps at the top, band kids in the middle, other assorted people at the bottom—but the middle groups have specialized on the basis of their interests and activities and not just where they fall in relation to the top group. Student life becomes differentiated horizontally and vertically as students become involved with more varied extracurricular activities such as the student newspaper, the drama club, and the choir, and form friendships around these interests. Instead of viewing life as a class-wide popularity contest, students become more concerned with defining their own identities and seeking to find a peer group that will support them in these efforts (Epps, 2002). Jenny Peterson, a Westside senior who seeks her center in the high school band, knows full well that she has not made the cut with the inner circle of athletes and cheerleaders:

> My whole goal of high school is not to be popular. It was to have fun and have friends. My good friends were in band with me. . . . I don't feel like I fit in really well with the more popular athletes and the richer people but . . . I have fun going on the church retreats, and the church camp, and all those things. And those are the people I want to hang out with.

Students we got to know in these middling high school groups echoed her sentiments, and they were not just handing us sour grapes. Those who were shut out of the in-crowd still feel a degree of envy and resentment about what they have been denied: social recognition, invitations to parties, and more options for dates. Yet they also embrace an alternative value system that is genuinely, if not always completely, satisfying.

Michael had started down this road, but he had not gone far. The oppositional, contrarian identity he was in the process of crafting might well have insulated him from the adolescent standards by which he had been found wanting (particularly in comparison with his sister). In his school papers, stories, and e-mails, Michael delineated the kind of teenager he wanted to be. For example:

> My name is Michael Carneal. . . . I really hate sports I have low self esteem and I play guitar. . . . I have an over achieving sister Kelly who is a senior. I hate being even compared to her. this explains my respning (?) behind being odd and strange and dressing the same way I act. . . .Sometimes I make buttons . . . expressing my opinions. I don't take stuff from teenagers or parents and I am seriously mad at the world. I like Gwar [a rock band] and Atari Teenage Riot [another band].[6]

Unfortunately, Michael did not succeed in getting other kids to accept his alternate game. He grasped the basics of adolescence—that kids who were too square were not popular—but his poor intuitions about which minor transgressions would be rewarded and which would mark him as a jerk were faulty. Trying to buy his way into the Goth group did not do the trick. Drinking salad dressing in the cafeteria brought him more mockery than friendly laughs. Wearing a cape to school was another unsuccessful gambit.

---

[6]This story was on Michael's computer hard drive. It appears to have been submitted to a teacher because it says, "sorry, messy writing."

Mental illness made it hard for Michael to calibrate the impact of his efforts. For example, he thought he had no friends, even though there were quite a few kids who claimed, even after the fact, that they were his friends. When kids tried to get close to Michael he would "pull away" in a way that was different from other teens, leaving him psychologically isolated. This loneliness also led to a deep depression, which in turn increased isolation from others.

All in all, Michael had not yet found the social niche that was so sustaining to people like Jenny Peterson, whose status was less than they might have liked. Michael came from a high-achieving family and seems to have remained ambivalent about his middling academic performance. Although he tried to move into the Goth group, he also retained his friends in the band, many of whom fit the goody-goody stereotype that he derided when among the "freaks." He flunked out in all of these contexts: he was not the student his sister was; he was the youngest, newest, and least accepted member of the Goth group; and he was one of two band students asked to sit out because of a shortage of uniforms. Instead of providing him with the security of an identity group, Michael's marginal position in various cliques exacerbated his sense of failure.

3.2   Parents and Pecking Orders

Although much of the pain that motivated these shootings came at the hands of other teenagers, adolescent social hierarchies gain much of their force by the way they are reinforced by adults. Indeed, adult investment in adolescent lives can actually exacerbate the feelings of marginality for those who do not succeed by mainstream standards.

If school were just one of many places adolescents spent their time, social failures within them might not take on such enormous significance. Indeed, in big cities school is less important because there are other proving grounds: the streets, the clubs, and summer camps. In communities like Heath and Westside, by contrast, the school is the undisputed focal point of community life for everyone. This aspect of school shootings was noted by a former Jonesboro resident who works for the state police.

> In a lot of these small towns, [school] is the center point of the community. It is the one point that draws the community together. While they may all have churches, they're subdivided among Methodists, Presbyterians. This [school] is where moms and dads and children come to participate in sporting events, Parents' Night. It is the focal point of the community. It's almost sacred ground.

Parental involvement in children's activities at the Heath and Westside schools is ubiquitous. Parents run sports teams when the school budgets cannot pay for coaches. They help lead the drug-free schools programs. Extracurricular activities could not function without the parents who accompany teams and performance groups all over the state. The marching band that Michael played in, for example, has trips every Saturday from September until Christmas break. Parents chaperone the buses, haul instruments, and make sets. The former principal, Bill Bond, estimates

that there are 20 parents who do nothing else every Saturday for months. But Bond said that after a while it did not even seem like an obligation:

> You can't believe the number of parents that are involved with band. And I mean drive a hundred of miles to stand there and hold balloons and give to the kids. It doesn't matter. . . . They don't consider it work when you show up at band contest on Saturday, because they love it, it's part of their lives.

As the focus of community life, the school becomes as central a part of the parents' lives as it is for their kids. Their presence dissolves the boundaries between school and community.

What are the consequences of living in a town where adults are so heavily invested in the social scene of the younger generation? Social capital can be stifling when parental involvement conflicts with the natural teenage desire for independence. "A lot of parents really struggle with letting go," a church pastor remarked.

> Kids don't want their parents to be around them at this time, because they want to spread their own wings. . . . [But] they want to have the support of their parents. . . . If it's a school activity, they want their parents in the stands. They want to be cheered or applauded. . . . [It's] a difficult balance.

Community involvement in schools means that successes and failures are magnified beyond school boundaries. Kids who distinguish themselves on the playing field or the stage are well known around town. When Mitchell was cut from the basketball team, he not only lost the opportunity to play, he also lost the chance to shine in a public arena. When Michael was asked to stand down from the marching band, his parents' regular presence in the concession stand compounded his embarrassment. His sister Kelly offered to give up her spot so that her brother could play; her generosity probably did not ease Michael's situation.

A bad reputation sticks, especially in a small community. Multiplex ties may not be an ironclad source of social control, but they do ensure that no-one gets a second chance to make a first impression. Under these conditions, a community can resemble a jail or an asylum, what Erving Goffman called a "total institution," in which efforts to craft a particular public identity can easily be foiled. Reputations once established can prove unshakable, because they are telegraphed through overlapping networks.

Teenagers from cities or suburbs who fall afoul of school pecking orders may be able to escape to clubs that are off campus. Children at the bottom of the school hierarchy may rest at the top of another social system in summer camp, a welcome refuge from the misery of teasing. But this is typically possible only when there is no-one common to both groups who can spread a negative reputation to the new circle. In Heath and Westside, distinct social spheres were nonexistent.

The task of continuously projecting even a minimally respectable front before all of these audiences was overwhelming for Michael, especially in the face of a deepening mental illness. Wherever he went—school, church, or a friend's house—Michael was apt to embarrass his well-respected family and give himself yet another chance to lower his social standing. Goffman reminds us that being an actor on the "front stage"—at work, at church, at a party—is hard work; putting forward a character

portrait that is socially acceptable requires energy and attention. Performance is draining, especially for someone who can barely hold his wilder thoughts in check. It is particularly debilitating when the person knows full well that his thoughts are not normal, as Michael did. "He realized he couldn't function in society," Dr. O'Connor remembered. "At one point he told me he thought he'd be safe in jail. He wouldn't have to make a pretext of functioning where he didn't think he could." The shooting provided an exit from, what was for him, a nearly overwhelming task of constant social performance.

Adults magnify the trials and tribulations of adolescence and reinforce the status metrics that govern it. Football and basketball games are big events in these small towns; they are gathering points for everyone in the community (Bissinger, 2000). Upcoming games and those that have just passed are the centerpiece of gossip in the local hangouts. In communities where people stay put through the generations, the fans in the stands are both parents and alumni (and often former players themselves). They care about how the team does on the field and have done so for perhaps as long as 30 years. Parents know the players, the local merchants recognize them, and—much to the dismay of those who do not play the glamour sports—they are known and respected around town. "In a small town there's not a whole lot to do," Eddy Gorman, a Westside staff member, explained. "[Sports provide] a kind of social center. On Friday night, if there's a home football game, it'll just [be packed]." Eddy thinks that high school athletics even overshadow the much larger sports program at Arkansas State University.

School athletes, especially football players, were also favored within the schools, which led to some resentment among other students.[7] Christine Olson, an academically inclined Westside High School student, looked on with frustration at the privileged world of football players.

> The football team is so glorified. . . . All of our subjects are supposed to be educational. And they get out of class to go eat lunch and go to watch Remember the Titans on one of their game days. . . . I mean my schedule was like college algebra and pre-calc, history, and all this stuff. And we don't get any privileges like that. . . . We bust our tails and we don't get anything for it.

Non-athletes at Heath were particularly upset about the lack of recognition extended to their accomplishments. "The football team was awful," one student complained, "but they got a whole lot of attention."

> Our band was good. You know we'd win a competition and nobody would say a thing about it. Our choir was really good. We sent the most people to all state, and higher state, nobody said a word about it. Smart kids, they didn't care about the smart kids. . . . But they definitely paid the most attention to the sports kids, like recognizing accomplishment. You know, like pep rallies—they had pep rallies for our constantly losing football team. They would make

---

[7]Coleman (1961) argued that sports are accorded special respect in high schools because they bring status and esteem to the whole community, as opposed to academics, which are primarily a competition among individuals. The fact that academic *teams* still are much less well-respected than sports teams, particularly football and basketball, suggests that cultural notions of what activities are desirable are playing an important role as well.

announcements, "Oh, the football team went and got beat by so and so," or "The basketball team went and got beat by so and so." But they never recognized anything else that anybody [else] did.

Students at Westside High School alleged that the football team was sometimes exempted from the random drug tests that are, in theory, administered to all students. We have no way of independently verifying this charge, nor do we think it should be taken at face value. Yet whether or not it was actually the case, some Westside High students thought it was; for them, this belief provides one more example of responsible adults supporting a key pillar of the social hierarchy among students: athletes rule.

These examples are drawn from Westside High School, but the sorting machine begins to operate in middle school. Middle school students are offered few organized activities, but sports are an exception. Football and cheerleading begin as early as fifth grade in Westside and are an important source of status even for middle school students. Parents who had been through the system before realized that these accomplishments would become important and coached their children about what activities they should join in middle school if they wanted to make the grade down the line.

Columbine High School embroidered this culture of athletic admiration beyond anything we saw in Arkansas or Kentucky. The Colorado state wrestling champion was allowed to park his $100,000 Hummer all day in a 15-min spot, and a football player was allowed to tease a girl about her breasts in class without sanction from his teacher. Sports trophies were the only ones displayed in the front lobby; sports pages in the yearbook were in color, whereas photos of the debate team and other clubs were in black and white (Adams & Russakoff, 1999). Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were subjected to unfettered bullying—physical and verbal—at the hands of athletes at Columbine (Katz & Jhally, 1999). Not surprisingly, when Harris and Klebold exacted their revenge, they began by barking "All the jocks stand up!" The shooters asked people "if they were jocks. If they were wearing a sports hat, they would shoot them" (Obmascik, 1999). In a school where athletes were granted special privileges, they were also first in the shooters' gun sights.

Michael had some similar sentiments. According to one of his psychiatrists, he "believed that his school favored 'sports people' and that no-one would do anything if he complained and that the kids would just come down harder on him" (Schetky, 1998, p. 16). He was not simply expressing his own anger at jocks or preps. The superior position of athletes was ratified by the school itself, and this bothered Michael as well.

Administrators at Heath were not unaware of the potential for favoritism, and they consciously worked to honor the achievements of students who were artistically or intellectually inclined. A special recognition ceremony for students with the highest academic achievement was held annually. Parents were invited as a matter of course. When the academic team won the state championship in Kentucky, Heath High held a post-competition pep rally. The team's defiant pride suggests their pleasure at this recognition and their awareness that they were bucking the tide. "This year our academic team won the Kentucky State 1A school tournament," a senior reminded us:

> So we had a big pep rally, and me and the other senior on the team, we were standing with the trophy between us in front of the entire school, heads cocked back defiantly. Come get me. And so from then on, people have actually known my name.

The community at Heath also showed its support for activities other than football and basketball; the band had boosters and a banquet night, just like the football and basketball teams, and participated in interscholastic marching band competitions. Parents put their time where their values lie; by doing so, they give a lot more than lip service to the idea that there is a life beyond football.[8]

These valiant attempts to be more even-handed did not level the playing field: undue favoritism toward athletes and popular kids remained an informal norm. In part, the practice reflects the cultural continuity and normative closure that develops when generations stay put. By some local estimates, 50–75% of the staff attended the local schools and, therefore, grew up with the same pecking order. The favoritism cuts deep, according to Westside students like Ralph Montgomery:

> [Popular kids] will [truss] you up more, and physically just push you around, just because they don't stand as big of a chance to get attention, or whatever. School officials are less likely to be hard on them. If somebody like me, that don't have a lot of friends [and wasn't] popular . . . went to the more popular kids and started pushing them around or something, [school authorities] wouldn't have no problem throwing me in detention.

Teachers who gave special treatment to popular kids or kids from "good" families sent the message to the rest that the adolescent pecking order would be reinforced.

Michael Carneal thought that popular kids had special privileges in his school, and he resented the double standard, as he explained in this essay:

> Recently there was a petition going around concerning the expulsion of several students because they were in the possession of alcohol. . . . If I got caught with alcohol would the accused have a petition for me? I don't think they would. . . . [T]he year before last the school incorporated a "zero tolerance policy" meaning you would be expelled. A lot of people have gotten caught since then, and some were put on probation and some were expelled. . . . Normally the people caught are not as popular as they are in this case. So why bend the rules this time? If they do, they better bend the rules for me on down the road.

---

[8]Coleman (1961) argued that the reason that sports has such high status in schools is that the teams represent the school in competition against other schools, whereas academic competition took place within schools and, hence, tended to set kids against each other. He suggested that by having debating teams and the like compete against other schools, it would raise the social status of these activities. Our evidence suggests that these assumptions, while plausible, do not take into account the powerful forces that valorize athletic talent in our society. In a world where even poor kids in Africa are wearing Michael Jordan jerseys and band camp is the subject of never-ending sarcasm in movies like *American Pie*, there is little chance that band members will be on a par with athletes in the adolescent social tournament.

3.3   High School Now and Forever

How does the future appear to a marginalized young adolescent? Matt Stone, creator of the popular cartoon show *South Park* and a 1989 graduate of Columbine High School, appeared in Michael Moores celebrated film *Bowling for Columbine*, where he offered a blunt account of the lessons he learned as a nonconformist oddball in the middle of Littleton. Stone noted how hard it was for outcasts to realize that high school is not forever, that the losers in adolescence often turn into the more interesting and respected adults while the football heroes sink into obscurity. "You just wish someone could have just have grabbed them and gone, 'Dude, high school is not the end of [life],'" Stone lamented. Harris and Klebold thought it was.[9]

For students at Columbine, this may be more of a perception than a reality. Littleton is a growing suburb with many newcomers moving in and few lifelong residents. In Heath and Westside, where people really are rooted for generations, it is common for kids to finish high school with the same cast of characters they knew in kindergarten. Most young people from Heath and Westside ultimately settle down in the same community where they grew up, and some never move away at all. The main avenue of escape is to leave for college, but few pursue it. Even the kids who are bright and highly motivated tend to stay local. Courtney Walsh, a friend of Michael's, saw this inertia plainly. "So many kids will say that they hate Paducah and can't wait till they graduate so they can get out," she remarked, "and they'll end up going to [Paducah Community College] just for lack of trying to get into another school."[10] The McCracken County School District estimates that 60% of Heath students go to college, and students estimated that less than 5% would go to school out of state. Students in the junior college live at home while studying. Heath teachers said that it was rare for students to have a career and goals in mind at a young age or to have serious college ambitions. Most students seem to follow the crowd, and the normative pattern is to stay local, for college and afterward.[11]

Even as adolescents grow into adults, the small-town views, habits, and patterns do not change, and neither do most of the friendship groups. "This is a fairly provincial place . . . in a lot of ways," remarked Ron Kilgore, a Heath social studies teacher:

> We're West Kentucky and damn proud of it is sort of the attitude. A lot of the people, even a lot of the teachers—and I don't mean this critically, although I don't think it's terribly healthy—commute to college and they never leave their home. They never leave their

---

[9]Eric Harris, one of the two shooters in the Columbine massacre, was stuck: He had no college plans and had been rejected by the military when he tried to enlist. The social rejections he suffered in high school looked like they would become a staple of his reality for some time to come. By contrast, Dylan Klebold had already been accepted at the University of Arizona and he knew that he had a way out of Littleton.

[10]Taken from a letter she wrote to Nicole Hadley after Nicole's death.

[11]Even those who leave often find their way back when they are ready to settle down. There are no exact figures available, but many residents told us that a common pattern was to return either after college or, more rarely, to retire after spending one's career years in a bigger city.

community, and so the ideas . . . that they're exposed to in college are seen still as outsider notions. And there's sort of a safety net or safety screen pulled around.

When people remain in the community for work or school, their high school personas remain with them. Friends made at Heath or Westside High stay with them for life, and the past is hard to escape. Of course, there are countercurrents to this stability. As "smart" kids who might have been in an out-crowd in high school move on to more prestigious white-collar jobs, the pecking order can be inverted. But from the vantage point of a marginalized teen like Michael Carneal, it can appear that the loser tag will stick for life.

3.4   On the Outside Looking in

Small-town environments work well for people who are accepted and can participate fully. But for an oddball nonconformist like Michael Carneal, the idea of growing old in Heath must have looked like a fate worse than death. Michael absolutely disdained much of what the town stood for. Consider his views on the quilting festival; an annual celebration that epitomized much of what older residents thought was best about the town. In an e-mail written shortly before he began his freshman year at the high school, Michael wrote:

> . .. Our town really SUCK.
>   We have this big QUILT FESTIVAL.... 50,000 old bags in snitty cars that drive an amazing 20 miles an hour come to town for a week and we all go Downtown and freak out the old lady quilters. .. . I asked (one] for some spare change and she said she didn't have any but "good luck." I said "Good luck I've already got your wallet.... IT WAS COOL. Ok my point is that there is nothing here.

A point of pride among adults, the quilting festival seemed like an anachronism to a disaffected teen. Michael's band of choice is Ween, a group that released an album that parodied the country music that many locals enjoyed.

Michael detested what he saw as hypocrisy, particularly when it revolved around religion. He joined the Goth group in denouncing popular kids who publicly preached abstinence but had sex anyway, and downloaded on his computer a document that points to a series of inconsistencies in the Bible. In an essay ostensibly about gays in the military, Michael argued that one cannot follow the teachings of the Good Book one day and ignore them the next:

> And if your still using the Bible as an excuse than your pitiful. … These twins from school. . . are always interpreting the Bible. They say … it says that "men are the best" and "women should just stay home…
>   NO
>   Some of the women are bungee jumping, record setting, T.V. staring and some are even running our government.... These people who interpret the Bible that way look at girls in their bathing suits and look at dirty magazines. Nope. None of that if women had to stay home. So look at the big picture when you interpret the Bible and the consequences.

Michael's resentment at small-town strictures surfaced in his attraction to rebellion. He downloaded material that explicitly called for students to rise up and challenge the conformity imposed on them by the schools. "The School Stopper's Textbook: A Guide to Disruptive Revolutionary Tactics, revised edition for junior high/high school dissidents" offers 100 suggestions for disrupting the classroom and "trash[ing] your school." The text admonishes students to resist the conventional practices forced on them in schools on the grounds that they are being forced into rigid molds that stifle individuality. Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, wrote essays that resemble this piece; indeed, Michael may have taken some of his inspiration from Kaczynski, since his work was sitting on Michael's hard drive. Although it is impossible to know how seriously Michael took these writings, they seem at a minimum to capture his own response to small-town life.

Social capital works well for those who are included, but those dense social ties seem oppressive or hypocritical to boys like Michael who do not fit in neatly.[12] When the future looks as if it will be no different from the present, a boy like Michael, who feels depressed, unwelcome, and a complete misfit, may conclude there is no exit.

3.5 Failing at Manhood

Seeking status, performing for peers, finding an identity, and dealing with meddle-some adults—these are tasks that face all adolescents. But it is a gendered process too. The challenges play out differently for boys and girls. We will not engage in the fruitless debate over whether it is easier or harder for boys (Summers, 2000) or girls (Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). The point here is simply that the process of finding a workable niche is distinctive along gender lines. All of the rampage shoot-ers are boys. We argue that this is no accident, for in addition to failing at adoles-cence, they were—at least in their own eyes—failing at manhood.

Masculinity is central to what makes a popular boy the king of the mountain (Pollack, 1998). To be a man is to be physically dominant, competitive, and pow-erful in the eyes of others. Real men exert control and never admit weakness. They act more and talk less. If this sounds like the Marlboro Man, it is because adolescent ideals of manliness are unoriginal. They derive from cultural projections

---

[12]Because our focus is rampage school violence, our discussion of the negative consequences of social capital has been directed toward its implications for Michael Carneal. But even for those who do not take such drastic actions, there can be downsides to social capital, the most obvious of which is a lack of privacy and autonomy (Boissevain, 1974; Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Simmel, 1950, particularly "The Metropolis and Mental Life," pp. 409–426). Morgan and Sorenson (1999) argue that the kind of norm-enforcing social capital that is so pervasive in Paducah and Westside can also inhibit academic achievement, perhaps by promoting a more parochial or insular mind-set. This would explain why so few students leave either of the towns to go to college, and why the few students we talked to who had said that they needed to make a clear break from their home communities (Morgan & Sorenson).

found in film, video, magazines, and the back of comic books. In-your-face basketball players, ruthless Wall Street robber barons, and presidents who revel in being "doers" and not "talkers" all partake of and then reinforce this stereotype. Twenty years ago, action figures like Superman were muscled, but within the range of a normal man's physique. Over time, they have morphed into exaggerated body-builders, with extremely thick necks, impossibly puffed out chests, narrow waists, bulging thighs. To the extent that these toys stand as idealized versions of the male body, it seems that something in the culture is pushing toward a vision of manhood that is just about as impossible to achieve as Barbie doll figures are for girls. Evidence that this pressure is having a negative effect on boys is piling up as study after study shows increased steroid use among boys as young as 12 (Egan, 2002).

Of course, high school boys are not able to claim the mantle of the tycoon, and few of them look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. Their closest approximation focuses on the arena to which they do have access: sports. On the playing field, they live out myths of what men should be like that go back at least as far as the Greek and Roman gods. Girls also play a key role in intramural competition, by serving as trophies that validate a boy's sexual appeal.

Bullying is one violent way that boys try to demonstrate their masculinity. Smaller, physically ineffectual boys are often singled out as targets of bullying by older boys. The captain of the debate team at Heath told us how he had his head knocked into the lockers on one occasion, and was beaten up by a bigger kid on the bus on another. One (not small) freshman told us that for months he would dodge behind a teacher when he saw an older bully coming, to avoid receiving hard punches on the shoulder that "really physically hurt." Another senior told us that he witnessed a group of 12 older boys chase and tackle younger and smaller ones for fun. Students described bullying and harassment as an everyday occurrence in the hallways, in "flex time," and in the bathrooms and said that despite its prevalence, teachers were either unaware of it or unable to stop it.

Bullying makes it possible for more powerful students to call attention to their superiority on grounds that favor them. Scholarly students told us that bullying was often initiated by farm boys who had been held back at least one grade and often two and resented the brighter futures of the college-bound kids. Pushing others around was a means for these kids to draw attention to the ways that they were strong and others weak (literally).

In addition to physical bullying, teasing that degraded the victim's masculinity was also common. Bullying experts have suggested that in recent decades, as teachers have become more aware of the importance of cracking down on physical bullying, teasing with the explicit intention of lowering the victim's self-worth is on the rise, and it has even been given a name: shaming. While the purpose of physical bullying is to control the victim (in the classic case, such as to make him turn over his lunch money), the purpose of shaming is to make the victim feel worse about himself (Newberger, 1999).

There is probably no more powerful source of stigma for an adolescent boy than being labeled gay. The risk to a boy's reputation is immeasurable, and his place on

the social ladder is utterly compromised if even a smidgeon of it sticks. Jim Jacobs, a Heath sophomore, has heard these rumblings in the hallway:

> I've heard so many people talking about people that are . . . gay. They call them names and . . . I have heard twice somebody threatened somebody just cause they're that way. And [being labeled gay] . . . would be the worst thing, because everybody would be against you. And some people are cool with it, you know, but most people in this school are not cool with that. Right after school, outside by the buses there. And they were making fun of [one boy] and then they said they were going to, you know, "We're going to beat you up," for no reason. He wasn't even doing anything to them. He didn't even say anything. And he was like walking by and they said that.

How does being labeled gay compare with other stigmatized identities? We asked students which of the following it would be worst to be socially: gay, poor, not white, not religious, or overweight and unattractive. In Heath, almost uniformly they responded that it would be worst to be gay. In Westside, students were divided about whether it would be worse to be gay or black.[13] The racial tolerance message had penetrated the culture in Paducah, but a similar sentiment did not seem to apply to gays (somewhat similar to the nation as a whole; Wolfe, 1998).

Why is being gay such a stain on one's reputation? The most common response was that gays violated traditional standards of what it means to be masculine. Said one student: "Guys aren't supposed to act feminine and stuff like that. They are not supposed to be gay, I guess." Another girl, now 1 year out of high school, said that gay people were "dirty":

> Like me and my boyfriend now we share a lot of those common thoughts about it. We just think it's gross. I mean, we still talk to the people; we still hang out with them. Not so much hang out with them but we talk to them at school and when we see them in public. And now I don't talk to them about it either.

The power of this epithet has grown so much that it now covers a much wider range of behavior than the purely sexual reference that it connoted in the past. The term "gay" is now used as a slang term for any form of social or athletic incompetence. Students routinely say to one another "that's gay" when they are talking about a wide array of mistakes or social failures. If someone fails to make the right move on a soccer field or drops a lunch tray in the cafeteria, the kid behind him is quite likely to say, "That's really gay." Why? One 15-year-old girl provided an explanation: "Boys have a fascination with not being gay. They want to be manly, and put each other down by saying 'that's gay.'"

Thus for boys, the struggle for status is, in large part, competition for the rank of alpha male and any kind of failure by another boy can be an opportunity to insult the other's masculinity and enhance one's own. It is a winner-take-all society, and any loss one boy can inflict on another opens up a new rung on the ladder that he might move into.

For Michael, who already had severe doubts about how well he was navigating these gender waters, being labeled gay, beginning with the "Rumor Has It" column and con-

---

[13]The KKK had a noticeable presence at Westside. In Heath, on the Future Farmers of America, a relatively small group of rural students were thought by their peers to be racist.

tinuing because of the teasing that followed, was torture. He told the psychologists that this was a primary reason for his academic slide in the second part of eighth grade. Michael said boys would call him gay in part because he refused to be mean to girls. He added that he had always felt more comfortable around girls than boys because girls did not tease him, and because with girls he did not have to compete to demonstrate his masculinity. For a boy who already had an extremely fragile self-esteem, who had repeatedly been picked on, and was unwilling or unable to fight back, being labeled "gay" or "pussy" explicitly underscored one key source of his social failure.

Andrew Golden's central experiences with status and power centered on his abilities as a wielder of weapons. As we have noted, starting at a young age, Andrew was fascinated and perhaps obsessed with guns and all they represented, beginning with when, as a little boy, he posed for photographs dressed in camouflage with a rifle. As a first-rate hunter, he had proved his ability to master nature with a weapon in his hand, and his experiences riding around the neighborhood with a knife strapped to his leg showed that he could similarly make other kids bow before him. Despite his small size, he was described as a menace, someone who cursed and yelled at other children, saying that if they came over to his yard he would shoot them with his BB gun. These sources of status translated poorly to school, where he was so invisible as almost to be forgotten. Not surprisingly, when he sought to rewrite the rules of the adolescent society on his terms, he did so with a gun in his hands.

Mitchell Johnson's social failures were caught up in his attempt to be masculine, although his problems were different. The influence of dominant ideals of masculinity on Mitchell's behavior is even more transparent than it was for Michael and Andrew: he was a tough guy wannabe. He liked lifting weights and, given a choice, would opt to play games that involved guns over other types of games. Mitchell was also a fan of gory and violent movies. While these are interests common to many boys (and some girls), he was particularly invested in living out the macho image of his fictional heroes in real life, as Westside teacher Emily Levitt recalled:

> [Mitchell] thought he was being bad. His image of himself was big and bad, because [his brother] Monte was just a teddy bear. One day, Mitchell, he said, "I feel sorry for [Monte]." "Why do you feel sorry for Monte? Everybody loves Monte." "Yes, but he's not very tough." [Mitchell's] idea of himself was he's got to be big and bad.

Mitchell's excessive concern with masculinity was likely intensified by having been a sexual assault victim earlier. His bravado, faux gang affiliation and his molestation of another child were simultaneously attempts to erase the deep shame of abuse, to assert a masculine identity, and to stave off future attack. To ensure his safety, Mitchell even found himself a protector, making quick friends with the biggest boy in his class. The extreme seriousness with which he took his relationships with girls, the need for a long-term commitment from them, and his inability to handle female rejection could also be interpreted as insecurities derived from past abuse.

Unfortunately, Mitchell could not persuade peers that he really was a hard guy. And if kids at Westside could see through these false claims, Mitchell was positively a laughingstock when he tried his stories of gang exploits in jail in the company of

kids who knew the real article. An employee of the county jail where Mitchell was held for 4 months before his trial remembered his ludicrous performance:

> He tried to talk gang. He tried to flash gang signs. He would take his comb and try to carve gang signs on the paint, on the door, on the bunk, on the table. . . . He would tell the boys that . . . he was originally from Chicago. He was a gang member from such and such a group. These other boys would laugh at him because they were gang people. They would ask him [questions] and he wouldn't be able to answer them and that would embarrass him. And that would make him very angry. He did not want to be laughed at.

For Mitchell, image really was everything. One of Mitchells female friends reported that he threatened to kill her the day before the shooting if she ever told anyone that his girlfriend had dumped him. He was more enraged by the possibility that others would find out that he had been rejected than he was about the end of the relationship. In a period of life where one's "rep" is central, Mitchell was consistently unsuccessful at getting others to believe the manly image that he was trying to project, a failure that helped provoke even more desperate actions.

3.6   Cultural Scripts

How do socially marginal, psychologically distressed youths manage the crosspressures they experience? We argue that adolescents have a limited repertoire of "cultural scripts" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Quinn & Holland, 1987) or "strategies of action" (Swidler, 1986, 2001) that they can draw on to resolve their social problems.[14]

Cultural scripts do not provide the ends toward which action should be oriented but rather the "tools" that people have at their disposal as they try to solve problems. Consider the television campaign in the late 1990s that advised kids to "squash it" when challenged to a fight. The campaign showed teens walking away from tense encounters by saying "squash it," and by using a hand signal, bringing the palm of a flat hand down onto a vertically clenched fist. These encounters were often combined with a voice-over from a celebrity validating the idea that walking away was the more difficult (and manly) thing to do. The goal here was not to change teen values: The campaign began from the assumption that most kids already wanted to avoid fighting but could not figure out how to get out of the situation when challenged in public arena. By introducing a new script—"squash it"—adults were hoping to give kids a new tool that they could use to extricate themselves without losing face.[15] Where school shootings are concerned, our task is to figure out what scripts the shooters have in their repertoire.

---

[14]Powell and DiMaggio's primary context is organizational analysis, but their discussion of different notions of culture, particularly the primacy given to scripts and schema, is useful for our analysis.

[15]The campaign was created by the Harvard School of Public Health. The "squash it" script was featured on a variety of popular teen television shows, and a national survey in 1997 of high school junior and seniors revealed that 60% of African-American youth had used the phrase, and 39% had used the hand signal. Report available at http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/squashir.html.

More specifically, we want to know what model of "problem solving" Michael, Andrew, and Mitchell employed to address the fact that they suffered from low social status, flawed social interaction, marginality with respect to social groups, and weak claims to a masculine identity. The moderate, even typical, scripts they employed did not do the trick. That breakdown pushed them in the direction of taking more radical steps, culminating in rampage shootings. They did not "snap" so much as build toward their crime as the less violent options failed to produce the results they wanted.

The first strategy, which all three employed, was to try to change their social position through performance. Michael and Andrew played class clown. Michael was notorious for his antics (stink bombs, stomping on fish); teachers and students recalled that Andrew liked to imitate characters from South Park and Beavis and Butthead. It did not work. Playing the class clown might prevent a kid from being labeled a square, but it does nothing to ensure that he will no longer be ignored, or in Michael's case, to insulate him from being teased. While a skilled stand-up comedian can make headway with the in-crowd, an awkward, goofy kid is not going to get anywhere.

Michael also tried desperately to find an identity group that would be willing to take him. He floated between the academic achievers, the band, and the Goths, but he never got beyond the fringe of any of these groups. Mitchell, too, was trying to solve his social problems by trying to "act" his way into higher social status. Whether he was trying to get girls to wear his ring at a party or boasting about his latest gang exploits, Mitchell was always on stage. But because he overstepped, others delighted in skewering his performance. Mitchell would, in turn, respond with more of the same, which only made matters worse.

Another option might be to ask for adult help in reversing social marginality. Unfortunately, such a move runs headlong into two primary cultural scripts—one about how adolescents should behave and another about how men should act. The adolescent script requires that teenagers display independence from adults in coping with disputes, failures, and pressures. The masculinity script follows suit, requiring that men solve their problems and avoid appearing weak by turning to others for help (Pollack, 1998).

Michael Carneal did occasionally confide in his mother, the person to whom he was closest, about the harassment he faced. But as he got older, he understood that running to mama is a sign of weakness. Instead, he would hit the steel drum in his backyard to let it out. Mitchell never talked to anyone about his sexual abuse. With the cultural script of masculinity firmly in hand, neither Mitchell nor Michael was able to lean on an adult about problems that were devastating to them.

Mitchell did manage to talk to at least one of his teachers about the fact that he had been bullied. But adults are not always responsive to complaints about bullying since they are inclined to think of it as a normal part of adolescence or something kids should just laugh off. Even if teachers had come to his aid, they would not have been able to solve his real problem: being perceived by other kids as a socially unsuccessful wannabe.

Another option available to Michael, Mitchell, and Andrew was simply to live with it. Millions of adolescents choose this path as a response to social marginality, teasing, and even bullying, convinced that there is nothing they can do to change the situation. Michael took this option for what felt like an eternity. Although he endured bullying from elementary school on, he laughed on the outside even though he was distraught on the inside. Eventually, this strategy became untenable. The teasing got worse, and so did his mental illness. He had to find an exit, a way to end the unrelenting social and psychological pressures. Mitchell was also locked in a downward spiral. Having been caught making sextalk phone calls, his father was threatening to move him back to Minnesota, a very scary prospect. We know less about Andrew's mental state, but for at least two of the three shooters, simply "taking it" would not work any longer.

At this point, they had a number of more drastic options available to them, including running away or even suicide. Suicide is an idea that many school shooters entertain. Michael considered suicide a number of times during middle school and had thoughts of jumping off a building or slitting his wrists. In the months before the shooting he became, in Dr. O'Connor's words, "seriously suicidal," taking his father's handgun and contemplating killing himself. For a week immediately after the shooting, he begged the leader of the prayer group to, "Please, just kill me." A school official reported that Andrew had threatened to kill himself. A friend of Mitchell's reported to the police that Mitchell had also contemplated suicide.

But suicide is a weak way to die, one at odds with the script of masculinity. School shooters are looking for status-winning, manhood-enhancing departures. Rampage school violence can lead in this direction if desperate individuals enter a public space and threaten others in a way that leaves the police no choice but to shoot. Such shooters prefer to be shot—suicide by cop—than simply to kill themselves, because it is in closer concordance·with a machismo code. Bethel, Alaska, school shooter Evan Ramsey said that his original plan was to bring a gun to school "to scare the hell out of everybody and kill myself" but that ultimately he decided, after being egged on by friends, that he wanted to "go out with a bang" (Fainaru, 1998a, p. A1).

The script of masculinity helps us understand why the boys, despite their suicidal tendencies, ultimately decided to turn their anger outward toward others.[16] Another option the boys explored was to fantasize, by themselves and with like-minded others, about violent things they could do to change their status. Michael began to write elaborate fantasies, drawing in part on available cultural scripts in which boys like him used weapons to take power over the hated preps. Even if it was only in a fantasy world, for once Michael would not be the weakling who could never fight back, but rather the man who caused others to quake in their boots.

Mitchell and Andrew were in much the same boat. Police concluded that the two had fantasized back and forth for months, on the bus and over the phone. In

---

[16]When girls experience this kind of psychological distress, by contrast, they seem to turn their anger inward, sometimes cutting themselves or developing eating disorders. Thus far, a "feminine script" does not provide for a lashing out violently toward others as much as an inward-turning self-destruction.

their minds, Andrew would no longer be the small boy "put upon" by bigger boys, and Mitchell would no longer be the one who talked big but could never back it up. In real life, however, their situation was unchanged and for Mitchell, it was getting worse—cut from the basketball team and dumped by his girlfriend. No amount of fantasizing could rearrange what he considered to be an unbearable reality.

The boys were seeking to establish themselves as people to be respected, not excluded, by showing that they were men capable of doing big things they were not accustomed to. Unlike adult assassins, who want to work in secret, Mitchell and Andrew told virtually everyone in sight, hoping to redefine themselves through their threats, which might have obviated the need for the shooting itself.[17] But they were unsuccessful: no-one took what they said seriously.

Issuing threats creates intense pressures to follow through. Michael's example is a case in point. When that fateful Monday came, Michael had committed himself to making something big happen. Failing to follow through would have been the ultimate example of "wimping out." Although they were not sure what he planned to do, several of his friends had gathered at the prayer circle in anticipation of something. When it appeared that he was not going to do anything, they went back ignoring him, increasing his frustration.

Perhaps one reason that peer involvement is so common in school shootings is that boys, in particular, escalate from inchoate threats to action in an effort to avoid the loss of face that would come with backing out. Police have speculated that such a dynamic was present between Andrew and Mitchell, with neither willing to be the one to back down from the big talk that they had concocted together. This was clearly the case in the shooting in Bethel, Alaska, where the shooter Evan Ramsey (who was also teased mercilessly about his nerd status by more popular boys) made his plans known and then wavered. Evan's friend James admonished him, "You can't go back, everybody would think you're nothing. Everybody would just have one more reason to mess with you" (Fainaru, 1998b).

Having exhausted their other options, the boys came up with a dramatic solution: the indiscriminate shooting of their classmates and teachers. This would solve their social problems in a way that the other strategies had not. No longer would they try to accommodate themselves by scraping and bowing before the lords of the adolescent society; instead they would show who was really in charge and stake their claim to a notorious reputation. The performance was a public one, and their prior threats guaranteed that no-one would doubt who was responsible for these dramatic actions.

For Mitchell, who was always claiming more than he could actually back up, the shooting provided irrefutable proof that he was the man he always advertised himself to be. No longer would the popular group be able to reject him as someone not quite worthy of inclusion; now they would see that he should have been a "top dog"

---

[17] Again, the purpose of school shootings is to make a public statement. The other killers who commonly take public credit for their actions are terrorist groups, who similarly want to be known so that their killings carry a symbolic message.

all along. At the same time, it provided a manly exit from his impending clash with his father. Finally, the shooting provided a highly public way of telling the world that this victim of sexual abuse could no longer be messed with: he would protect himself, violently if necessary.

The shooting was also a statement of Andrew's power; he would be invisible no longer. He would be respected and feared. The shooting allowed him to superimpose this image of himself onto a community that valued strengths that he did not have (size, athletic talent). Andrew was trying to forcibly rewrite the adolescent scorebook, to show that the boy with the best shot rules.[18]

For Michael, the shooting provided a way to invert the social hierarchy—to move himself at once from his position close to the bottom to the very top. And he could now release all the pent-up anger from years of teasing and bullying in one public burst of aggression. ln his mind, it refuted the claims that he was weak or gay and provided definitive evidence to the kids who had thrown him into lockers that he could be every bit the man. As Michael put it: "I thought maybe they would be scared and then no-one would mess with Michael."

The seemingly random choice of targets also speaks to the boys' need to send a message, rather than simply to exact revenge. Random firing has been the most distinctive aspect of rampage school shootings, and the most frightening. As former principal Bill Bond pointed out, if Michael had wanted to shoot the preps, he would have gone upstairs to where the preps hang out. But when Michael shot randomly into the prayer circle, and when Mitchell and Andrew fired at their fellow students from across a field, they were demonstrating their anger with an entire social system that had rejected them rather than trying to take out particular tormentors. For this purpose, any target would do just as well as any other, so long as the shootings occurred on a public stage for all to see.

Finally, it is no coincidence that the boys used the school as the outlet for their anger. Schools are both the location of their adolescent social failures and the center of community life, not just for students but for everyone in these small towns. For Michael, seeking to reverse years of negative perceptions that had accumulated in his family, church, and community, what better place to do it than in the school, the one institution that links all these spheres? It is the only public stage with strong connections to the entire community, and by opening fire randomly at school shooters issue a public expression about how they have been treated in their communities and about the way they want to be remembered.

---

[18]Both Mitchell and Andrew also somehow thought that after a time away, they were going to be able to come back to enjoy their newfound status. Mitchell told a friend, "I'm gonna be running from the cops for a while," but that he planned to return in the not-too-distant future. This suggests that they thought they were going to be able to cash in on their changing social status.

3.7   Conclusion

As this research shows, the impetus for the shootings did not come from bad parenting or broken families, the Internet or music videos. Rather, the rage that fuels school shooters emerges as the last act in a long and bitter drama that is central to the cultural confines of the adolescent world. American teenagers are ruthless arbiters of one another's social worth. Anyone who falls short will "feel it where it hurts." To fail the "test of cool" is to be subjected to withering attacks on one's self-worth.

If the adolescent world were completely self-contained, a hermetically sealed chapter in the life cycle, it would be hard enough to live through. But it is not. The teenage pressure cooker is created and sustained by youths, but its power derives from the way the surrounding adult society reinforces its central messages. Grown-ups are party to the status-seeking, ridicule-laden social system of youth culture. Their participation, tacit and explicit, in these status games reinforces the worst aspects of teenage life. In homogeneous small towns where adults are heavily invested in the activities of their kids, reputations made in high school can last into adulthood. Under these circumstances, adolescent social failures are magnified and can seem more like a life sentence than a rite of passage.

Although the impetus for rampage school shootings is rooted in adolescent status competition, reinforced by adults, broader cultural scripts of masculinity also play an important role. Status competition among boys often centers on fulfilling a narrow notion of manliness. Andrew Mitchell and Michael Johnson not only failed to become respected social actors, but also failed to become powerful males. The shootings provided an important way for them to defy the labels they had been assigned and to demonstrate publicly that they were the men-in-themaking that they claimed to be.

When students go to school and shoot randomly at their classmates, they are, more than anything, trying to send a message to everyone about how they want to be seen. In rural and suburban America, school is often the community's most central institution for adults as well as kids. The shootings provided a way for these boys to redefine their identities and assert their masculinity on the community's most public stage. By randomly targeting their classmates, they showed that they were less interested in revenge against particular individuals than in broadcasting their message to the peer and community social structure that had rejected them.

References

Adams, L., & Russakoff, D. (1999, June 12). Dissection of Columbine's cult of the athlete. *The Washington Post*, p. A1.
Bissinger, H. G. (2000). *Friday night lights: A team, and a dream*. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo.
Boissevain, J. (1974). *Friends of friends: Networks, manipulators, and coalitions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Boli, J. (1989). *New citizens for a new society*. New York: Pergamon.

Coleman, J. (1961). *The adolescent society*. New York: Free Press.

Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Human nature and social order*. New York: Scribner's.

Coontz, S. (1997). *The way we really are*. New York: Basic.

Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review, 96*, 608–630.

Crocker, J., Major, B., & Steele, C. (1998). Social stigma. In D. T. Gilgert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1991). Introduction. In P. J. DiMaggio & W. W. Powell (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Egan, T. (2002, November 22). Body-conscious boys adopt athletes' tastes for steroids. *The New York Times*, p. A1.

Epps, G. (2002, January 28). Can Buffy's brilliance last? *American Prospect*, pp. 28–31.

Erikson, E. (1994). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Fainaru, S. (1998a, October 18). Alaska school murders: A window on teen rage. *The Boston Globe*, p. A1.

Fainaru, S. (1998b, October 19). A tragedy was preceded by many overlooked signals (part 2 of 3). *The Boston Globe*, p. A1.

Katz, J., & Jhally, S. (1999, May 2). The national conversation in the wake of Littleton is missing the mark. *The Boston Globe*, p. E1.

Kinney, D. (1993). From nerds to normals. *Sociology of Education, 66*(1), 21–40.

Morgan, S. L., & Sorenson, A. (1999). Parental networks, social closure, and mathematics learning: A test of Coleman's social capital explanation of school effects. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 661–681.

Newberger, E. (1999). *The men they will become*. Reading, MA: Perseus.

Obmascik, M. (1999, April 21). High school massacre: Columbine bloodbath leaves up to 24 dead. *The Denver Post*.

Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia*. New York: Putnam.

Pollack, W. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Random House.

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*, 1–24.

Portes, A., & Landolt, P. (1996). The downside of social capital. *The American Prospect, 7*(26), 18–21.

Quinn, N., & Holland, D. (1987). Culture and cognition. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural models in language and thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). *Failing at fairness*. New York: Scribners.

Schetky, D. (1998, May 27). Forensic evaluation of Michael Carneal, p. 16.

Simmel, G. (1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press.

Summers, C. H. (2000). *The war against boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review, 51*, 273–286.

Swidler, A. (2001). *Talk of love*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wolfe, A. (1998). *One nation, after all*. New York: Viking.

Chapter 4
School Rampage in International Perspective: The Salience of Cumulative Strain Theory

Eric Madfis and Jack Levin

Prior to the mid-1990s, social scientists who sought to understand mass murder tended to focus on episodes where numerous victims were killed during a single incident in workplaces, families, and public places like shopping malls and restaurants (see, for example, Dietz, 1986; Levin & Fox, 1985). During the mid and late 1990s, however, a string of multiple-victim shootings occurred at middle and high schools located in fairly obscure suburban and rural areas of the United States. As a result of such shootings in American schools, a growing number of specialists (Fox & Levin, 2011; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Newman, Fox, Roth, Mehta, & Harding, 2004; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2004) turned their attention to the school rampage in search of an explanation for these perplexing events.

Roughly a decade after the 1990s spike in American middle and high school rampages, several American colleges and universities such as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Louisiana Technical College, and Northern Illinois University experienced massacres on their campuses (Fox & Savage, 2009). Rampage incidents, in particular the attack at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, have had long-lasting and far-reaching effects upon the language and policy debates surrounding school crime and safety (Muschert & Madfis, 2012; Muschert & Peguero, 2010). While multiple-victim school attacks were not unprecedented in Europe before the highly publicized Columbine case (see for example, the 1925 school massacre

E. Madfis (✉)
Department of Social Work, University of Washington,
Tacoma, WA, USA
e-mail: emadfis@u.washington.edu

J. Levin
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Northeastern University,
Boston, MA, USA
e-mail: j.levin@neu.edu

in what is now Vilnius, Lithuania, the 1967 massacre at St. John's RC High School in Dundee, Scotland, the 1983 school massacre at the Freiherr-vom-Stein Gesamtschule in Eppstein, Germany, and the 1989 school shooting in Rauma, Finland), a "copycat effect" has emerged worldwide since the late 1990s.

Not unlike the adoption of American consumer products (e.g., Coca Cola, McDonalds, and KFC) and film and music popular culture, disaffected individuals in other lands have taken their inspiration for mass murder from highly publicized American incidents. In July 2011, Anders Breivik killed 77 people when he bombed central Oslo and then gunned down dozens of young people at a summer camp of the Labour Party's youth wing. Breivik's 1,500-page manifesto copied sections from the writings of American Unabomber Theodore Kaczinski, whose own manifesto led to his ultimate capture after 17 years of sending bombs through the mail to universities and airline executives (Hough, 2011).

Similarly, since the April 1999 Columbine massacre, school shooters within the United States and around the world have turned to this infamous American case for their inspiration to kill (Larkin, 2009). For example, in April 2002, 19-year-old Robert Steinhäuser shot to death 13 faculty members, two students, and one police officer at the Johann-Gutenberg-Gymnasium in Erfurt, Germany during final exams, before committing suicide. Upon searching the German killer's home computer, police later located newspaper articles about Harris and Klebold and the Columbine massacre (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2010). In September 2006, 25-year-old Kimveer Gill shot to death one student and injured another 19, before committing suicide, at Dawson College in Montreal, Canada. During a police search of Gill's home, police found a letter to his family praising the actions of Harris and Klebold. Gill was known to spend his idle hours logging onto a website called VampireFreaks.com, where he listed the internet-based video game "Super Columbine Massacre" as one of his favorites and displayed 50 photos of himself carrying a rifle and wearing a black trench coat and combat boots reminiscent of the outfit worn by the Columbine killers (Travers, 2006). Sebastian Bosse, who bombed and shot students and staff at his former school in Emsdetten, Germany, on November 20, 2006, praised Harris in his diary (Larkin, 2009). Two British teenagers obsessed with the Columbine massacre planned the bombing of their Manchester school for its 10 year anniversary (Carter, 2009).

4.1 Purpose and Method

In a previous publication (Levin & Madfis, 2009), we proposed a broad and sequential explanatory model of the factors frequently implicated in rampages committed by students in the United States. To provide relative uniformity of motivation, our analysis included only those perpetrators who were current or former students of the middle school, high school, or college that they targeted.

We sought to generalize not to all school shooting incidents, but, following Newman et al. (2004), only to school rampages: cases in which three or more people were killed or injured by gunfire on school property. Our criteria for selection, therefore, excluded the large number of school shooting cases with single victims (Hagan, Hirschfield, & Shedd, 2002), as well as double murders and assaults in which one particular individual is deliberately targeted but innocent bystanders are unintentionally harmed (e.g., in domestic or gang violence). Although we also excluded school slayings in which firearms were not used from the primary sample, we do examine rampage attacks utilizing knives, axes, bombs, and other weaponry as a useful basis for comparison.

Muschert (2007) pointed out the lack of studies (at least in the English language) that explore rampage violence outside of the United States, and this chapter seeks to help remedy that deficit. The literature on school rampage over the last decade has often emerged sporadically in diverse locations due to disciplinary boundaries and language barriers, and even specialists are not always aware of the case studies and empirical scholarship conducted elsewhere. It is our hope that this volume as a whole will address that problem. Our contribution to that effort explores the international salience of our cumulative strain model (Levin & Madfis, 2009), which was created via the inductive analysis of numerous American cases of school rampage. Here, we examine recent cases of rampage school shootings outside of the United States, applying the same selection criteria as our previous American study, in order to determine the extent to which our multi-stage explanatory model may be generalized internationally.

For this purpose, we gathered a sample of international school rampage incidents from various sources—including the Lexis-Nexis newspaper database and various internet sites which compile lists of school violence incidents—to compile as comprehensive a list as possible and to confirm the accuracy of data by drawing on multiple sources. We acknowledge that relying on newspaper accounts creates certain limitations. Duwe's study of how the American news media reports mass murder in the United States (2000), found that the most widely publicized mass murders were disproportionately likely to include large numbers of casualties, victims unknown to the offender, public locations, assault weapons, interracial offender–victim relationships, older offenders, and workplace violence. Hence, a list compiled from newspaper searches is likely to include a disproportionate number of cases that fit these descriptions. Unfortunately, there is no research investigating these biases in the school or international contexts. Although our sample was intentionally limited to multiple-casualty events using firearms in public locations, if Duwe's findings (2000) can be generalized to school rampages outside the United States, our sample might be biased toward cases where students targeted victims of different races or ethnicities, as well as from undue attention paid to rampage attacks with random victims as opposed to targeted attacks on specific individuals. In addition, language barriers forced us to utilize mainly English-language publications which could certainly impact the quality as well as quantity of our sample and data.

Via the aforementioned method, we examined the following 12 incidents, all of which met our selection standards and occurred since the April 1999 Columbine massacre (Table 4.1).[1]

4.2   The Model

Our model consists of five distinct stages, each of which is hypothesized as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the school rampage to take place. Thus, none of these variables at any given stage is viewed, by itself, as causing a school rampage to occur. The term cumulative strain is used to emphasize the crucial point that these factors intersect and build upon one another in a cumulative fashion. Long-term frustrations (chronic strains) experienced early in life or in adolescence lead to social isolation, and the resultant lack of pro-social support systems (uncontrolled strain) in turn allows a short-term negative event (acute strain), be it real or imagined, to be particularly devastating. As such, the acute strain initiates a planning stage, wherein a mass killing is fantasized about as a masculine solution to regain lost feelings of control, and actions are taken to ensure the fantasy can become reality. The planning process concludes in a rampage attack facilitated by weapons that enable numerous casualties in schoolrooms and campuses, where students are closely packed together.

4.2.1   Stage 1: Chronic Strain

Social scientists have long asserted that strains, various life pressures and difficulties, may result in criminal behavior. In 1938, Robert K. Merton adapted Durkheim's anomie theory to argue that those who are structurally excluded from achieving the cultural goal of material success experience strain and may ultimately adapt to this disappointment with various forms of deviant and criminal behavior. Likewise, social psychologists have long argued that chronic frustration, a string of failures to achieve an individual's objectives, increases the likelihood of anger and aggressive behavior (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939). In an early study, Palmer (1960) found that convicted murderers had suffered more important frustrations throughout childhood—physical defects, poor academic performance, few friends,

---

[1] Please note that we have not included offender suicides in the death count, something we suggest generally as a good operational practice. In the case of the Montreal rampage on September 13, 2006, Gill is listed as a former student, although he attacked Dawson College rather than his nearby alma mater, Vanier College, which he attended without graduating. A notepad police found in his car also indicated his intention to take his killing spree to other venues, including Vanier College (Who Was Kimveer, 2008). As the table indicates, very little data was available in English on the Veghal, Taiuva, Pak Phanang, and Patagones cases.

Table 4.1 International rampage shooting incidents

Date of rampage	Shooter's name and age	N killed/injured	Location and size of community	Bullied?	Isolated?	Former or current student?	Staff targeted w/ students?
December 7, 1999	D. Ali, 17	0/5	Veghel, Netherlands (small community)	Unknown	Unknown	Current	Students only
April 26, 2002	R. Steinhäuser, 19	16/1+suicide	Erfurt, Germany (large urban)	No	Yes	Former	Staff and students
October 21, 2002	H. Y. Xiang, 36	2/5	Melbourne, Australia (large urban)	No	Yes	Current	Staff and students
January 27, 2003	E. A. Freitas, 18	0/8+suicide	Taiuva, Brazil (small community)	Yes	Unknown	Former	Staff and students
June 6, 2003	A. Boonkwan, 17	2/4	Pak Phanang, Thailand (small community)	Unknown	Unknown	Current	Students only
September 28, 2004	R. Solich, 15	3/5	Patagones, Argentina (small community)	Unknown	Unknown	Current	Students only
September 13, 2006	K. S. Gill, 25	1/19+suicide	Montreal, Canada (large urban)	Yes	Yes	Former	Students only
November 20, 2006	S. Bosse, 18	0/5+suicide	Emsdetten, Germany (small community)	Yes	Yes	Former	Staff and students
November 7, 2007	P. Auvinen, 18	8/0+suicide	Jokela, Finland (small community)	Yes	Yes	Current	Staff and students

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Date of rampage	Shooter's name and age	N killed/injured	Location and size of community	Bullied?	Isolated?	Former or current student?	Staff targeted w/ students?
September 23, 2008	M. J. Saari, 22	9/0+suicide	Kauhajoki, Finland (small community)	Yes	No	Current	Students only
March 11, 2009	T. Kretschmer, 17	15/9+suicide	Winnenden, Germany (small community)	Yes	Yes	Former	Staff and students
April 7, 2011	W. M. Oliveira, 24	12/20+suicide	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (large urban)	Yes	Yes	Former	Students only

and chronic illnesses—than brothers who had never been convicted of committing a homicide.

Moving the concept of strain beyond Merton's social structural and class concerns (1938, 1968) and Dollard and colleagues' notion of failed objectives (1939), Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992) broadened the concept of strain to include a range of negative experiences or disappointing events in social relationships at home, school or work, or in the neighborhood. In Agnew's view, strain is a range of difficulties which lead to anger, frustration, disappointment, depression, fear, and ultimately, crime.[2] When strain intensifies and persists over a lengthy period of time, it becomes chronic.

Not unlike those who commit family annihilations and workplace mass murders, chronic strain seems to be a persistent theme in the life experiences of students who kill their schoolmates and teachers en masse (see, for example, Fox & Levin, 2011; Newman et al., 2004; Vossekuil et al., 2004). For school shooters, stressful and frustrating conditions often characterize their home life, their school relationships, or both. Research has confirmed the role played by strain and frustration in the family and at school in the development of delinquent behavior more generally (Agnew, Brezina, Wright, & Cullin, 2002; Agnew & White, 1992). Further, Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips (2003) found chronic rejection of the shooters in at least 13 of the 15 American school shooting cases they examined.

Among the sources of strain identified by Agnew (1992) are the failure to achieve positively valued goals and the disjunction of expectations and achievements. Both of these sources are similar to, though broader in scope than, Merton's analysis of the disparity between cultural goals and structural means (1938, 1968). Middle and high school students often judge their success and value in life neither by grade-point averages (as Merton's singular material goal model would suggest) nor by family relationships, but rather in terms of their popularity with peers. American youths who have gone on a rampage at their middle and high schools include both academic successes and failures (Hermann & Finn, 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2004), but almost all of them had been physically bullied, teased, humiliated, or ignored by their fellow students on a regular basis (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Larkin, 2007; Newman et al., 2004; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). By and large, persistent bullying was the main source of chronic strain in American cases.

As in the American context, the majority of school shootings outside of the United States (at least 7 of the 12 incidents we studied) involved long-term bullying as an expression of the killer's chronic strain and longstanding desire to get even. Eighteen-year-old Edmar Freitas, who committed suicide after shooting and

---

[2] Langman (2009a, b) argues that school rampage killers may be typologized into traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic categories. While our notion of strain fits most closely with that of traumatized rampage killers, we readily acknowledge the causal role that psychosis plays in some of these cases, though other mental health concerns such as depression and suicidal ideation are far more common. We do, however, dispute the notion that psychopathy plays a vital role in many cases, for unlike most serial killers, who lack empathy for others and revel in identifying as predators, the majority of rampage school shooters and other mass murderers are far more likely to view themselves as fundamentally moral victims of unjust treatment (Fox & Levin, 2011).

injuring eight people, mostly students, at his former school, the Colonel Benedito Ortiz High School in Taiuva, Brazil, in January 2003, for example, had been routinely teased and humiliated by his classmates since the age of 7 for being overweight (Morena, 2011). Chronic strain was similarly implicated in the September 2006 case of Kimveer Gill who shot to death one student and injured another 19 at Dawson College in Montreal, Canada. His motive was unclear until police located his online journal where he recorded how he had been bullied and harassed by the "jocks and preps" in his school (Travers, 2006; Who Was Kimveer, 2008). Eighteen-year-old Sebastian Bosse injured 27 people at his former school in November 2006 because he wanted revenge in what his suicide note referred to as "a revolution of the dispossessed" against the students who tormented and humiliated him. At one point, his tormenters went so far as to press a red-hot key against his hand (Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2010, p. 281). Similarly, Pekka-Eric Auvinen shot to death the principal, a school nurse, six students, and himself at his high school in Jokela, Finland, in November 2007 after being frequently bullied since fourth grade (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011). In September 2008, Matti Juhani Saari entered the Kauhajoki School of Hospitality in Kauhajoki, Finland, where he massacred nine students and then took his own life. For years, Saari reportedly had been a victim of bullying and humiliation by his classmates and later by his military peers. His fellow high school students regarded him as weird and unsociable, targeted him for scornful name-calling and hurtful pranks, and even assaulted and spat on him; his torment continued after graduation as other recruits urinated on his bed during his military service (Kiilakoski & Oksanen). In March 2009, 17-year-old Tim Kretschmer killed 15, including nine students and three teachers at his former high school in Winnenden, Germany. Kretschmer had long been mocked by other students (German school, 2009; Rayner & Bingham, 2009). In April, 2011, 23-year-old Wellington Menezes de Oliveira shot to death 12 students at his alma mater, the Tasso da Silveira School in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He had been constantly harassed and bullied by other students in part because of a physical disability. In a video recorded 2 days prior to his rampage, he suggested that he sought revenge for all "who have been humiliated, attacked, and disrespected for being different" (Rio school, 2011).

Bullying was not, however, the only form of long-term frustration experienced by school rampage shooters in the international sample. Chronic strain also took the form of persistent academic failure. For example, Robert Steinhäuser's school shooting in Erfurt, Germany on April 26, 2002, was less akin to those of his bullied American student counterparts and more like many workplace avengers who feel as if they have been unjustly fired or overlooked for accomplishments and promotions and decide to get even through the barrel of a firearm (Fox & Levin, 1994a). In this way, the Erfurt incident has much in common with an attack at the University of Iowa in October 1991 where Gang Lu, a graduate student in physics, was so outraged at being denied an important award for his Ph.D. research that he killed three faculty members on his dissertation committee and the graduate student who had won the prize for which he had unsuccessfully competed (Chen, 1995). Robert Steinhäuser had a longstanding reputation as a lazy and under-achieving student who had been

repeatedly disciplined for truancy and misbehavior. This would explain why his primary targets were teachers rather than peers. According to students, Steinhäuser aimed only at teachers, although two students were killed by shots fired through a locked door. During a period of high unemployment and few job prospects, Steinhäuser believed he had been robbed of his only opportunity to be accepted into a college and pursue a viable career (Gasser, Creutzfeldt, Naher, Rainer, & Wickler, 2004). He apparently blamed the faculty for his failings and decided to exact violent revenge against those he held responsible. Similarly, Huan Yun Xiang, who killed two students and injured two more and his professor at Monash University in October of 2002, was "constantly frustrated in class with students and lecturers because he found it difficult to communicate . . . [as] his command of the English language was limited" (Tozer, 2002). As a Chinese student in Australia, failing the course might have meant that Xiang's last 4 years of education were wasted as he could have subsequently been deported or forced to take unskilled factory work (Rees, 2002). Thus, although chronic bullying was not a factor in either of these cases, Steinhäuser's frequent reprimands (and ultimate expulsion from the school) and Xiang's constant trouble communicating at school (and the required oral exam which later precipitated his rampage), certainly constituted significant strains.

4.2.2   Stage 2: Uncontrolled Strain

The strains of everyday life are, for the majority of people, contained by the presence of conventional and pro-social relationships. From the point of view of middle-class society (from which a majority of American school shooters have come), most young people are embedded in a protective network with mainstream support systems in place. If they cannot find acceptance at school, they locate it in the family. Or, perhaps, they move to another set of peers outside the realm of their school. Some students, however, either never develop any meaningful social relationships at all (such as Virginia Tech shooter Seung-Hui Cho) or they turn to marginalized students who support and encourage their violent anti-social feelings and beliefs (such as the killer duos responsible for the massacres at Columbine, CO, and Jonesboro, AR).

In his social control theory, Hirschi (1969) argued that commitment to conventional institutions and bonding relationships with conventional people immunize individuals from perpetrating criminal acts including violence. Such well-connected individuals have a stake in conformity to mainstream norms and are reluctant to jeopardize that by engaging in criminal behavior. Those who lack such conventional bonds, by contrast, may feel isolated and/or marginalized and are accordingly less restricted to conformist behavior. Elliott, Ageton, & Cantor (1979) modified Hirschi's control theory, proposing that delinquency is most likely when there are weak bonds to conventional groups and strong bonds to deviant groups.

Adults who go on a rampage at work or in the family are almost always socially isolated and lacking in both conventional and deviant social bonds (Fox & Levin 2011).

By contrast, students or former students who shoot their schoolmates may similarly lack a large mainstream social network, but they are more likely to locate sources of support and companionship among peers who experience many of the same grievances they have. While Vossekuil et al. (2004, p. 20) determined that 34% of the American school shooters they examined were characterized by others or themselves as "loners," another 27% of their sample of shooters socialized with students who were disliked by their peers or were viewed as being part of a "fringe" group such as Columbine's infamous "Trenchcoat Mafia."[3] Further, they found that 44% of shooters were dared or encouraged by their peers to engage in the attacks (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 26).

While strain may persist for decades and family strains often start early in life, conventional social bonds begin to break down later. According to Agnew et al. (2002), adolescents are lower in social control than either adults or children: they tend to be less attached to their parents, less committed to being academically successful, and more likely to have friends who get into trouble. The developmental phase of adolescence is often marked by a profound desire for independence and rebellion. The peer group becomes almost everything. Supportive parents may no longer be appreciated by an adolescent who is rejected by his conventional peers and has no friends in the popular crowd. Young people may similarly have trouble making the transition into adulthood, where they are now required to fend for themselves. Not every young person is capable of moving easily from stage to stage. This is especially true for young people who have experienced persistent difficulties throughout childhood and adolescence.

Many American school shooters resided in small tight-knit towns where residents are in close contact with one another (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Newman et al., 2004). For individuals who can conform to dominant cultural norms and are accordingly accepted by other residents, it is very comfortable to live in such a locale. However, for students who are rejected or ignored, there are few alternative options for peer acceptance. A strong sense of community often entails less tolerance of differences (Kimmel & Mahler) and may leave students feeling trapped in the only game in town (Levin, 2008; Newman et al., 2004). As their resentment grows to an intolerable extent, they may have only two choices—either to retreat into a world of isolation or to join together with other students who are similarly rejected or ignored.

Much like their American counterparts, most of the international school rampages (8 out of the 12 incidents) occurred in small towns or villages: Veghel, the Netherlands (population 37,000); Taiuva, Brazil (5,000); Pak Phanang, Thailand

---

[3] We do not intend to suggest that being different, befriending people who are out of the mainstream, or participating in youth subcultures (which are, more frequently than not, pro-social cultural endeavors) usually facilitates a move to violence. The fact that the name "Trenchcoat Mafia" was initially created not by its members but rather by other students at Columbine High as a derogatory term for the friendship clique (Larkin, 2007) indicates just how potentially dangerous it can be for school administrators and teachers to utilize outsider status as a warning sign for murderous behavior. Rather than reduce a potential threat, this approach can doubly victimize already marginalized students through negative attention from school authorities.

(13,000); Patagones, Argentina (18,000); Emsdetten, Germany (36,000); Jokela, Finland (6,000); Kauhajoki, Finland (14,000); and Winnenden, Germany (28,000). That said, there are also a few large cities represented among the shootings outside of the United States—in Erfurt, Germany; Melbourne, Australia; Montreal, Canada; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Both within and outside of the United States, there may have been a copycat factor where initial cases of school rampages in small communities encouraged imitation by disaffected young people in other small communities rather than in large or medium-sized cities (see Agnew, 2004 on how specific forms of violence can often be understood as resulting from the social context in which strains are perceived and then avenged). Being ignored or rejected by peers in a small tight-knit community may be more significant for students who lack alternative social outlets beyond the school environment. By contrast, large cities are characterized by a greater number of options, increasing the likelihood that a student who is bullied by members of one group may find acceptance among other groups (Newman et al., 2004).

Uncontrolled strain can be identified in most incidents internationally, either through accounts by the shooters themselves or via the perceptions of their friends, family, and acquaintances. Erfurt's Robert Steinhäuser was characterized by his peers as a shy loner who did not get along well at home and had a reputation as a discipline problem at school. Even Steinhäuser's parents were unaware that their son had been expelled (Mendoza, 2002). Monash University shooter Huan Yun Xiang was characterized by students and teachers as "a loner who always sat somewhat apart" (Rees, 2002). In the last few months before Dawson College shooter Kimveer Gill killed one young woman, injured another 20 people, and killed himself, he cut off all contact with friends (Who Was Kimveer Gill, 2008), and several neighbors depicted his transformation into a solitary lifestyle as fairly recent (Blog Paints Chilling, 2006). The Emsdetten shooter, Sebastian Bosse, described as a "loner who spent all day playing computer games," had no friends at his school, where he noted that "the only thing I learned intensively . . . was that I'm a loser" (18-year-old Gunman, 2006; Juttner, 2006). Similarly, classmates who were familiar with Auvinen, one of the two Finnish rampage killers, described him as a loner and an outcast who had recently withdrawn completely from social relations (Larkin, 2010). Friends described Tim Kretschmer, the Winnenden rampage killer, as a lonely and quiet young man who felt rejected by society and ignored by his teachers, and much like many of the aforementioned cases, ultimately withdrew from his peers before the massacre (Davies, 2009). The shooter in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Menezes de Oliveira, had five siblings but lived alone, had no friends, and avoided contact with his former schoolmates (Raposa, 2011). Saari, the second Finnish shooter seems to have differed in this regard. According to one of his former classmates, Saari was "happy, a social guy [who] got along with people well and was not lonely" (Cser, 2008). However, he did attend nine different schools and moved constantly as a child, and, while his mother stated that he had been "lively during his first years," she described him as increasingly "shy, silent, and withdrawn" towards the end of his life (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011, p. 33). Even if Saari cannot be classified as a friendless loner, the significant factor may be the encouragement and

support for violence that Saari received from his friends in the online social networking world. Much like his fellow Finnish shooter Auvinen, Saari spent a great deal of his time posting violent videos on YouTube and interacting with peers on discussion boards preoccupied with Columbine and other school shootings (Kiilakoski & Oksanen). It is notable, however, that all of the 12 cases under investigation in this study were committed by lone individuals. Unlike the killer duos of Westside Middle School in Arkansas and Columbine High School in Colorado and the numerous prevented rampage incidents involving multiple student plotters in the United States (Madfis, 2012), school rampage outside of the United States has been a fairly solitary pursuit.

Numerous young individuals who suffer strain over a long period of time come to be isolated from conventional sources of encouragement and support, yet still live long law-abiding lives. Many move beyond the isolation and rebellion of adolescence and eventually increase their social bonds (attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs) to conventional social institutions. In the third stage, however, disaster strikes (or at least, is perceived to strike), and the chronically strained and uncontrolled individual moves one step closer to multiple murder.

4.2.3   Stage 3: Acute Strain

In the vast majority of cases of all forms of mass murder, there is evidence of acute strain, a loss perceived as catastrophic in the mind of the killer that serves as a catalyst or precipitant. The chronic/acute distinction is akin to that found in medical nomenclature between chronic and acute illness. While chronic illness refers to a persistent and long-standing medical condition, acute symptoms develop rapidly and have a substantially shorter lifespan. Likewise, whereas chronic strains are persistent and long-term, acute strains are short-term but particularly troubling situations or events that seem catastrophic to an already beleaguered, frustrated, and isolated individual who has lost the ability to cope with adversity.

The catalyst for school shooters is most often a humiliating loss of face, a rejection by a girlfriend, a loss of academic standing, an eviction from a community of peers, or even a major illness (Madfis & Arford 2008; Vossekuil et al., 2004). American middle and high school students who committed rampages often suffered some episode involving peers or romantic interests that left them no longer able to cope with existing chronic strains. For example, before his rampage at Pearl High

---

[4] Additional acute strains seemed to be present in the Veghal and Pak Phangang incidents. However, without additional background data, the exact circumstances (and presence of various additional factors) are difficult to discern. The school shooter in Veghel, the Netherlands (Ali D.) was reportedly attempting to avenge the honor of his sister who had been involved in a failed relationship with another student at the school. Anucha Boonkwan, a student at Pak Phangang high school outside of Bangkok, Thailand, opened fire on fellow students, killing two and injuring another four, while they lined up in the morning to sing the national anthem. A day earlier, Boonkwan had suffered a humiliating loss of face in a fistfight with one of his classmates.

School in Mississippi, Luke Woodham was dumped by his girlfriend, an event he described in his journal as destroying him (Mendoza, 2002).

Similar romantic failures are found in international cases of school rampage.[4] For example, Pekka-Eric Auvinen was apparently rejected by his girlfriend shortly before he committed the massacre in Jokela (Stenger, 2007). Tim Kretschmer, who targeted students at his former high school in Winnenden, Germany, felt rejected by the girls in his class, and was supposedly snubbed shortly before the massacre by a girl he had been particularly infatuated with, all which together may explain why most of his victims were females (Rayner & Bingham, 2009).

In addition to negative experiences of romantic rejection, occupational and school failures are also common sources of acute strain for rampage killers. An example of the former, Matti Saari was expelled from the military for firing a weapon during a training session before he killed nine students at the Kauhajoki School of Hospitality in Finland (Larkin, 2010). College students who open fire on American campuses are likely to have suffered an acute strain of an academic rather than social nature (Fox & Savage, 2009), and numerous incidents at international campuses match this pattern. For example, the Monash University shooter Huan Yun Xiang shot students in a classroom on the morning when he was scheduled to take an oral final exam which his poor English language abilities made him destined to fail and thus likely to be deported (Rees, 2002). Montreal's Dawson College killer, Kimveer Gill, failed to graduate from junior college. In his profile on the VampireFreaks.com website, he wrote, "Work sucks . . . School sucks . . . Life sucks. What else can I say?" (Montreal Gunman, 2006).

In many international cases, high school shooters were similarly motivated to act after failing to succeed academically or professionally. Months prior to his rampage in Erfurt, Robert Steinhäuser had been expelled from school for forging a medical excuse for his truancy. As a result, he forfeited any opportunity to take his final examinations, and was left with absolutely no school qualifications and significantly diminished career opportunities. It was no coincidence that Steinhäuser launched his attack while his classmates were taking the math portion of this very exam (Mendoza, 2002). Likewise, in August 2010, only a few months prior to his attack, Rio de Janeiro school shooter Oliveria was fired from his job in a food company as a result of poor work performance (Raposa, 2011).

4.2.4   Stage 4: The Planning Stage

Acute losses prove catastrophic in part due to the lack of a positive and supportive environment and have a cumulative effect due to long-term frustration and chronic strain. No longer able to cope and feeling as if there is nothing in life left to lose, the potential shooter is motivated to get even and show the world, even if only for a few minutes of horrifying bloodshed, that he cannot always be ignored and diminished. After this point, the killer's mind is made up to commit a massacre, and he must first spend some time planning the event to go out, literally and figuratively, with a "bang." Subsequent strains and even subsequent events, such as other rampage

attacks, may change the timetable and logistics of the plan (and this is the manner in which the copycat effect must be understood: not as a causal factor, but as one determinant influencing choice of timing and method). However, there almost always seems to be one singular acute episode which serves as a last straw for the killers who finally decide to commit mass murder as a power-asserting albeit fatalistic way out.

A mass murder is not a simple act to perpetrate. For the killers, a massacre constitutes the final power-asserting moment of a disastrous and failed existence, so it is clearly in their interest to have the event well planned and achievable. This planning is an involved and often lengthy process. According to Vossekuil et al. (2004), most school shooters create a plan at least 2 days before initiating their attack. Yet many of them plan not for days but for weeks or months beforehand. For example, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold spent over a year preparing their attack (Larkin, 2007).

The common misconception portrays the mass killer as a madman who suddenly "goes berserk" or "runs amok" and kills a large number of people with hardly any particular rationale, trigger, or objective. These slang expressions fail to accurately describe the vast majority of mass murders committed by either adolescents or adults. Spontaneity and randomness may be appropriate descriptors for homicidal maniacs who genuinely suffer from psychotic delusions and hallucinations. However, such explanations are inappropriate in any understanding of the deeper psychological and sociological motivations of most modern-day mass killers. It is clear that the majority of massacres involve deliberate planning and rational thought (Fox & Levin, 1994b; Newman et al., 2004; Vossekuil et al., 2004), and only a small minority of mass killers are psychotic (Holmes & Holmes, 2001) or diagnosed with serious mental health or behavior disorders (Vossekuil et al., 2004).

This leads to a troubling but inevitable conclusion. If mass murderers are rational actors and not hallucinating maniacs, then a violent massacre must in some way provide a "rational" solution. In fact, for school shooters (and likely other mass killers as well), the massacre serves to solve their most pressing problems of damaged personal identity and tarnished self-worth.

Planning was well documented in most international school rampages. Prior to his attack, Robert Steinhäuser was characterized by his peers as someone who had always tried to be at the center of attention. He wanted everyone to know his name and to be famous. After his expulsion from school, Steinhäuser spent at least a month stockpiling weapons and ammunition and making the necessary plans to maximize his body count (Gasser et al., 2004; Mendoza, 2002). Edmar Freitas planned his assault and suicide in Freitas, Brazil, for at least 2 months (Dreyer, 2003). In Montreal, Gill posted dozens of photos on his website depicting himself as a dangerous gun-toting young man. Security cameras showed Gill scoping out his killing venue 1 month before his rampage took place. At approximately the same time, he was training at a shooting club in order to secure his firearms permit (College shooter, 2006). Sebastian Bosse of Emsdetten, Germany, created an elaborate website in preparation for his attack at his former school (Böckler et al., 2010). Finland's Pekka-Eric Auvinen, who ended his killing spree by committing suicide, left behind a media package including a manifesto and a home-made video entitled

"Jokela High School Massacre—11/7/2007" showing him firing a handgun. He had planned the attack for more than 7 months and received his gun license 3 weeks before his shooting spree (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2009; Police: Gunman Acted, 2008). In the weeks prior to his rampage, Matti Saari posted several videos on YouTube under the username "Wumpscut86," showing him firing a handgun at a local shooting range. The 22-year-old killer left a note saying that he had planned his rampage for years. An acquaintance of Saari said that around 18 months previously he had sent him a message saying that he intended to carry out a school shooting (Friend says, 2009). Albertville Technical High School killer Tim Kretschmer announced his intention to go on a rampage in a number of chat rooms and posted his plans on the internet a day before going on his killing spree. Three weeks before the massacre, Kretschmer wrote a letter to his parents, explaining that he was deeply troubled and simply could not continue to live (Yeoman and Charter, 2009). Rio killer Wellington Menezes de Oliveira planned his attack for months in advance, scoping out his former school on several occasions, one of them 3 days before his attack, when he shaved his beard in the hopes of not being recognized (Brazilian school shooter, 2011). On the day of his rampage, Oliveira arrived at school carrying a backpack and told school staff that he had been invited to give a speech to students, before opening fire with two handguns (Cavanagh, 2011).

As Kimmel and Mahler (2003) and Newman et al. (2004) have previously noted in the American context, the utility of a school massacre as a masculine gender performance is paramount. It should come as no surprise, then, that all of the international rampage shootings explored in this study were committed by males. When we consider the manner in which much of Western culture equates violence with masculinity, we can begin to comprehend the act as a deliberate plan designed to control the image others have of the killer (as a powerful and masculine individual) in the socially approved manner for men, with violence. These continually humiliated, ignored, and emasculated boys and men feel that one last catastrophic show of force, homicidal violence on a massive scale, will restore lost feelings of masculinity, pride, power, and possibly result in the added bonus of achieving international fame.

After the final cumulative loss, the killer has set his mind on the vision of massive, terrifying human destruction as a way to gain a personal sense of pride, accomplishment, and masculine force. A period of planning must take place, during which the prospective killer locates an appropriate weapon, prepares the logistics of the attack, selects appropriate targets, and so on. In order for the attack to take place successfully, it must not only be meticulously planned; various facilitating factors need to be in place to transform a deadly dream into a terrifying reality.

4.2.5   Stage 5: Massacre at School

Of course, most bullied and rejected youths never commit a massacre, even if they suffer from chronic and acute strain and distance themselves from mainstream sources of social control. It is similarly true that many severely troubled young

people who have seriously considered committing a mass murder and even planned a deadly attack do not go through with it. Additionally, some people who desire to be mass killers initiate attempts yet fail due to a critical lack of facilitating factors, such as the training in or access to firearms or explosives.

According to routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson, 1994), predatory crimes occur only when suitable targets are available, effective guardians are absent, and motivated offenders are present. Multiple-victim shootings at schools contain all three of Cohen and Felson's foreground-level factors: multiple students collectively despised by the shooter(s) and congregated closely together in classrooms or public places; an absence of armed officers in the immediate area (few school shootings are ended through the intervention of law enforcement); and a student who is dedicated to killing his schoolmates.

To explain, also in Felson's foreground-level manner, why school massacres occur and take multiple lives, one must look to the presence of a lethal weapon of mass devastation, most frequently a firearm. Consistent with the routine activity perspective, most of the American school shooters conveniently acquired the gun(s) used in their rampage from their own home or the home of a close relative or friend (Fox Levin, & Quinet, 2011; Vossekuil et al., 2004). The absence of a semi-automatic firearm, conversely, reduces the likelihood of a school shooting turning into mass murder. On September 17, 2009, for example, a 19-year-old former student wounded nine people at a school in Ansbach, Germany, but, as he utilized petrol bombs and an ax, none of his victims died (Firebomb Attack, 2009).

In addition, routine activity theory helps to explain the selection of victims in school shootings. Few episodes of school violence result in any death at all, let alone a large body count, and the vast majority of school homicides have a single victim (Hagan et al., 2002). For a massacre to occur, a number of suitable targets must be available. As previously mentioned, youths who target multiple victims may be motivated to kill en masse in order to set a new record or achieve infamy. The massacre is, in some cases, meant to be an act of revenge, but it may also be designed to send a message that the shooter is powerful, important, and not to be ignored. This morbid statement is only as potent as the action is deadly and so a massacre sends the strongest message. Routine activity theory helps explain why the school or college serves as the ideal site for a massacre: crowded classrooms and bustling campuses pack unsuspecting victims (not to mention bitter rivals and despised authority figures) closely together.

At the scene of their attacks, those international rampage killers whose primary targets were students or teachers immediately headed for classrooms where large numbers of their potential victims were located. For example, Gill began by opening fire on groups of students outside the school buildings and quickly moved to the atrium near the cafeteria, where he could maximize the carnage (Montreal Gunman, 2006). Auvinen used a semi-automatic pistol to murder students mostly in the entrance hallway of the school, after which he walked around the school and killed the principal in the school yard (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2009). Saari opened fire on 20 students taking an exam and then moved to another classroom containing large numbers of students (Finnish college, 2008). Kretschmer began his killing spree in two top-floor classrooms and a chemistry

laboratory. In contrast, Steinhäuser's rampage required more mobility. He launched his attack as his classmates were engaged in their final exams and ignored students while directing his assault only at the teachers who were scattered throughout the building (Mendoza, 2002).

In an earlier contribution (Levin & Madfis, 2009), we argued that the real enemies of Virginia Tech killer, Seung-Hui Cho, were possibly not at Virginia Tech, but in the middle and high schools where he had been humiliated on a daily basis by classmates who made fun of his flat affect, his extreme shyness, and his lack of fluency in English. We pointed out that it would have been difficult, if not impossible for Cho to have targeted his former classmates as they were now inaccessible as a group. On his campus, however, he was able to commit *multiple murder by proxy,* Virginia Tech students were in proximity and available in large numbers. They stood in for the many classmates who had victimized Cho during his formative school years. Such a way of thinking, wherein the more easily accessible school target stands as a symbol for a host of prior injustices, was explicitly expressed by Emsdetten's Sebastian Bosse in his suicide note:

> I want REVENGE! I've been thinking about how most of the students that humiliated me have already left the school. I have two things to say about that: 1. I wasn't only in one class, I went to the school as a whole. No way are the people at the school innocent! Nobody is! They've got the same program running in their heads as the earlier years! I am the virus that wants to destroy these programs, and where I start is totally irrelevant. 2. Most of my revenge will be directed against the teachers, because they are people who intervened in my life against my will and who helped to put me where I now stand: On the battlefield! Almost all these teachers are still at this damn school! (Böckler et al., 2010, p. 280).

For Bosse, his former school was not only a symbolic target; it was also a practical one where mass violence could actually be enacted in one final burst of vengeful devastation.

4.3   Prevention

Since the Columbine massacre in 1999, numerous short-sighted policies have been proposed and implemented in an effort to satiate the public and reduce the anxieties of teachers, students, and parents. The American response has largely been to increase punitive disciplinary measures, surveillance via cameras and resource police officers, and security through target-hardening practices such as metal detectors and limited entrances. It is important to emphasize that the average duration of a school shooting is less than 15 min (Vossekuil et al., 2004), so that reactive measures can ultimately accomplish little. From a routine activities perspective, increasing the number and effectiveness of capable guardians and engaging in target-hardening tactics to diminish their suitability and ease of access does nothing to diminish the third and most vital of Felson's factors—the motivation of offenders. To this end, the focus must also be on long-term prevention techniques to ensure that students do not develop a desire to engage in a school massacre in the first place.

Our analysis suggests that incidents of multiple-victim shootings aimed at students and teachers might be deterred early on by reducing the chronic strains experienced by students who are likely to turn violent. There are frequently important warning signs—bullying and lack of friendships—to identify students who have suffered prolonged frustration in school and/or at home and are in urgent need of assistance from supportive adults. The problem is that teachers, school psychologists, and counselors do not always react to *troubled* students until they become *troublesome* and are seen as a threat to others.

It often takes years of being teased, bullied, and/or neglected by peers before a student develops a plan to kill his classmates and teachers. By the time a young person has murderous intentions, it is usually too late to intervene. But years earlier, a sensitive teacher, a perceptive guidance counselor, or even a concerned parent might have made all the difference. If strains are counteracted early on, then the cumulative impact of isolation, catastrophic losses, and planning lose their efficacy in regard to producing a massacre.

Important skills for coping with strain may require effective guidance, counseling, or even medication. Millions of young people, regardless of their potential risks for violence, would benefit from intervention by parents, teachers, administrators, and school psychologists to prevent bullying and harassment. Fortunately, many principals and legislators in the United States, due in part to highly publicized student suicides and homicides, have recently enacted anti-bullying programs and policies. Many of them aim at changing the student culture rather than focusing on changing bullied students. Because almost all of the school shooters around the world have been males, an effective conflict resolution policy should promote more constructive images of masculinity.

In Stage 2, we saw that some angry students externalize the blame for their miseries. Students who go on a rampage are unlikely to take responsibility for their own actions, accept their marginal status among conventional peers, or adjust to the role of outsider. Some adolescents who never seriously consider violent vengeance may find sources of self-esteem beyond popularity. In response to peer humiliation, targeted students may resist and gain much needed self-esteem by developing competence in other valued areas of life such as scholarship, extra-curricular activities, athletics, music and art, or with family members.

Moreover, many students who suffer from strain over a lengthy period of time never experience a catastrophic loss and instead mature from middle to high school status, high school to college status, or into adulthood, where peer influence declines in significance. It is important to intervene in the lives of emotionally desperate students long before they can potentially suffer acute strain in the form of a catastrophic event. When such a calamitous occurrence does arise in their lives, they will then have the self-esteem and social support system in place to soften the blow.

Additionally, as our fourth stage clearly indicates, school massacres are by and large carefully planned for days, weeks, or months before they take place. Fortunately, many attackers also reveal some element of this plan to their friends or family members—communication which O'Toole (2000) refers to as "leakage." Vossekuil et al. (2004) found that 81% of their American sample revealed their homicidal plot to at

least one person, while 59% informed two or more people. These facts indicate a dire need for students to break the culture of silence, take threats seriously, and come forward with such crucial information. Due to the widespread publicity of certain school massacres, this change has already begun to take place. Many American shooting rampages since Columbine have been narrowly averted, because trusted young confidants revealed the dangerous intentions of their peers to the authorities (Butterfield, 2001; Daniels et al., 2007, 2009; Madfis, 2012), while the Berlin Leaking Project has been a vital source of German data on school threats and communications of impending violent acts (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2010).

Finally, students who lack access to and training in the use of particularly lethal weapons may injure but not kill many. Though it is much more common for a young student to attack a classmate in school with a knife, guns are the most common weapons used to commit multiple homicide. If parents, grandparents, or other adult relatives keep a firearm in the home, they must be absolutely certain that it is inaccessible to troubled children and teenagers. In at least two of the international incidents (Kretschmer and Boonkwan), rampage shooters secured a weapon from their father's collection.

In the aftermath of the many mass murders in the United States, there have been calls to arm students, teachers, and faculty members, either as a means of deterring future offenders from making an attempt or with the mindset that an armed populace would be better equipped to stop a rampaging killer. In fact, nearly 20 American states considered new legislation to permit students and faculty to carry firearms on college campuses in the wake of the massacre in Tucson, Arizona, on January 8, 2011, in which 19 people were shot, including U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords (Gottesdiener, 2011). Thus, in the face of strong support for the second amendment to the American Constitution (the right to bear arms), little focus has been placed on reducing the availability of firearms. By contrast, the most common reaction to incidents outside of the United States has been attempts by gun control advocates to reduce teenagers' access to deadly weapons (though rampages have also precipitated other collective reactions, such as calls to prohibit violent video games in Germany after Bosse's attack and Finland's pouring resources into identifying and counseling disaffected young men after Saari's rampage). In most nations, however, shootings have been followed by broad media and political discussion of gun ownership issues related to school safety.

Following the Erfurt massacre, German gun laws were tightened, raising the minimum age of gun ownership from 18 to 21 (Loyn, 2009) and requiring extra medical and psychological testing for those under the age of 25 who sought to purchase guns (Massacre in Winnenden, 2009). The 2006 school shooting in Emsdetten led German lawmakers to amend the country's already strict gun laws, banning tasers, dummy guns, and several other weapons. Anyone assessed to be violent or with a criminal record was no longer eligible to purchase a firearm (Harding, 2009). Then, following Kretschmer's rampage, German politicians passed new legislation to create an electronic weapons registry along with random inspections in gun-owning homes (Bundestag approves, 2010). In Germany, applicants for a firearm license must be at least 21 years old, must pass criminal and psychiatric background checks,

and are required to have a legitimate reason for possessing a firearm (e.g., to hunt or protect themselves) (Alpers & Wilson, 2011; Harding, 2009).

After the shooting at Monash University, all Australian states passed new laws against handgun trafficking (Crabb, Costa, Munro, & Murphy, 2002), and the federal government placed new restrictions on handguns regarding maximum caliber, magazine capacity, and minimum barrel length (Hudson, 2003). In Canada, Gill's rampage inspired discussions about how to reduce access to automatic weapons and moves to tighten gun control generally. Yet the killer was entirely unknown to law enforcement and had no criminal record that would have prevented him from securing a firearm (Canada.com, 2007; Travers, 2006). The episode in Rio de Janeiro provoked nationwide discussions in Brazil about the safety of the country's schools, and the government called for a major disarmament program (Lemos, 2011).

Not unlike the situation in the United States, Finland's gun laws are relatively lax, permitting numerous residents who would be ineligible elsewhere to own and carry a firearm. Finland has the third highest rate of gun ownership in the world, behind only the United States and Yemen. Moreover, many Finns, even those most affected by recent school tragedies, oppose any recommendations by investigative committees to limit access to firearms. Hunting and recreational shooting are extremely popular. The majority of residents in both Jokela and Kauhajoki said they believed that the school shootings in their towns were isolated incidents that could not have been prevented (Oksanen, Nurmi, Rasanen, & Lindstrom, 2010).

After Auvinen's rampage, Finnish authorities pledged to raise the age for buying a gun from 15 to 18 but ultimately never did (Finland fears, 2008). Instead, the Ministry of Justice turned its attention to policies and programs designed to improve the lives of marginalized students. The *Report of the Investigation Committee* on the Jokela school shooting (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2009) recommended, among other things, imposing measures to prevent bullying and harassment at an early stage of development, to increase control of internet websites that encourage violence, and to provide effective mental health services for troubled youngsters. Following the 2009 school rampage in Kauhajoki, the Investigation Committee (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2010) recommended taking steps to limit the prevalence of semi-automatic firearms and raise the minimum age for possessing guns to 20 years. As in the Jokela report, the Kauhajoki Investigation Committee recommended developing mental health services for young people and changing school culture to reduce bullying. The new report also recommended more carefully distributing psychotropic medications to children and teenagers, coordinating efforts to reach students who suffer from mental illnesses, giving disgruntled students opportunities for expressing their grievances, and institutionalizing a comprehensive security plan for school emergencies.

The debate over how best to prevent and control school rampage shootings, and gun control as a solution in particular, remains hotly contested. Looking at recent incidents of school rampage in China, however, may prove quite useful as a basis for comparison. China's strict gun control laws were instrumental in determining the choice of weapon in a recent string of school rampages committed by outsiders who apparently had no direct connection to their victims, as either former or fellow stu-

dents. These legal restrictions on the possession of firearms may also have saved the lives of numerous Chinese citizens. In none of the eight horrific onslaughts committed from March 2010 through August 2011 was a firearm employed. Instead, the weapon was a knife, a box cutter, a hammer, or a cleaver. While causing unspeakable harm, the Chinese version of rampage seemed to result in far more injury than death, even though the victims were vulnerable children. In three cases, multiple victims lost their lives. On March 23, 2010, Zheng Minsheng stabbed to death eight children. Two months later, Wu Huanming killed seven kindergarteners and two adults with a cleaver. On August 4, 2010, Fang Jiantang killed three children and a teacher. Notwithstanding the death toll in these two latter cases, Huamming attacked another 11 children who were injured and survived, while Jiantang harmed, but did not kill, another 17 people. Likewise, though 16 students and a teacher were attacked by a knife-wielding assailant at a school in Leizhou, Guangdong Province, on August 28, 2010, all of the victims survived. Just a day later, 28 students, two teachers, and a security guard at a school in Taixumng, Jiangsu all survived after being stabbed repeatedly. Similar subsequent attacks with hammers and box cutters certainly caused great harm and injury, but they too were unsuccessful as mass murder attempts. While gun control laws do nothing to address the appetite for vengeance and carnage (and thus can be no substitute for preventative and ameliorative measures), they certainly make large-scale lethal violence more difficult to commit.

4.4   Conclusion and Future Research

School rampages within and outside of the United States since the Columbine massacre share much in common. In our international sample of shooters since the turn of the twenty-first century, many were influenced in terms of motive as well as modus operandi by the Columbine killers. In addition, they tended to be persistently bullied by other students or had experienced academic failures. Most were socially isolated, residing typically in small towns where a tight-knit sense of community mainly benefited students who had already found peer acceptance. Most took their own lives, after exacting a measure of revenge that was planned far in advance after one particularly devastating triggering event. Overall, the cumulative strain model initially devised to explain rampage in American schools seems to apply remarkably well to international incidents of multiple-victim school shootings.

At the same time, rampages committed outside of the United States did vary from what we have come to know about American school rampage. Half were former students and nearly all were in their late teens or early twenties, and thus, because of their adult status, were more able than the adolescents in American incidents to legally secure a firearm. Unlike their American counterparts, none operated in a homicidal partnership. Rampage school shooters outside of the United States were far more likely than those in America to explicitly target school staff rather than or along with their peers. In these international cases, this likely reflects the greater prevalence or significance of straining experiences relating to academic failures in place of or along-

side those pertaining to relational or peer-based stressors. It is also possible that this difference reflects a greater value placed upon peer group dynamics as part of identity formation in American culture, or even the fact that schools outside the United States often track their students into career trajectories from far younger ages in a manner which would make poor academic performance a considerably greater blow. Future research should seek to better understand the causes and significance of these differences. Further, scholars ought to more fully investigate international responses to school rampage and the manner in which anti-violence policy is often the result of particular cultural, political, and structural manifestations rather than the uncontested or inevitable solution to particular crises.

Ultimately, it is hoped that projects such as this edited volume will foster a more international and cross-disciplinary school shooting literature. That may mean additional theoretical work (such as Henry, 2009) which recognizes the need for school violence scholarship that utilizes "a complex combination of common social circumstances occurring on three levels: individual, community, and socio-cultural" (Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010, p. 347). It may also necessitate new emphasis on school homicide outside of the developed world, where language barriers and limited electronic media exacerbate the paucity of knowledge regarding shootings in South American and Asian countries. Such research is vital to improve the dialogue on school violence prevention so that scholars and practitioners from diverse fields and locales may be aware of what is going on elsewhere and be better alerted to the best practices with empirically confirmed results.

References

18-year-old gunman distributed bombs in the school building. (2006, November 20). Retrieved December 12, 2011, from http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/0,1518,449557,00.html.

Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology, 30*(1), 47–87.

Agnew, R. (2004). A general strain theory approach to violence. In M. A. Zahn, H. H. Brownstein, & S. L. Jackson (Eds.), *Violence from theory to research* (pp. 37–50). Cincinnati, OH: Anderson.

Agnew, R., Brezina, T., Wright, J. P., & Cullin, F. T. (2002). Strain, personality traits, and delinquency: Extending general strain theory. *Criminology, 40*(1), 43–72.

Agnew, R., & White, H. (1992). An empirical test of general strain theory. *Criminology, 30*(4), 475–500.

Alpers, P., & Wilson, M. (2011, November 26). *Guns in Germany: Facts, figures and firearm law.* University of Sydney School of Public Health. Retrieved January 6, 2012, from http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/germany.

Blog paints chilling portrait of "angel of death." (2006, September 15). *CTV News*. Retrieved December 14, 2011, from http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Canada/20060914/gill_profile_060914/.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2010). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2010). Explaining and preventing school shootings: Chances and difficulties of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 295–314). New York: Springer.

Brazilian school shooter described self as a loner. (2011, April 13). Retrieved December 12, 2011, from http://articles.cnn.com/2011-04-13/world/brazil.school.shooting_1_school-shooting-gunman-beard?_s=PM:WORLD.

Bundestag approves tougher gun laws. (2010, January 4). Retrieved January 5, 2012, from http://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article1115547/Bundestag_billigt_verschaerftes_Waffenrecht.html.

Butterfield, F. (2001, March 8). Tips by students result in arrests at 5 schools. *New York Times*, p. A20.

Carter, H. (2009, September 2). Manchester duo deny plot to copy Columbine massacre. Retrieved May 25, 2012, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/02/uk-columbine-anniversary-bomb-plot.

Cavanagh, R. (2011, April 8). Twelve kids killed in Brazil school shooting. Retrieved December 10, 2011, from http://news.sky.com/home/world-news/article/15968174.

Chen, E. (1995). *Deadly scholarship: The true story of Lu Gang and mass murder in America's heartland*. New York: Carol.

Cohen, L., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review, 44*(4), 588–608.

College shooter Gill obsessed with guns. (2006, September 15). *CBC News.* Retrieved November 3, 2011, from http://cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2006/09/15/aftermath-shooting.html.

Crabb, A., Costa, G., Munro, I., & Murphy, P. (2002, October 23). PM flags tougher gun laws. Retrieved December 12, 2011, from http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/10/22/1034561495101.html.

Cser, A. (2008, September 23). Gunman kills 10, self in Finnish school shooting. Retrieved November 22, 2011, from http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/09/23/us-finland-shooting-news-idUSTRE48M92I20080923.

Daniels, J. A., Buck, I., Croxall, S., Gruber, J., Kime, P., & Govert, H. (2007). A content analysis of news reports of averted school rampages. *Journal of School Violence, 6*, 83–99.

Daniels, J. A., Volungis, A., Pshenishny, E., Gandhi, P., Winkler, A., Cramer, D., et al. (2009). A qualitative investigation of averted school shooting rampages. *The Counseling Psychologist, 38*(1), 69–95.

Davies, L. (2009, March 12). Germany school killer gave warning in chatroom. Retrieved December 12, 2011, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/12/school-shooting-germany-letter.

Dietz, P. (1986). Mass, serial, and sensational homicide. *Bulletin of the New England Medical Society, 62*, 477–491.

Dollard, J., Doob, L. W., Miller, N. E., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. (1939). *Frustration and aggression*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dreyer, D. (2003, February 14). Culture of peace—turning the table of violence. Retrieved December 20, 2011, from http://www.educacional.com.br/reportagens/cultura_paz/default.asp.

Duwe, G. (2000). Body-count journalism: The presentation of mass murder in the news media. *Homicide Studies, 4*(4), 364–399.

Elliott, D. S., Ageton, S. S., & Cantor, R. J. (1979). An integrated theoretical perspective on delinquent behavior. *Journal of Research on Crime and Delinquency, 16*, 3–27.

Felson, M. (1994). *Crime and everyday life: Insight and implications for society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Finland fears copycat. (2008, September 25). Retrieved January 2, 2012, from http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,427761,00.html.

Finnish college gunman kills 10. (2008, September 23). Retrieved January 2, 2012, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7630969.stm.

Firebomb attack on German school. (2009, September 17). Retrieved January 2, 2012, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8260427.stm.

Fox, J. A., & Levin, J. (1994a). Firing back: The growing threat of workplace homicide. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 536*, 16–30.

Fox, J. A., & Levin, J. (1994b). *Overkill: Mass murder and serial killing exposed*. New York: Plenum.

Fox, J. A., & Levin, J. (2011). *Extreme killing: Understanding serial and mass murder*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fox, J. A., Levin, J., & Quinet, K. (2011). *The will to kill: Making sense of senseless murder* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Fox, J. A., & Savage, J. (2009). Mass murder goes to college: An examination of changes on college campuses following Virginia Tech. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1465–1485.

Friend says Saari called him shortly after school shooting. (2009, September 25). Retrieved December 28, 2011, from http://www.hs.fi/english/article/1135239733955.

Gasser, K. H., Creutzfeldt, M., Naher, M., Rainer, R., & Wickler, P. (2004, April 19). Bericht der Kommission Gutenberg-Gymnasium. Retrieved December 28, 2011, from http://www.thueringen.de/imperia/md/content/text/justiz/bericht_der_kommission_gutenberg_gymnasium.pdf.

German school rampage "happened in seconds." (2009, March 11). Retrieved December 23, 2011, from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29630925/ns/world_news-europe/t/german-school-rampage-happened-seconds/#.TwPWFtTOy6U.

Gottesdiener, L. (2011, April 21). After Arizona veto, guns on campus legislation still pending in other states. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved August 30, 2011, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/21/guns-on-campus_n_851814.html.

Gun club opened door to Gill, Fabrikant. (2007, June 19). *Canada.com*. Retrieved November 3, 2011, from http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=1d0f80b2-abfl-456b-bc09-3392d71ecb4b&sp.

Hagan, J., Hirschfield, P., & Shedd, C. (2002). First and last words: Apprehending the social and legal facts of an urban high school shooting. *Sociological Methods and Research, 31*(2), 218–255.

Harding, L. (2009, March 11). Strict German gun laws fail to prevent school shooting. Retrieved January 3, 2012, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/11/germany-school-shooting-laws/print.

Henry, S. (2009). School violence beyond Columbine: A complex problem in need of an interdisciplinary analysis. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1246–1265.

Hermann, M., & Finn, A. (2002). An ethical and legal perspective on the role of school counselors in preventing violence in schools. *Professional School Counseling, 6*(1), 46–54.

Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Holmes, R. M., & Holmes, S. T. (2001). *Mass murder in the United States*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hough, A. (2011, July 24). Norway shooting: Anders Behring Breivik plagiarised "Unabomber." Retrieved December 28, 2011, from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/8658269/Norway-shooting-Anders-Behring-Breivik-plagiarised-Unabomber.html.

Hudson, P. (2003, June 30). Prices set in handgun crackdown. Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/06/29/1056825278337.html.

Juttner, J. (2006, November 21). Armed to the teeth and crying for help. Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,449814,00.html.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011). Cultural and peer influences on homicidal violence: A Finnish perspective. *New Directions for Youth Development, 33*(129), 31–42.

Kimmel, M. S., & Mahler, M. (2003). Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence: Random school shootings, 1982–2001. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*, 1439–1458.

Langman, P. (2009a). Rampage school shooters: A typology. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 14*(1), 79–86.

Langman, P. (2009b). *Why kids kill: Inside the minds of school shooters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Larkin, R. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Larkin, R. (2010). Masculinity, school shooters, and the control of violence. In W. Heitmeyer, H. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 315–344). New York: Springer.

Leary, M., Kowalski, R., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 202–214.

Lemos, I. (2011, November 4). Government decides to advance disarmament campaign. Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://g1.globo.com/Tragedia-em-Realengo/noticia/2011/04/governo-decide-antecipar-campanha-pelo-desarmamento.html.

Levin, J. (2008). *Serial killers and sadistic murderers: Up close and personal*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus.

Levin, J., & Fox, J. A. (1985). *Mass murder: America's growing menace*. New York: Plenum.

Levin, J., & Madfis, E. (2009). Mass murder at school and cumulative strain: A sequential model. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1227–1245.

Loyn, D. (2009, March 11). German attack raises gun law questions. Retrieved January 5, 2012, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7938402.stm.

Madfis, E. (2012). *Averting the unlikely: Fearing, assessing, and preventing threats of rampage violence in American public schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

Madfis, E., & Arford, T. (2008, February). Investigating precipitating factors in mass murder: Do "last straws" get to the bottom of rampage killing or merely scratch the surface? *Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Society (ESS) conference in New York*.

Massacre in Winnenden has echoes of Erfurt school shootings. (2009, March 11). Retrieved January 5, 2012, from http://article.wn.com/view/2009/03/11/Massacre_in_Winnenden_has_echoes_of_Erfurt_school_shootings/.

Mendoza, A. (2002). *Teenage rampage*. London: Virgin.

Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*, 672–682.

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.

Ministry of Justice, Finland. (2009). Jokela school shooting on 7 November 2007: Report of the Investigation Committee. Publication 2009, p. 1.

Ministry of Justice, Finland. (2010). Kauhajoki school shooting on 23 September 2008: Report of the Investigation Committee. Publication 2010, p. 39.

Montreal gunman called himself "angel of death." (2006, September 14). *CBC News*. Retrieved November 3, 2011, from http://cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2006/09/14/gunman-shooting.html.

Morena, M. C. (2011, April 8). Survivors of similar case as Rio to relive trauma. Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/brasil/sp/sobreviventes+de+caso+semelhante+ao+do+rio+revivem+trauma/n1300036730840.html.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.

Muschert, G. W., & Madfis, E. (In press, 2013). Fear of school violence and the dominance of risk control in the post-Columbine era. In G. W. Muschert, S. Henry, N. L. Bracy, & A. A. Peguero (Eds.), *The Columbine effect: Fear and the expansion of school antiviolence policy*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Muschert, G. W., & Peguero, A. A. (2010). The Columbine effect and school anti-violence policy. *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, 17*, 117–148.

Muschert, G. W., & Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and control of violence: communication in school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 345–361). New York: Springer.

Newman, K., Fox, C., Roth, W., Mehta, J., & Harding, D. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

O'Toole, M. E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: Critical Incident Response Group, FBI Academy, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

Oksanen, A., Nurmi, J., Rasanen, P., & Lindstrom, K. (2010). This can't happen here!: Community reactions to school shootings in Finland. *Research on Finnish Society, 3*, 19–27.

Palmer, S. (1960). *Psychology of murder*. New York: Crowell.

Police: gunman acted alone. (2008, October 31). Retrieved December 23, 2011, from http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2007/11/police_gunman_acted_alone_256673.html.

Raposa, K. (2011, April 7). Brazil news wrap: Rio de Janeiro school shooting kills 12. Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2011/04/07/brazil-news-wrap-rio-de-janeiro-school-shooting-kills-11/.

Rayner, G., & Bingham, J. (2009, March 12). German school gunman Tim Kretschmer: chat room warning "was a hoax." Retrieved May 2, 2012, from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/4982158/German-school-gunman-Tim-Kretschmer-Chat-room-warning-was-a-hoax.html.

Rees, M. (2002, October 29). Two students killed in Australian university shooting. Retrieved January 2, 2011, from http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/oct2002/mon-o29.shtml.

Rio school massacre video shows months of planning. (2011, April 14). Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/8780882-rio-school-massacre-video-shows-months-of-planning.

Stenger, W. (2007, November 11). Don't blame me, says girlfriend who split with YouTube killer. *The Times* (London).

Tozer, K. (2002, October 22). Police trace the moments before the Melbourne shooting. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/stories/s707926.htm.

Travers, E. (2006, September 14). Police seeking motive in Montreal college shooting. Retrieved November 3, 2011, from http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1535046,00.html.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2004). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

Who was Kimveer Gill (Parts 1–3). (2008, September 4). Retrieved December 17, 2011, from http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/story.html?k=40661&id=c7b3f15e-9cdd-4e52-8d86-c1d59e6cff0b.

Yeoman, F., & Charter, D. (2009, March 12). Tim Kretschmer, the boy who killed 15 in school rampage, stole pistol from his father's arsenal. Retrieved October 1, 2011, from http://www.timesplus.co.uk/tto/news/?login=false&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.thetimes.co.uk%2Ftto%2Fnews%2Fworld%2Feurope%2F.

Chapter 5
On the Relevance of Phantasy
for the Genesis of School Shootings

Frank J. Robertz

Any research endeavor begins with a review of existing knowledge. This is subjected to critical verification and, if all goes according to plan, enlarged to offer a broader perspective on the world in general and the research topic in particular. To ensure the relevance of the knowledge thus generated, however, researchers must not limit themselves to confirming, correcting, or extending these perspectives. They must also come to conclusions that can be implemented in practice, and this imperative is even more urgent when lives are at stake. This chapter, therefore, begins with an outline of the current state of research and then extends its perspective to encompass the relevance of phantasy in the genesis of school shootings. In the process, I highlight some specific preliminary implications for new methods that are addressed in greater depth in subsequent contributions to this volume. The focus on phantasies provides scope for relevant impulses that offer a better understanding of the familiar phenomenon of leakage while also giving suggestions for successful prevention and the identification of early warning signs.

5.1 School Shootings: Definition and Frequency

Let us begin with an outline of the phenomenon. No analysis is conceivable without a careful definition. A definition of "school shootings" must be able to identify with precision those acts that constitute a distinguishable phenomenon with shared characteristics and it must be able to differentiate these from other violent incidents like simple interpersonal killings or gang conflicts. Unfortunately, the methods used in several large studies are fuzzy in this respect and can result in severely underweighted

F.J. Robertz (✉)
Institute for Violence Prevention and Applied Criminology,
Berlin, Germany
e-mail: fr@igak.org

or overweighted figures. For example, even a significant fundamental study (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002) counts the simple interpersonal killing of a rival on the school parking lot as an incidence of school shooting. For the figures given here, therefore, a definition was chosen (Robertz, 2004) that largely conforms to international conventions and also allows the phenomenon to be clearly distinguished from other forms of school violence. Hence the term "school shootings" is used to describe those killings or attempted killings by adolescents at their schools that were committed with a direct and targeted reference to the school in question. This direct reference exists in the case of two kinds of incidents: first, when the crime was directed against several victims who did not belong to an opposing group (gang), and second, when a single victim was demonstratively chosen because of his or her function at the school rather than because of a simple interpersonal conflict of the kind that could as easily have broken out in another setting. When the global data is analyzed according to this perspective, an additional factor emerges: the chosen location for such demonstrative acts of violence was invariably the school which the perpetrator was attending or had attended in the past (Robertz, 2004; Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010).

The phenomenon of school shootings first manifested itself in this form in 1974 and became more frequent in the United States during the 1990s, when it also began to increase in severity. A survey dated January 1, 2010 (Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010) identified a total of 124 incidences worldwide, with nine shootings occurring in the first 10 years of the phenomenon and 71 between 2000 and 2009. The gravity of the shootings varies to an astonishing degree. On average, each shooting has a death toll of 1.7 and 3.4 injuries. But in some shootings, such as those in Columbine, Red Lake, Erfurt, and Winnenden, more than ten people were killed. The conspicuously high number of deaths in these cases does not correlate with the response time of emergency services and the weapons used by the perpetrators. Thus it may be assumed that variables such as success in overcoming the inhibition against killing, as well as the immediate effects of the crime situation on the perpetrator's psyche, play a major and as yet largely unexamined role.

5.2   Similarities Between Perpetrators

The early American studies identified numerous common characteristics of school shootings. While the crimes as such may be viewed as an independent phenomenon with specific characteristics (McGee and DeBernardo, 2002; Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, & Gray, 2001), the adolescent perpetrators too exhibit conspicuous attributes in all the studies.

Most of them had easy access to weapons and prior experience of handling firearms (Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The typical risk factors for the classical violent crimes committed by adolescents individually or in groups—such as excessive alcohol and drug use, academic failure, and a police record (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006)—were examined in some studies but were rarely observed in connection with school shootings (Robertz, 2004). By far, the more

interesting results were found on the psychodynamic level. The adolescents in question were found to be rather introverted loners with inadequate social skills (McGee & DeBernardo, 2002; Moore et al., 2003), and most of them had prior experiences of subjectively severe personal failure. In general, these experiences took the form of subjectively grave, multiple losses of status or relationships (Vossekuil et al., 2002).

An early study of the seven school shootings that occurred in Germany between 1999 and 2006 confirmed these results of the US studies and also found that six of the seven shooters were highly susceptible to narcissistic injury and had an intense desire for admiration as well as phantasies of unlimited power and greatness. As a result, the perpetrators were unable to adequately process injuries and failures and could not achieve closure. At the same time, the adolescent perpetrators also exhibited a high sensitivity to criticism and rejection. Additionally, the school records of many of the perpetrators showed that they had received reprimands or disciplinary warnings, and all had extremely negative academic prospects. Thus it appears that the crisis and injury experiences of narcissistically susceptible perpetrators were directly linked to school (Hoffmann, Roshdi, & Robertz, 2009).

Nevertheless, it is by no means a general rule that such adolescents present with a pronounced psychiatric syndrome. Many of them exhibited multiple depressive dynamics, which went as far as suicide attempts in individual cases (Meloy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Some of them additionally presented with personality accentuations or disorders of a schizoid or paranoid nature. Psychotic disorders, however, are very rare (Hoffmann, 2011, p. 209). A recently published psychiatric labeling method in which perpetrators are assigned to the categories of psychopathic, psychotic, and traumatized (Langman, 2009) currently lacks adequate empirical corroboration in the published literature and fails to hold true in the German cases that have been studied in depth (Hoffmann, 2011).

I will, however, devote more space to two other abnormalities, namely the social environment of these adolescents and their psychological development leading up to the crime.

5.2.1   Social Environment

The perpetrators typically come from families that are described as middle-class (McGee & DeBernardo, 2002; Moore et al., 2003). The family types range from superficially intact nuclear families to foster families (Vossekuil et al., 2002). However, the research group led by Katherine Newman rightly points out that the nature and emotional quality of day-to-day interactions within the family constitute a far more important variable than the formal nature of the family structure (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004). When this is taken into account, the results of the various studies are largely consistent: the perpetrators' families are described as dysfunctional and problematic (e.g., Fast, 2008; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003), and the adolescent perpetrators stated that they felt out of place, abandoned,

and lonely within the family (e.g., O'Toole, 1999; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000).

At school, the perpetrators typically saw themselves as the objects of victimization, threats, and exclusion (Meloy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002). While this is not always easy to evaluate from the outside, as the predisposition to narcissistic injury causes them to perceive everyday experiences as extreme, the perpetrators' diaries and drawings and, in particular, their own pre-delict and post-delict statements clearly show that their relationships at school were deficient and inadequate (Newman et al. 2004; Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010). If they had distinct social relationships at school, these persons were usually outsiders too (Moore et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2004).

For assessing the stability of the relationship structures of adolescent perpetrators, it is helpful to examine various criminological theories of control (Robertz, 2004). In particular, relevant perspectives are offered by the four variables of the social bond proposed by Hirschi and adapted by Robertz to explain the phenomenon of school shootings. In formulating his theory, Hirschi focused not on norm deviation as such, but rather on reasons for norm adherence. He holds that the protective forces that prevent people from committing crimes—including physical violence—largely take the form of strong social relationships, which he subsumes under the collective concept of the "social bond" (Hirschi, 1969).

It is highly conspicuous that the adolescent school shooters no longer had any strong social bond in Hirschi's sense of the term at the time of their delict and were therefore not protected against resorting to violence. The social bond, Hirschi argues, comprises: *attachment* (emotional bonding to other people), *commitment* (a feeling of obligation), *involvement* (participation in conventional activities), and *belief* (faith in conservative values).

In Hirschi's view, *attachment* is the totality of the emotional bonds to groups or persons that give the subject a sense of being dependent on the opinion of the groups or persons to whom they are bonded. Stated in positive terms, the presence of caring and stable social relationships enables adolescents to articulate emotional distress in difficult situations and receive assistance in crisis situations. It is highly conspicuous that, at the time of their delict, adolescent school shooters generally had no friends or family members who understood them and to whom they were willing to open up. What is relevant here, however, is exclusively their subjective view and not some ostensibly objective view from the outside.

By *commitment* Hirschi means the assumption that a person will consider the consequences of their actions before putting a plan into action. From a positive perspective, this can be linked with the psychological concept of self-efficacy. When an adolescent believes that a proposed action endangers the status quo they have attained in life, the probability of carrying out the action decreases. If they can identify attainable social prospects on their own, they will not jeopardize their reputation or possessions by resorting to lethal violence. In their subjective perceptions, adolescent rampage shooters are usually convinced of their inability to

attain attractive social prospects even through sustained positive behavior in the present.

The concept of *involvement* is used by Hirschi to describe inclusion in conventional activities such as work, hobbies, sports, etc. Very pragmatically, he also includes in this concept activity per se that simply leaves adolescents with too little spare time to indulge in deviant behavior. This can be summed up in the proverb "Idleness is the beginning of all vice." But this factor too can be viewed in a positive light: involvement in group situations and traditional social relationships reinforce the feeling of being taken seriously, receiving recognition, and belonging. All these things would be jeopardized by resorting to violence. Once again it becomes clear that the perpetrators of school shootings were very poorly integrated into these kinds of structures. In contrast, gun clubs and airsoft clubs occasionally attract future school shooters (Hoffmann et al., 2009, p. 199). However, case studies imply that these associations are not used for maintaining social contacts and developing personal relationships, but rather to improve shooting skills and obtain permission to use and purchase more powerful weapons.

Finally, *belief* describes the acceptance by the adolescent of a conventional system of norms and values that is shared with the social environment. In Hirschi's view, the intensity of belief in the binding force and necessity of these norms varies from person to person. His pragmatic perspective assumes that a person who believes in the obligatory nature of the norms is more likely to adhere to them. Intriguingly, case studies show that adolescent perpetrators virtually demand an affirmation of these normative categories from their social environment. In the case of the norm against killing, some of them attracted attention by unexpectedly heated discussions, by dropping hints to their teachers, or by explicitly showing other students a preparatory act of some kind. One study of school shootings in Germany found that 86% of the adolescent shooters had displayed death lists or specifically announced the identity of their intended targets in advance (Hoffmann et al., 2009, p. 202). Similarly, case studies indicate that most of the future killers were not taken seriously and that some even received tips for the crime or were given a knife as a weapon, while in other cases bets were laid on their willingness to follow through or students remarked on the day of the crime that they had not done their homework because the shooting was going to take place. According to all the findings, these ostensibly supportive gestures are in fact jokes and misunderstandings. The adolescent perpetrators, however, are left with an impression of normative support for their intentions.

The more pronounced these four variables of the social bond are in the case of a given adolescent, the more effective the social bond will be as a deterrent for instrumental killings. It is the insufficient anchorage of the perpetrators in the social fabric that creates the possibility of delinquent and therefore violent behavior (Hirschi, 1969; Robertz, 2004). Thus we can already identify an initial concrete recommendation for how to deal with students presenting indications for violent behavior: for a preventative effect, it is necessary to understand the relevance of their individual social bond, to make an accurate assessment of the specific manifestations of their bond, and, if necessary and possible, to strengthen it.

5.2.2   The Road to Violence

It is a logical consequence of the adolescents' social situation that they regard the real or anticipated erosion of their few stabilizing relationships (and life perspectives) as extremely dramatic. Such incidents, which are widely regarded as situative crime triggers, have repeatedly been observed prior to shootings in Germany (Hoffmann et al., 2009; Robertz, Hoffmann, & Roshdi, 2009). They are also mentioned in international studies as final experiences of loss (Moore et al., 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2002). McGee and DeBernardo (2002) identify the period between 2 weeks and 24 h before the crime as a crucial time frame. Based on the published studies, Böckler and Seeger sum up these triggers as:

- Rebukes and punishment by parents or school authorities;
- Events in which the adolescent was subjected to public mockery/Treatment from others that was perceived as unfair;
- Loss of or rejection by a partner or idol;
- Repeated rejection or bullying by peers;
- Severe illness diagnosed in the perpetrator or a person close to the perpetrator. (Böckler & Seeger, 2010, pp. 65f., translated)

Despite the existence of triggers in close proximity to the crime, school shootings are not fundamentally situative events. Rather, they occur against the background of a lengthy developmental sequence. Thus there is always an extended planning stage in advance of a school shooting (Robertz et al., 2004; Vossekuil et al., 2002), and the plans reflect a strand of motives that can be reconstructed in retrospect (Hoffmann, 2003; Meloy et al., 2001). However, it must be assumed that these plans are not put into action unless a trigger event occurs, in the absence of which they remain on the level of intense wishful thinking.

Strands of motives typically have their roots in the bio-psychosocial vulnerability of the perpetrators and are related to problems of insufficient self-esteem, problem-solving capacity, and social competence (Fast, 2008; Robertz, 2004). The adolescent feels extremely vulnerable and sees few social prospects. Together with subjective lack of control and social rejection, this creates a volatile framework (Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010). Adolescents perceive this as a profoundly threatening situation and will attempt everything in their power to maintain a positive self-image. If this state reaches an unendurable intensity, and if reference figures and viable perspectives remain absent from their social reality, the adolescent takes refuge in violent phantasies which become more intense, more specific, and more detailed as the time of the shooting draws closer (Robertz, 2006).

Interestingly, this phase of increasingly intense violent phantasies also exhibits a phenomenon which O'Toole (1999) was the first to describe as *leakage*. It must be assumed that the two phenomena are closely related. O'Toole wrote that leakage occurs when a student deliberately or inadvertently reveals clues about his feelings, thoughts, views, and intentions—including the phantasies that underpin them—to commit an imminent violent act: "These clues could take the form of subtle threats, boasts, innuendos, predictions, or ultimatums. Clues could be spoken or conveyed in stories, diaries, essays, poems, letters, songs, drawings, doodles, tattoos, or videos"

(O'Toole, p. 16). From today's perspective, the list must be extended to include websites and comments left in social networks on the Internet.

Over the last decade, threat assessment research has shown that this form of providing clues about violent phantasies occurs not only in connection with school shootings, but also in the case of many other forms of targeted violence such as stalking or attacks on public figures (Calhoun & Weston, 2003; Hoffmann, Meloy, Guldimann, & Ermer, 2011; Meloy et al., 2004; Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldimann, & James, 2011; Meloy, Sheridan, & Hoffmann, 2008). For the sake of clarity, however, O'Toole's deliberately broad concept of leakage is increasingly being defined more narrowly and integrated into an array of general warning behavior that can be observed in advance of acts of targeted violence.

Most recently, therefore, *leakage* is considered to include only those forms of communication with others that are not only driven by the intent to inflict harm upon a target, but that could also have been noticed by others before the crime (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). In addition to leakage proper, Meloy and O'Toole have identified seven other warning signs in a perpetrator's behavior to complete the array of assessment criteria.

Pathway comprises all behaviors that form part of the preparation of the actual crime (Calhoun & Weston, 2003). *Fixation* is an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a certain person or target (Mullen et al., 2009). *Identification* refers to a predilection for militaria and martial role models, which Dietz described as "pseudo-commando" (1986) and Hempel, Meloy, & Richards as "warrior mentality" (1999). Meloy & O'Toole (2011) use the term *novel aggression* to denote violent acts that are not related to the actual crime and are used by the future perpetrator to test their own ability to commit violence, while an increase in the frequency and variety of acts relating to the victim is termed an *energy burst*. Finally, the warning behaviors outlined by Meloy and O'Toole include *directly communicated threats*, which are directed at the victim or the police in advance of the crime, and an increase in distress and despair that may be expressed in words or actions and is termed *last resort*.

It must be pointed out, however, that not all these eight behaviors are present in equal measure before the various types of targeted violence, nor are all eight factors equally pronounced in the case of each specific form of violence. Contemporary research is focusing on the empirical study of these specifics (Meloy et al., 2008; Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). Concerning school shootings, studies currently observe in the first place the specific perspective of leakage, along with fixation, identification, directly communicated threats, and pathway behaviors (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011; Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein, 2000). As we will see in what follows, all these manifestations can be linked to the presence of the intense and specific violent phantasies mentioned above.

While the link between protracted experiences of contempt and powerlessness on the one hand and phantasies of revenge or violence on the other hand has now been empirically proved (Agnew, 2004; Sutterlüty, 2003), it remains to be shown why the presence of these phantasies can lead to the warning behaviors discussed above and how the phantasies acquire their specific characteristics. To do so, we must first take a detailed look at the nature of phantasies in general and of violent phantasies in particular.

5.3 Phantasies

The earliest historical evidence of a deeper interest in the nature of human phantasy can be found in the works of Plato, whose orientation toward the *logos* and gradual abandonment of traditional mythology led him to mistrust images of all kinds. His aim was the pure understanding of "truth." In his view, phantasies obscure immutable Being and simulate that which does not exist.

However, contemporary authors like Carlisle rightly point out that it is phantasy which allows us "to visualize goals and mentally act out the necessary steps for reaching them before taking action in real life" and that phantasy also enables us to "generate new, creative ideas" (Carlisle, 2011, pp. 91–92). Even Plato himself began in the course of his life to appreciate the creative power of phantasy and finally came to believe that the world had been created according to an image generated in the imaginings of a higher being. Aristotle put these concepts into more concrete words. In his view, phantasies were a way to generate images independently of perception in order to visualize the possible and impossible. Thus he believed that phantasies were endowed with a powerful creative potency.

Both Plato's and Aristotle's views were later adopted by the Stoic philosophers to develop a distinction between *phantasiai kataleptikai* (ideal images based in reality) and *phantasiai analeptikai* (images that correspond vaguely or not at all to reality). Here we already see two crucial capacities of phantasy: the power to reproduce and the power to create from scratch (Ränsch-Trill, 1996).

Phantasy can also be exploited and modified for our own entertainment. We use this tension-relieving function of phantasy almost every day to secretly escape from unpleasant situations. When we are bored in the office, when we are stuck in traffic on a hot summer's day, or when our neighbor won't stop talking despite our meaningful yawns, we automatically take refuge in escapist phantasies. They might be about our upcoming vacation, our sexual desires, or an imaginary unfriendly retort to our neighbor's incessant chatter. We can tune out reality at will and move into the realm of our phantasies.

Phantasies are such powerful tools that they enable people to remain functional even in the most extreme situations. For example, phantasies provide a way to live out cathartic emotions and impulses that are forbidden in real life. Even subjectively major violations of self-esteem, to which social conventions generally preclude responses, can be compensated in the privacy of one's phantasy, allowing the source of a humiliation to be punished without consequences and situations involving injury to be relived in altered form.

This power is also evident in phantasies with a positive thrust, and it can prove virtually essential for survival. In situations that are difficult to endure, the experience of reality can be softened by means of mitigating phantasies. Impressive examples of this can be found in the recollections of hostages or prisoners who were able to cope for months with situations in which their lives were in constant danger. For example, Stephane Hessel said that his survival tactics in the Dora concentration camp took the form of communicating phantasies about his own past and future, talking about the cities where they had lived and the foods they would eat when they got home. These

were strange imaginary concoctions; his was layered pasta and jam (Hessel, 2011, p. 115). Viktor Frankl related his phantasies as a prisoner at Auschwitz: "But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise" (Frankl, 1984, p. 57).

5.3.1   Distinctive Characteristics of Phantasies

We must, however, distinguish more clearly between mere rational considerations and phantasies. The thoughts, ideas, memories, and images that constantly permeate our consciousness do not become phantasies until they are linked to a powerful emotional element: that is, until our wishes and longings are connected with the interior processes and images (Ernst, 2011). Herein lies the difference between phantasy and imagination. Imaginative thinking is an overarching concept that includes both abstract thought and problem solving as well as phantasies. While imagination, in most cases, is a dispassionate process that serves primarily to weigh up several different options, phantasy is a special case of imagination that is highly emotionally charged and inextricably linked to wishes, hopes, fears, and other strong emotions (Person, 1995). Phantasy is not only concerned with imagining abstract solutions, but serves an emotional purpose.

In our context, it is crucial to distinguish between different types of phantasies. According to Ethel Person, phantasies can be roughly divided into *fleeting* and *repeating* phantasies. Daydreams tend to be fleeting. They are ephemeral, rarely repeated, and generally triggered suddenly by an external stimulus. Repeating phantasies recur repeatedly in day-to-day life and generally have a long prehistory. Often they develop in youth and have various effects that continue on into adulthood. These repeating phantasies are often rooted in the unconscious. While fleeting phantasies serve to compensate a temporary loss of equilibrium, repeating phantasies arise from recurring needs (Person, 1995).

Additionally, Person describes a third category, namely that of *generative* phantasies. These occupy an intermediate position and may recur over a prolonged period, but do not have lifelong significance. Generative phantasies are more variable than repeating phantasies and, in most cases, serve to protect our self-assurance and self-image. Often they express our hopes and wishes for the future of our families or our careers. They enable us to pursue goals in the long-term and adapt them to our current life situations (Person, 1995, p. 42).

5.3.2   Secondary Realities

A form of phantasy that corresponds to Person's repeating and generative phantasies is described by Lempp as *secondary realities* (2009). There are some advantages to this terminology, as it unlocks an entire concept of developmental psychology

that offers a theoretical underpinning for distinguishing between actions in real life and experiences in phantasy.

The origin of secondary realities, in Lempp's view, lies in the early childhood perception of the world. A newborn baby cannot distinguish between itself and its environment at first, but gradually uses its egocentric experiences to construct an idea of the world around it. This process lays the foundations for future secondary realities. The child initially perceives the ideas thus constructed as "true" even though the adults in its environment do not share its conviction that objects can have feelings and intentions. However, at the age of 3 or 4 years, the child notices that its reference persons experience reality differently. To communicate adequately with them, the child learns the parallel use of this "primary reality" and for a time places it alongside its own phantasy world on an almost equal footing. Subsequently, it learns to switch back and forth between secondary and primary reality with ever greater skill. Lempp calls this skill "transitioning ability" (2003, p. 39).

Over the course of the child's development, its focus shifts more and more from the secondary reality to the primary one. However, the personal secondary reality of every individual is maintained throughout life and in fact undergoes continual development (Lempp, 2003). We use these portions of our phantasies every day to compensate for shortcomings in the primary reality. Early studies found not only that 96% of all people have daydreams and phantasies (Singer, 1966), but also that approximately 40–50% of their waking hours on days dominated by mundane routine are spent in their phantasy experiences. Accordingly, Ethel Person noted that many psychoanalysts regard an inability to phantasize as being just as pathological as an excessive immersion in a phantasy world (Person, 1995, p. 31). A recent study by Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) at Harvard University used an iPhone application to measure the thoughts, feelings, and actions of 2,250 people in everyday life. They found that 46.9% of subjects' waking hours were spent on daydreams. Not all these daydreams correspond to phantasies or secondary realities, but these figures give an initial impression of the importance in everyday life of experiences outside our perception of reality.

5.3.3   Unconscious Phantasies

Interpretations of phantasy become even more complex when they take into account the psychoanalytic construct of unconscious phantasies. Freud believed that daydreams were *conscious phantasies* and viewed them as responses to a frustrating reality: the creation of wish-fulfilling phantasies makes it possible to escape from an unpleasant reality. At times, the inner gratification offered by phantasies even allows a certain degree of independence from the outside world. In this process, a mentally healthy daydreamer does not confuse his phantasy experiences with his external reality. Conscious phantasies must therefore be clearly distinguished from uncontrolled hallucinations which are subjectively experienced as reality. In Freud's words: "Satisfaction is obtained from illusions, which are recognized as such without

the discrepancy between them and reality being allowed to interfere with enjoyment" (1930 [1962], p. 27).

Freud also recognized that the content of phantasy activity is influenced by real-life impressions. In his view, a phantasy initially builds on a wish that has immediate importance. Subsequently, it recalls a memory of a past experience in which the wish was fulfilled, and finally it creates a future situation that is suitable for the fulfillment of the wish. Freud recognized the danger that phantasies might escalate and become overpowering and pointed out that phantasizing can lead to the genesis of neuroses and psychoses, so that "a broad by-path here branches off into pathology" (1908 [1925], p. 49).

But not all phantasies are conscious. Comparing the human mind to an iceberg, Freud wrote that only the smallest part is visible and thus, by analogy, accessible to conscious thought. Beneath the surface lies a very much larger area that is not subject to direct control. While this area significantly influences a person's desires, thoughts, and actions, its influence is visible only in its effects. This unconscious part of the human psyche is the home of urges, impulses, wishes, and also unconscious phantasies (Knapp, 1982, pp. 278ff.).

For most of his long working life, Freud described *unconscious phantasies* as phantasies that either arise directly from this unconscious or that develop from the suppression of conscious daydreams. This *repression* of conscious phantasies into the unconscious is believed to be one of the psychological defense mechanisms that maintain a person's inner equilibrium. When certain phantasies significantly infringe a person's internalized norms and values, they may be repressed and thereby be placed beyond the reach of the conscious mind. However, they can still influence the person's will, thoughts, and actions without being detected.

Such unconscious phantasies can be accessed only under certain conditions. Thus Freud wrote: "The process of repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place once, the results of which are permanent, as when some living thing has been killed and from that time onward is dead; repression demands a persistent expenditure of force" (1915 [2001], p. 151). If this necessary effort is allowed to lapse for a moment, unconscious phantasies may resurface—as conscious phantasies, as a pathological symptom, as nocturnal dreams, or in the form of artistic expression. Thus it is not surprising that adolescents with intense violent phantasies often express these creatively (see, e.g., Weilenmann, Waldschmidt, & Janssen, 2011). Unconscious phantasies, however, do not usually resurface in the same form in which they were originally repressed. According to Freud, phantasies may express themselves in many different ways in the unconscious as they are beyond the influence and control of the conscious mind. They develop progeny, form links, and proliferate "in the dark" (1915 [1986], p. 129).

Freud was not, of course, the last person to study unconscious phantasies. The pioneer of psychoanalysis inspired many other authors to engage with the concept of phantasy. Other luminaries in the field of psychoanalysis, such as Hanns Sachs, Donald Winnicott, Jacques Lacan, Hanna Segal, Jerome Singer, and Ethel Person made significant contributions to the development and refinement of the concepts.

In examining such unconscious phantasies, it must be borne in mind that while they influence the perception and interpretation of reality, reality itself also has an impact on unconscious phantasies. Reality is experienced and assimilated and subsequently influences the unconscious phantasies (Segal, 1974, pp. 30ff.). Ronald Britton demonstrated the mingling of conscious phantasies, real experiences, and unconscious phantasies using the writings of Mary Shelley. Her *Frankenstein* was based on a nocturnal dream that frightened her so much that she engaged with its content in a daydream and later incorporated these phantasies in her literary work. The daydream helped her to discard her fear by means of a projective identification. She wanted to evoke her own fear in other people and calmed herself through the creative expedient of turning her nocturnal fear into a work of literature. Shelley herself may not have been aware of the extent to which real experiences and memories influenced this process. Britton points out that Shelley refrains from mentioning that her own mother died in giving birth to her, that Shelley's own child had died, that her niece was soon to be born—and that she had had a conversation on the previous day about Erasmus Darwin's idea that corpses could be reanimated using galvanic currents (Britton, 2001, pp. 149f.). As this example shows, the interrelationships between conscious and unconscious phantasies are highly complex and difficult to identify.

5.3.4   Sources of Phantasies

While unconscious phantasies initially consist of repressed wishes, fears, etc., the sources of our unconscious phantasies remain unexplored. Highly creative people are able to create extraordinary phantasy worlds, but it is intriguing that even people who have very little ability to put their conscious phantasies to creative use can still have a very active experience of phantasy. These people are more consumers than producers of phantasy; they draw on fictions that are available in popular culture, such as books, films, plays, music, and games. Freud pointed out that reading a particular book can be highly satisfying because phantasies which we would normally reject in the form of spontaneous daydreams can be enjoyed without self-reproach or shame when they are narrated as fiction by a writer (1908 [2000], p. 179). Consuming such fiction therefore represents another means of concealing our phantasies from ourselves.

The consequences are highly intriguing. Knowledge of a person's favorite books, films, plays, etc. can tell us about the underlying issues and wishes that especially preoccupy the person's phantasy. In the context of criminal prosecutions and risk analyses, an attempt to unlock the phantasies of violent criminals can be helpful for averting future violent acts. Projective testing procedures, like knowledge of favorite works of fiction, can give indications about the underlying content of phantasies (Schlesinger, 2004, pp. 39ff.). However, it must be borne in mind that no person ever adopts the entire phantasy offered by books, films, plays, etc. (Person, 1995, pp. 122ff.). Rather, only those aspects are taken up that represent at least a

partial reflection of personal wishes and needs. In practical terms, therefore, one should always identify favorite scenes from a work of fiction and explore the specific characteristics that evoke admiration of a role model rather than simply asking about favorite games, films, or books. A particular fascination with the latest film version of *Alice in Wonderland*, for example, may arise from the sexual attractiveness of the female lead, an interest in special effects, or an identification with the figure of a young woman who begins as a heteronomous figure but discovers her own strength in the course of the film. Only through precise questions and the openness of the interviewee can we get to the heart of the issues and wishes that a given fiction touches upon. With reference to our present topic of violent phantasies, it is possible for someone to feel attracted to violent games or films without necessarily entertaining phantasies of putting violent acts into practice.

Conversely, we must self-critically note that violent phantasies can be inspired by the violent content that is made available for mass consumption in the context of popular culture. This topic has been frequently and often heatedly debated, especially in connection with the visual media, where the impact of violent material is believed to be particularly effective. While some researchers use environmental pollution analogies in connection with the visual media, which are suspected of polluting the "trails and maps in the brains of young people" (Spitzer, 2005, p. 246, translated), others regard them as necessary tools for defense against anxiety, since the enjoyment of violent video games and films creates a shared, disburdening identity for youth culture while simultaneously allowing adolescents to "test the social and psychological skills they will need as adults" (Jones, 2011, p. 86).

Irrespective of the impact of the visual media, however, our environment offers so many possibilities for the graphic portrayal of violence that gaining access to sources of inspiration for violent phantasies is very easy indeed. One need hardly go as far as the highly controversial first person shooter video games or films containing explicit violence. Even the daily news, the family bookshelf, and the example provided by adults are sufficient to provide explicit models that can find their way into violent phantasies.

Despite the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of determining the content of phantasies, we have made some progress in defining these phantasies now. Ethel Person sums this up aptly: "Fantasies are mediators between the inner and outer worlds; they are fueled by both the fantasizer's biological and emotional needs, as shaped by his or her personal history, and by circumstances. But the story lines of fantasy cast a wider net; they borrow their narrative content from the cultural surround" (1995, p. 216)

5.4 Violent Phantasies

Thus the refuge offered by our phantasy contains the "important resources of the self: (…) our deepest feelings, strongest wishes, and most secret thoughts" (Ernst, 2011, p. 34, translated). The elaboration of the various elements of our phantasies

may be pro-social, but may also be destructive and violent to a high degree. A violent phantasy is a person's concrete and visual interior engagement with violence (Urbaniok, 2011, p. 257), and is typically "imagined in pictures and sequences of actions" (Günter, 2011, p. 42, translated). An engagement of this kind is individual and personal and can differ from person to person in type, elaboration, intensity, and specificity of themes and images (Robertz, 2011, p. 21).

Because of their highly personal and individual nature, gathering exact data about violent phantasies is an extremely problematic task. Accordingly, there are very few research reports on the prevalence of violent phantasies, and their extent has generally been studied only in connection with psychopathological phenomena, if at all. For example, violent phantasies are attested in patients with a history of substance abuse, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia (Asnis, Kaplan, van Praag, & Sanderson, 1994) as well as in patients with panic disorders (Korn, Plutchik, & van Praag, 1997), post-natal psychosis (Wisner, Peindl, & Hanura, 1994), and depressive disorders (Rosenbaum & Bennett, 1986). Broad scope for the delict-specific discussion of the influence of violent phantasies is offered in particular by the field of sexual and serial murders (Prentky et al., 1989; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988). Here too, however, prevailing opinion presumes abnormally intense forms of violent phantasies.

The presence of violent phantasies in the general population has been even less frequently studied. None of the published studies gives a precise definition of the concepts of "violence" and "phantasy" and the subjects probably had widely divergent ideas about the meaning of the two words. This impacts on the quality of the findings. Nevertheless, the studies in question yield some interesting results.

Nagtegaal asked 72 female psychology students in the Netherlands aged between 17 and 26 years about daydreams or thoughts of harming or injuring other people. Forty-three of her subjects (almost 60%) reported having experienced "aggressive phantasies" with a frequency ranging between "several times per year" to "once a day" (Nagtegaal, 2008, p. 51). While Nagtegaal evidently used a very broad definition of violence and included even verbal aggression in her survey, three American studies focused on violent phantasies of a more serious nature, namely homicidal phantasies. All three, like Nagtegaal, used psychology students as their subjects, but their average age was higher and men were questioned in addition to women. Kenrick and Sheets conducted two studies at Arizona State University in 1993 in which respectively 68% and 69% of the subjects reported homicidal phantasies. Crabb's study, conducted at Pennsylvania State University in 2000, found homicidal phantasies in slightly over 45% of the subjects, while Buss (2006) states that 91% of the men and 84% of the women in his studies reported vivid phantasies of killing another person. The results of these studies also yielded other conspicuously similar results: men are more likely to admit to having had homicidal phantasies and also report a higher frequency and longer duration. They also differ from women in the triggers and objectives of their homicidal phantasies. Specifically, Kenrick and Sheets report that the homicidal phantasies of their male subjects occurred with particular frequency as responses to personal threats or frustrating events. Additionally, 32% of the men who reported violent phantasies cited "want-

ing to know what it's like to kill someone." In contrast, this motivation was reported by only 8% of the women who spoke about their violent phantasies. Women primarily experienced their violent phantasies in the aftermath of family conflicts, followed by personal threats (which were frequently mentioned by men as well), and lovers' quarrels. Corresponding with these results, 59% of the men with violent phantasies said that the targets of their homicidal phantasies were strangers, while only 33% of the women reported that their phantasies were about strangers.

The sometimes considerable differences in the percentage figures may be related to the phrasing of the questions and the design of the studies. For example, none of the surveys distinguishes very clearly whether the phantasies reported by the subjects are rather fleeting or generative or repeating phantasies. Although these studies create the impression that homicidal phantasies are very common, the design of the studies and the nature of the questions (a large proportion of which were published) suggests that the answers primarily concerned occasional phantasies of a fleeting and non-specific nature.

5.5   The Significance of Violent Phantasies for School Shootings

A very different picture emerges when one looks at the field of school shootings. Here the intensity, specificity, and duration of the adolescent perpetrators' violent phantasies is significantly greater than that of the general population (Robertz, 2004; Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010). Based on the frequently striking statements, writings, and drawings of the perpetrators, their phantasies can be assumed to be generative or repeating phantasies rooted in the emotions (Person, 1995) or secondary realities (Lempp, 2009) which predominantly have specific content and become more powerful as the time of the crime approaches. The following remarks about violent phantasies refer primarily to this sub-form of phantasy with its particularly strong psychodynamic effect.

5.5.1   Realization of Violent Phantasies in School Shootings

With respect to violent phantasies in adolescents, Günter rightly cautions that "Development in adolescence determines the extent to which destructive and violent phantasies (…) can be regulated so that recourse to primitive psychological mechanisms remains unnecessary even under conditions of anxiety and when the stability of the subject's self-esteem is under threat" (Günter, 2011, p. 55, translated). Thus the stress-relieving function of violent phantasies may develop in problematic ways in adolescents and, under conditions of excessive anxiety and low self-esteem, may

result in critical manifestations which Günter terms "developmental fixations." This causative excess of anxiety and grave deficits of self-esteem, recognition, life perspectives, and relationships that offer security is widely found in the biographies of adolescent school shooters. An identification with violence and destructiveness that began as something playful may, after a decrease in the flexibility of phantasy creation, give rise to steadily escalating destructive identifications.

Once again, an intensive engagement with violent visual media is regarded in these situations as a crucial precursor for "explosive catastrophes" (Günter, 2011, p. 62). Lempp stresses the potential of the visual media for compensating adolescents' fears for the future, but also argues that today's visual media exhibit a much larger potential for influencing phantasies than stories or books had in the past. He holds that amid the vast range, explicit portrayal, and photorealistic graphics of modern visual media, it is "not always easy to discriminate between the reproduction of reality and fiction" (2009, p. 109, translated). In the case of psychologically stressful representations, readers and listeners of the past had the option of imagining the events in subjectively bearable ways. In contrast, the very specific images supplied by films and video games force their consumers to "assimilate them in the way they are offered" (Lempp, 2009, p. 110, translated). Accordingly, Günter holds that the danger of losing oneself in such illustrated phantasy worlds is significantly higher than in the case of material transmitted verbally (Günter, 2011, p. 62).

According to Lempp, this development can lead to violent acts because a small number of adolescents respond to these images with a reduced transitioning ability between the primary and the secondary reality. The result may be short-term losses of relationship to reality in which actors believe themselves to be in the secondary reality although they are in fact in the primary reality (Lempp, 1992, pp. 35–39). In this way, the "reality-distorting influence" and several symptoms reported repeatedly in German and American case studies (which seemed to be psychotic at first, but were actually non-pathological symptoms according to psychiatric standards; see, for example, Myers, Scott, & Burgess, 1995, p. 1485; Lewis et al., 1988, p. 586) acquire a context that is founded in theory. These phenomena too could be explained as short-term episodes of loss of transitioning ability into the (primary) reality, with the grave consequence of violent offenses that take place outside of the realm of phantasy.

And indeed some German cases provide a great deal of evidence to support Lempp's thesis of a lack of transitional ability at the time of the crime. For example, Robert Steinhäuser, who committed suicide after killing 16 people in Erfurt on April 26, 2002, used press reports, video games, and images of past school shootings to fuel, develop, and refine his phantasies. Specific aspects of this material reappeared in his choice of weapons, attire, and modus operandi. An even more important factor seems to be a fundamental shift in the dynamics of the act which occurred after he shot a policeman responding to the crime. At that moment, the self-assured, confident assassin suddenly became a dejected adolescent who moved through the school building with shuffling steps and downcast gaze. He stopped firing at teachers, took off his balaclava, and allowed himself to be locked into a room where he subsequently committed suicide. The killing of the police officer

clearly did not fit into the phantasies which he had played out again and again in his mind prior to the shooting. It seems that the combination of reality and phantasy postulated by Lempp dissolved at this moment in favor of an unimpeded perception of reality where Steinhäuser became aware of the consequences of his actions (Robertz, 2004, pp. 229ff.).

Because of the lack of empirical verification of this highly intriguing thesis, however, the extent to which the adolescents experienced a temporary loss of transitioning ability may legitimately be questioned. It is quite possible that violent elements of the popular culture disseminated by the mass media had merely become integrated into their phantasies and were reflected at the time of the crime by the specific attire, weaponry, statements, or courses of action they adopted, while the awareness of the consequences of their actions led to an externally perceptible change in their modus operandi. Günter, therefore, considers it much more probable that violent phantasies in many cases help to create a situation in which "the phantasies that are imagined over and over again ultimately urge and almost compel us to put them into action" (Günter, 2011, p. 42, translated).

Thus Lempp's alternative hypothesis appears more apposite. Instead of a short-term loss of transitioning ability, the following hypothesis is conceivable too: based on the developments outlined above, an adolescent under severe stress projects himself into the role model, supplied by the mass media, of a man who, in the phantasy, does not experience fear but evokes it in others—and, in so doing, compensates for the experiences of injury he has suffered in the past. In his secondary reality, the adolescent may act out situations in which he solves problems in the role of his selected "über-man" (Lempp, 2009). As these phantasies become stronger and more specific, individual elements are converted into reality and are externally perceived as leakage. However, homicidal intentions do not necessarily exist in reality at this stage. Rather, actions that are subsequently interpreted by outsiders as preparatory to the crime may at first merely have the character of a legal and harmless phantasy game with no intent to commit a crime. For example, buying a balaclava may serve to intensify the subject's violent phantasies, but need not mean that the intention of putting the phantasies into action existed at the time of the purchase.

If the primary reality subjectively becomes less and less bearable for the adolescent and if his protective factors (including the social bond) subjectively continue to decrease, then these circumstances help to create a fixation in the secondary reality. If the ability to transition remains preserved (i.e., if the possibility of moving between the perception of reality and phantasy continues to exist), the future shooter deliberately chooses to put his wish-fulfilling phantasy into action in reality (Lempp, 2009).

However, it must be assumed that there are numerous other influences in addition to the visual media that facilitate a fixation on the secondary reality. While the great relevance of specific stimuli from novels, films, and conversations is well known from case studies, press reports and portraits of past school shooters too seem to have played a crucial role in the identification process. According to Böckler and Seeger (2010) and Kiilakoski and Oksanen (2011), a veritable cultural script of school shootings has developed during the past decade.

5.5.2 Characteristics of Violent Phantasies
in School Shootings

The basic idea of the cultural script is taken from Newman et al. (2004), who point to the significance of a stereotypical image of men in western industrial nations. Men are conceived as fearlessly and steadfastly facing the vicissitudes of life and, if necessary, safeguarding their interests by violent means. According to Newman et al., films in which adolescent, macho heroes kill to become famous are almost carbon copies for the phantasies of adolescent school shooters. Violence is portrayed as an impressively masculine solution for otherwise insoluble problems—the ultimate sensational act of a real man.

This interpretation does not seem unrealistic in view of the statements of the adolescent shooters. The perpetrator of the West Paducah shooting made post-delict references to a Hollywood film which he had seen several times: "I saw it in a movie. I saw it in *The Basketball Diaries*" (Webber, 2003, p. 27), and the Columbine shooters boasted in their pre-delict videos that the entire world would one day be wild about these tapes and for their biographies: "Directors will be fighting over this story" (Twenge & Campbell, 2003, p. 261).

Adolescents with problems who have no prospects and weak social bonds and who indulge in increasingly intense violent phantasies might perceive school shootings as a potential solution that can provide the ultimate proof of their masculinity. And our culture offers copious illustrations of this solution. Not only are fictional models for violent action provided by films, music, and books, etc., but the simplified portrayals in the news media also create concrete templates for identification which appear to be used as formal role models in the choice of attire, weaponry, statements, and courses of action. The print media and Internet searches provide easy sources for susceptible adolescents to find out how to carry out a school shooting in order to get into the international headlines, how to inspire fan pages on the Internet, etc. There is even information on press strategies and discussions about which songs to listen to during a rampage.

The shooting at Columbine High in the United States plays a particularly prominent role as a model. Thanks to the publication of surveillance camera tapes, the personal statements by the perpetrators, and innumerable television documentaries, some of which featured re-enactments of the shootings, media coverage of these events was so intense that its mythology developed into a dominant form of the script (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011) that has come to exercise a direct and ongoing influence on the phantasies of subsequent adolescent school shooters. For example, the adolescent perpetrator who committed a school shooting in Emsdetten in Germany cited as his heroes not the perpetrator who killed 16 people at the grammar school in Erfurt, Germany, but the Columbine shooters. He wrote in his diary: "Eric Harris is God! There's no doubt about it" (Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010, p. 174, translated). After Harris' death, he wrote birthday greetings on the fan page "Erics Geburtstags-Ecke" (Eric's Birthday Corner) and produced an Internet video glorifying the Columbine shooting.

At the time, the news media disseminated the myth that the Columbine shooters were victims of bullying who wanted to take spectacular vengeance on their bullies. This myth proved to be disastrous because it made it easier for subsequent shooters to justify their acts to their own conscience; the ultimate step gains legitimacy by appearing to redress the balance of justice. Here too, numerous examples can be cited. As Kiilakoski and Oksanen (2011) point out, the shooter of Jokela in Finland stated that the purpose of his crime was to inspire every intelligent person in the world and start a revolution against the prevailing system. Similarly, the shooter of Blacksburg in the United States said that he was dying in order to inspire whole generations of the weak and the helpless (Kellner, 2008, p. 38).

Of course these scripts and phantasies cannot be passed from one perpetrator to another in identical form because our phantasies are far too personal and individual to make this possible. However, the ideas and models of prior perpetrators are subsumed into individual violent phantasies in order to identify consciously and demonstratively with what appear to be shared ideas. The shooter of Emsdetten uploaded his farewell video in English in order to be part of a larger movement extending beyond the borders of Germany. His ideal was to be a martyr who would be mentioned in the same breath as Eric Harris and inspire future shooters. Accordingly, he wrote in his diary shortly before his rampage: "I hope that other outcasts will be treated better after GSS! And I hope that some of'em will be like Reb, Vod, and Me! A FUCKING HERO!" (Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010).[1]

5.5.3 The Significance of Violent Phantasies for Warning Behavior

The types of warning behavior outlined above can now be described in more detail. The sources of such warning behavior are both conscious and unconscious violent phantasies of a generative or repeating nature. In the absence of recognition and socio-emotional involvement in reality, the immense subjective significance and intense character of the violent phantasies gives rise to a vicious circle: in the face of continual failures or emotional wounding, the future shooter increasingly turns to wish-fulfillment phantasies in which he compensates for the frustrations of everyday life by indulging in phantasies of revenge and omnipotence. At the same time, he neglects to nurture his already weak social bond in reality. This in turn causes his phantasies to appear subjectively all the more significant and leads him to search actively for new impulses to strengthen the phantasies.

Our culture offers a great variety of such impulses, especially in the form of visual media which offer violent role models for identification and supply reports about previous school shootings. By supporting the refinement and intensification of his phantasies, these media also fulfill the future shooter's need for control, since

---

[1] GSS is Bosse's school, Geschwister Scholl Schule; Reb (Rebel) and Vod (VoDKa) are abbreviated forms of the nicknames used by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

in his imagination he has the kind of absolute control over the phantasy scenario which he cannot attain in real life. However, the violent phantasy also comes to include specific impulses from everyday life that appeal to the individual phantasy structure of the future shooter. The structure of a permanent violent phantasy may include everyday experiences from school life as well as the availability and sensory stimulation of a weapon (Robertz, 2004).

In this context, the behavior patterns of *leakage* (as specified by Meloy et al., 2011) are the often unconscious intensive phantasies that become visible through creative expression. In art class, in essays, in the choice of content for personal websites, etc., the future perpetrator expresses themes and characteristics with which he is intensely preoccupied on a daily basis. Similarly, the warning behaviors of *fixation* and *identification* may be ascribed directly to unconscious or conscious violent phantasies, since these behaviors describe an externally perceptible and increasingly intense appropriation of the phantasy models.

Largely conscious phantasies become discernible in the future shooters' interactions with other people. The purpose of the *directly communicated threats* described by Meloy et al. (2011), that is, the communication of personal imaginings and the showing of weapons and death lists, is to explore the reactions of the people thus addressed. If there is no demonstratively negative response, or if the addressees confirm the future perpetrators in their phantasies, this may be taken as corroboration of the values and norms underlying the violent phantasy and of the possibility of putting it into action. All this helps to justify the phantasies and subsequently to increase their intensity.

But this does not yet mean that even very intensive and specific violent phantasies will necessarily be put into action. Lempp (2009) notes that an increase in the intensity of the phantasy and in the detail of its contents goes hand in hand with a fixation on the secondary reality. The person entertaining the phantasies increasingly assimilates the cultural script of a school shooter, so that he increasingly comes to perceive the acting-out of the phantasies in reality as a logical step. However, the actual intent to commit a real-life shooting only arises after a trigger, as more specifically defined by Böckler and Seeger (2010).

Whereas the pre-delict acts observed until this point are also partly attempts to supply additional content for intensifying phantasies that have already been imagined hundreds of times, the trigger event now causes the formation of a concrete intent to commit the crime. At this stage, it appears to be an easy task for the perpetrators to make the necessary preparations for the act and to circumvent potential obstacles on their way to committing the shooting. At this point, the behavior described by Meloy et al. (2011) as *pathway* occurs.

If Lempp's thesis of the loss of transitioning ability is correct, then at the start of the shooting the perpetrator has the sense of being within the phantasy even though the act is being carried out in reality. Carlisle too believes that the phantasy of preparing for the act and the real-life preparations of the act can overlap in such a way that the adolescent is intermittently uncertain whether his or her memories of an act are part of the phantasy or took place in reality (personal communication by Carlisle, August 2003). Thus the familiar phantasy script would direct the perpetrator's

experience of his real-life actions and result in a dreamlike perception that collapses only when crucial aspects of the content of the phantasies and of the real-life actions are no longer compatible.

5.6 Consequences

There are many possibilities for intervention and for the prevention of school shootings (Robertz, 2012) which are discussed in due detail elsewhere in this volume. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out three additional consequences that follow from the specific phantasy experience of the adolescent perpetrators.

To begin with, care should be taken not to over-interpret harmless manifestations of violent phantasies in real life. We have noted the widespread occurrence of occasional, fleeting violent phantasies in society. Furthermore, even the presence of stable, destructive phantasies does not mean that these phantasies will necessarily be put into real-life action. Both the factors of the social bond and the availability of pro-social recognition and self-efficacy protect against the implementation of violent phantasies. It is these factors, therefore, that should be strengthened in the course of wide-scale prevention and given sufficient consideration during risk evaluation.

If one attempts to influence multimedia portrayals of role models and scripts as the inspiration for violent phantasies, it is vital to bear in mind that many of the media products that have come under fire are components of a new youth culture (see, among others, Jones, 2011; Günter, 2011). Often these products appear suspect and reprehensible to experts because the experts themselves are too far removed from the lifeworld of adolescents. Consequently, many scientific publications contain misrepresentations and moralistic demands that are based solely on personal assumptions about the objectionableness of media products, while the actual content of these products and, most importantly, their meaning for the adolescents who consume them are not revealed. In this context, it is vital that any kind of censorship is preceded by a closer study of the lifeworlds of adolescents. If, however, attempts are made to influence the scripts, then it is the media portrayal of real-life rampages that should be emphatically challenged. In particular, the ways in which these events are portrayed in the media should be studied. Research into copycat acts of violence indicates the consequences of simplification of explanation and interpretation as well as the relevance of specific descriptions of the concrete methods and circumstances of individual crimes. Coverage of these incidents should at all costs avoid romanticizing the perpetrators or awarding them covert recognition. Simplistic and emotionalized portrayals run the risk of facilitating the association of phantasies with prior rampage crimes and thereby increasing the probability of copycat shootings (Robertz, 2004; Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010).

Ultimately, it is of paramount importance for all of us to be more open, warm, and attentive in our dealings with adolescents. Expressing interest, offering conversation, and ideally forming relationships not only strengthens the protective social

bond, but also helps adolescents to find outlets and new solutions for seemingly insoluble problems. Most importantly, however, the subjective necessity of high-intensity compensatory phantasies is considerably reduced by strong pro-social relationships.

References

Agnew, R. (2004). A general strain theory approach to violence. In M. A. Zahn, H. H. Brownstein, & S. L. Jackson (Eds.), *Violence: From theory to research*. Ohio: Anderson.

Asnis, G. M., Kaplan, M. L., van Praag, H. M., & Sanderson, W. C. (1994). Homicidal behaviors among psychiatric outpatients. *Hospital & Community Psychiatry, 45*, 127–132.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim: Juventa.

Borum, R., & Verhaagen, D. (2006). *Assessing and managing violence in juveniles*. New York: Guilford.

Britton, R. (2001). *Glaube, Phantasie und psychische Realität: Psychoanalytische Erkundungen*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Buss, D. M. (2006). *The murderer next door: Why the mind is designed to kill*. New York: Penguin.

Calhoun, T., & Weston, S. (2003). *Contemporary threat management*. San Diego: Specialized Training Services.

Carlisle, A. (2011). Zur Entwicklung von Gewaltphantasien. In F. J. Robertz (Ed.), *Gewaltphantasien: Zwischen Welten und Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 89–115). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Crabb, P. B. (2000). The material culture of homicidal fantasies. *Aggressive Behavior, 26*, 225–234.

Dietz, P. E. (1986). Mass, serial and sensational homicides. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 62*(5), 477–491.

Ernst, H. (2011). *Innenwelten*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. Woodstock: Overlook.

Frankl, V. (1984). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Washington Square.

Freud, S. (1908 [1925]). *On creativity and the unconscious: Papers on the psychology of art, literature, love, religion*. New York: Harper.

Freud, S. (1915 [1986]). *The essentials of psycho-analysis*. London: Hogarth.

Freud, S. (1915 [2001]). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14). London: Vintage.

Freud, S. (1930 [1962]). *Civilization and its discontent*. New York: Norton.

Günter, M. (2011). Die stabilisierende Funktion von Gewaltphantasien bei Jugendlichen. In F. J. Robertz (Ed.), *Gewaltphantasien: Zwischen Welten und Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 39–66). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hempel, A., Meloy, J. R., & Richards, T. (1999). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of mass murderers. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 27*, 213–225.

Hessel, S. (2011). *Tanz mit dem Jahrhundert: Erinnerungen*. Berlin: List.

Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hoffmann, J. (2003). Amok—ein neuer Blick auf ein altes Phänomen. In C. Lorei (Ed.), *Polizei und Psychologie* (pp. 397–414). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hoffmann, J. (2011). Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen—Risikoeinschätzung und Prävention. In G. Deegener & W. Körner (Eds.), *Gewalt und Aggression im Kindes- und Jugendalter* (pp. 202–216). Weinheim: Beltz.

Hoffmann, J., Meloy, J. R., Guldimann, A., & Ermer, A. (2011). Attacks on German public figures, 1968–2004: Warning behaviors, potentially lethal and non-lethal acts, psychiatric status, and motivations. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 29*(2), 155–179. doi:10.1002/bsl.979.

Hoffmann, J., Roshdi, K., & Robertz, F. J. (2009). Zielgerichtete schwere Gewalt und Amok an Schulen: Eine empirische Studie zur Prävention schwerer Gewalttaten. *Kriminalistik, 63*(4), 196–204.

Jones, G. (2011). Über mediale Realitäten der Phantasie. In F. J. Robertz (Ed.), *Gewaltphantasien: Zwischen Welten und Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 67–87). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Kellner, D. (2008). *Guys and guns amok*. London: Paradigm.

Kenrick, D. T., & Sheets, V. (1993). Homicidal Fantasies. *Ethology and Sociobiology, 14*, 231–246.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011). Soundtrack of the school shootings: Cultural script, music and male rage. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 19*(3), 247–269.

Killingsworth, M. A., & Gilbert, D. T. (2010). A wandering mind is an unhappy mind. *Science, 330*, 932.

Knapp, G. (1982). Begriff und Bedeutung des Unbewussten bei Freud. In D. Eicke (Ed.), *Tiefenpsychologie Band 1: Siegmund Freud—Leben und Werk* (pp. 261–283). Weinheim: Belz.

Korn, M. L., Plutchik, R., & van Praag, H. M. (1997). Panic-associated suicidal and aggressive ideation and behavior. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 31*, 481–487.

Langman, P. (2009). *Why kids kill: Inside the mind of school shooters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 202–214.

Lempp, R. (1992). *Vom Verlust der Fähigkeit, sich selbst zu betrachten: Eine entwicklungspsychologische Erklärung der Schizophrenie und des Autismus*. Bern: Huber.

Lempp, R. (2003). *Das Kind im Menschen: Über Nebenrealitäten und Regression—oder: Warum wir nie erwachsen werden*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Lempp, R. (2009). *Nebenrealitäten: Jugendgewalt aus Zukunftsangst* (2nd ed.). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Lewis, D. O., Lovely, R., Yeager, C., Ferguson, G., Friedman, M., Sloane, G., et al. (1988). Instrinsic and environmental characteristics of Juvenile Murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 27*, 582–587.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (2002). The classroom avenger. In N. G. Ribner (Ed.), *Handbook of Juvenile Forensic Psychology* (pp. 230–249). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A. G., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A. A., & Gray, B. T. (2001). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of adolescent mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*(6), 719–728.

Meloy, J. R., Hoffmann, J., Guldimann, A., & James, D. (2011). The role of warning behaviors for threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*. Article first published online: August 24, 2011. doi:10.1002/bsl.999.

Meloy, J. R., James, D. V., Mullen, P., Pathé, M., Farnham, F., Preston, L., et al. (2004). A research review of public figure threats, approaches, attacks, and assassinations in the United States. *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 49*, 1086–1093.

Meloy, J. R., & O'Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 29*(4), 513–527.

Meloy, J. R., Sheridan, L., & Hoffmann, J. (2008). *Stalking, threatening, and attacking public figures: A psychological and behavioral analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Moore, M. H., Petrie, C., Braga, A., & McLaughlin, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Mullen, P. E., James, D. V., Meloy, J. R., Pathe, M. T., Farnham, F. R., Preston, L., et al. (2009). The fixated and the pursuit of public figures. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology, 20*(1), 33–47.

Myers, W. C., Scott, K., & Burgess, A. W. (1995). Psychopathology, biopsychosocial factors, crime characteristics and classification of 25 homicidal youth. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 34*(11), 1483–1489.

Nagtegaal, M. H. (2008). *Agressief gedrag: De relatie met disfunctionele gedachtecontroleprocessen, cognitie en persoonlijkheid (Unpublished doctoral dissertation)*. Rotterdam: Erasmus University.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico: FBI Academy.

Person, E. S. (1995). *By force of fantasy*. New York: Penguin.

Prentky, R. A., Burgess, A. W., Rokous, F., Lee, A., Hartman, C., Ressler, R., et al. (1989). The presumptive role of fantasy in serial sexual homicide. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 146*, 887–891.

Ränsch-Trill, B. (1996). *Phantasie: Welterkenntnis und Welterschaffung: Zur philosophischen Theorie der Einbildungskraft*. Bonn: Bouvier.

Ressler, R. K., Burgess, A. W., & Douglas, J. E. (1988). *Sexual homicide: Patterns and motives*. New York: Free Press.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School Shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Robertz, F. J. (2006). Zur Genese todbringender Phantasien—Neue Erkenntnisse zum School Shooting von Columbine. *Forensische Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie, 13*(3), 50–72.

Robertz, F. J. (2011). Wunderland der Phantasie. In F. J. Robertz (Ed.), *Gewaltphantasien: Zwischen Welten und Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 17–35). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Robertz, F. J. (2012). Prävention von Amok und schwerer Gewalt an Schulen. In S. Drewes & K. Seifried (Eds.), *Krisen im Schulalltag*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Robertz, F. J., Hoffmann, J., & Roshdi, K. (2009). Winnenden und kein Ende: Ergebnisse der ersten Studie über deutsche School Shootings. *Deutsche Polizei, 5*(2009), 16–20.

Robertz, F. J., & Wickenhäuser, R. (2010). *Der Riss in der Tafel: Amoklauf und schwere Gewalt in der Schule* (2nd ed.). Heidelberg: Springer Medizin.

Rosenbaum, M., & Bennett, B. (1986). Homicide and depression. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 143*, 367–370.

Schlesinger, L. B. (2004). *Sexual murder: Catathymic and compulsive homicides*. Boca Raton: CRC.

Segal, H. (1974). *Melanie Klein: Eine Einführung in ihr Werk*. Munich: Kindler.

Singer, J. L. (1966). *Daydreaming: An introduction to the experimental study of inner experience*. New York: Random House.

Spitzer, M. (2005). *Vorsicht Bildschirm! Elektronische Medien, Gehirnentwicklung, Gesundheit und Gesellschaft*. Stuttgart: Klett.

Sutterlüty, F. (2003). *Gewaltkarrieren: Jugendliche im Kreislauf von Gewalt und Missachtung*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.

Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2003). Isn't it fun to get the respect that we're going to deserve? Narcissism, social rejection, and aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*(2), 261–272.

Urbaniok, F. (2011). Therapeutische Arbeit mit deliktrelevanten Phantasien. In F. J. Robertz (Ed.), *Gewaltphantasien: Zwischen Welten und Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 251–266). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: US Secret Service and US Dept. of Education.

Vossekuil, B., Reddy, M., & Fein, R. (2000). *Safe School Initiative: An interim report on the prevention of targeted violence in schools*. Washington, DC: US Secret Service.

Webber, J. A. (2003). *Failure to hold: The politics of school violence*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Weilenmann, R., Waldschmidt, F., & Janssen, L. (2011). Umgang mit Gewaltphantasien an Schulen. In F. J. Robertz (Ed.), *Gewaltphantasien: Zwischen Welten und Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 193–229). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Wisner, K. L., Peindl, K., & Hanura, B. H. (1994). Symptomatology of affective and psychotic illnesses related to childbearing. *Journal of Affective Disorder, 30*, 77–87.

Chapter 6
Thirty-Five Rampage School Shooters: Trends, Patterns, and Typology

Peter Langman

Rampage school shootings are often discussed as if they constituted a single phenomenon. This is misleading. Rampage attacks are committed by widely differing perpetrators who carry out different types of attacks against a variety of targets. The attackers vary in terms of personality, family history, and mental health status. Some are suicidal and intend to die in their attacks; others plan on killing and making their escape. Some are bullies, some are bullied, and some are both. Some kill randomly and some target specific people or classes of people. Most only attack people at school, but some also kill family members.

The term "rampage school shooter" is used here to refer to attacks at schools in which there were multiple victims. The victims included people who were shot randomly, as well as some who were specifically targeted. The perpetrators in almost every case were either current or former students at the schools they attacked. In two cases, those of Marc Lepine and Kimveer Gill, the perpetrators were not students at the schools they attacked. They were, however, approximate peers to the students they shot, and Lepine had twice applied to and been rejected by the Ecole Polytechnique where he committed his rampage. Adults who murder children at school are not included in this study.

This chapter continues a line of research on a typology of school shooters (Langman, 2009b, 2009d, 2010a, 2010b), expanding the sample to 35 shooters (see Table 6.1), which allows a more nuanced analysis and stronger conclusions. Shooters who can be placed within one of the three categories of the typology are analyzed in the greatest detail. Additional analyses are conducted on the complete sample in order to explore such factors as suicidal intent among school shooters, victim selection, the impact of the age of the perpetrators, and trends over time.

P. Langman (✉)
Langman Psychological Associates, LLC,
Allentown, PA, USA
e-mail: peterlangman@yahoo.com

Table 6.1 Thirty-five rampage school shooters in chronological order

Date	Name/age	Location	Type
05/28/75	Michael Slobodian, 16	Brampton, Ontario: Centennial Secondary School	Uncategorized
10/27/75	Robert Poulin, 18	Ottawa, Ontario: St. Pius X High School	Psychopathic
01/29/79	Brenda Spencer, 16	San Diego, CA: Cleveland Elementary	Psychopathic
12/06/89	Marc Lepine, 25	Montreal, Quebec: Ecole Polytechnique	Psychotic
05/01/92	Eric Houston, 20	Olivehurst, CA: Lindhurst High School	(Traumatized)
12/14/92	Wayne Lo, 18	Great Barrington, MA: Simon's Rock College	Psychopathic
01/18/93	Scott Pennington, 17	Grayson, KY: East Carter High School	(Traumatized)
11/15/95	Jamie Rouse, 17	Lynville, TN: Richland High School	Traumatized
02/02/96	Barry Loukaitis, 14	Moses Lake, WA: Frontier Junior High School	Uncategorized
02/19/97	Evan Ramsey, 16	Bethel, AK: Bethel High School	Traumatized
10/01/97	Luke Woodham, 16	Hattiesburg, MS: Pearl High School	Psychotic
12/01/97	Michael Carneal, 14	West Paducah, KY: Heath High School	Psychotic
03/24/98	Andrew Golden, 11 Mitchell Johnson, 13	Jonesboro, AR: Westside Middle School	Psychopathic Traumatized
04/24/98	Andrew Wurst, 14	Edinboro, PA: Parker Middle School	Psychotic
05/21/98	Kip Kinkel, 15	Springfield, OR: Thurston High School	Psychotic
04/20/99	Eric Harris, 18 Dylan Klebold, 17	Jefferson County, CO: Columbine High School	Psychopathic Psychotic
05/20/99	Thomas Solomon, 15	Conyers, GA: Heritage High School	Uncategorized
12/06/99	Seth Trickey, 13	Fort Gibson, OK: Fort Gibson Middle School	Uncategorized
03/05/01	Charles Williams, 15	Santee, CA: Santana High School	Uncategorized
03/22/01	Jason Hoffman, 18	El Cajon, CA: Granite Hills High School	(Traumatized)
04/26/02	Robert Steinhauser, 19	Erfurt, Germany: Gutenberg Gymnasium	(Psychopathic)
03/21/05	Jeffrey Weise, 16	Red Lake, MN: Red Lake High School	Traumatized
08/30/06	Alvaro Castillo, 18	Hillsborough, NC: Orange High School	Psychotic
09/13/06	Kimveer Gill, 25	Montreal, Quebec: Dawson College	Psychotic
04/16/07	Seung Hui Cho, 23	Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech	Psychotic

Table 6.1 (continued)

Date	Name/age	Location	Type
10/10/07	Asa Coon, 14	Cleveland, OH: Success Tech	Traumatized
11/07/07	Pekka-Eric Auvinen, 18	Jokela, Finland: Jokela High School	(Psychotic)
02/08/08	Latina Williams, 23	Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Technical College	Uncategorized
02/14/08	Steven Kazmierchak, 27	DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University	Psychotic
09/23/08	Matti Saari, 22	Kauhajoki, Finland: Seinajoki University	(Psychotic)
03/09/09	Tim Kretschmer, 17	Winnenden, Germany: Albertville-Realschule	(Psychopathic)
04/03/09	Jiverly Wong, 41	Binghamton, NY: American Civic Association	Psychotic
04/07/11	Wellington de Oliveira, 23	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Tasso da Silveira Municipal School	(Psychotic)

Note: the types in parentheses are tentative classifications

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a data-based foundation to the investigation of rampage school shooters. All too often the study of this topic has been hampered by lack of information or misinformation that has become widely accepted as fact. The research presented here is an effort to look objectively at a large enough sample of school shooters to begin to draw meaningful conclusions. Perhaps inherent in this effort is the second purpose of the study, which is to highlight the significant differences among the perpetrators of rampage school attacks.

6.1   Method

This research began with a collection of case histories. Information was gathered from a variety of sources, including student journals, police records, court documents, official reports, books, and articles in both scholarly journals and news outlets. These cases were then subjected to a qualitative analysis that investigated patterns and themes. Out of this emerged a typology of school shooters.

In addition, data were collected on 35 shooters from 33 rampage attacks (two attacks were carried out by two shooters each). Most of the shooters have been placed into one of three categories of the established typology. Each category has a core group who most clearly belong in the category, as well as other shooters who, due to a lack of information, are more tentatively placed in the category. Finally, there are six shooters who remain uncategorized. Either more information is necessary to categorize them, or the typology needs new categories to include them. Despite being uncategorized, their inclusion provides a more comprehensive view of school shooters.

The primary limitation of this work is the lack of sufficient information in certain cases to allow for a more in-depth analysis and categorization. Also, there is a lack of clarity at times regarding details. For example, it is not always known if a victim at Columbine were shot by Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold. This applies to a lesser extent in the Jonesboro incident, where the casualties cannot always be attributed specifically to Andrew Golden or Mitchell Johnson. Though care has been taken to be as accurate as possible, the exact details cannot be known for sure.

Finally, judgment has been used with other types of data. For example, whether or not a shooter intended to die in his or her attack cannot always be established beyond any doubt. Some shooters left suicide notes, but others did not. The same ambiguity exists regarding victims who were nonrandom targets. In some cases, shooters left notes or made statements prior to the attack indicating their desire to kill particular people. In other cases, the evidence is not as clear. Individual cases may thus be open to debate.

The incompleteness and ambiguity inherent in this type of research requires that the results of the data presented below be viewed with appropriate caution. In identifying trends over time, for example, it must be remembered that not every rampage school shooting has been included in the sample. Also, other researchers may have different definitions of rampage school shootings and thus may focus on a different set of incidents.

Similarly, the classification of shooters into the three types is dependent on sufficient information being available. If further information is made available regarding particular shooters, their classification will need to be reevaluated. This holds true as well for decisions made regarding whether or not shooters were suicidal, whether they were picked on, and whether they had specific targets.

6.1.1 Demographics of the Sample

The sample includes shooters from 1975 through 2011, from the United States, Canada, Finland, Germany, and Brazil. This does not include every rampage school shooting since 1975; rather, these shooters were selected because there was sufficient information available for analysis. The incidents took place at a variety of school settings including middle school, high school, college/university, and an adult learning classroom.

Though school shooters in North America are generally thought of as white males this is not always the case. Two of the shooters in this sample are female: Brenda Spencer and Latina Williams. Another woman, Jillian Robbins, committed a shooting at Pennsylvania State University (September 17, 1996), but so little information was found on her that she was not included in the sample.

In addition to the international scope of the sample and the inclusion of both genders, there is racial and ethnic diversity among school shooters in the United States and Canada. Latina Williams was African American and Marc Lepine's father was Algerian. There was at least one Latino shooter in the United States—Alvaro Castillo.

Table 6.2 Age distribution among school shooters

Age	Number of shooters
11	1
13	2
14	4
15	3
16	5
17	4
18	6
19	1
20	1
22	1
23	3
25	2
27	1
41	1

In addition, Jason Hoffman's mother may have been Latina (her last name is Marquez). Shooters of Asian descent include Wayne Lo (Taiwan), Kimveer Gill (India), Seung Hui Cho (Korea), and Jiverly Wong (Vietnam). Finally, there have been three shooters with Native American heritage in one or both parents: Evan Ramsey, Seth Trickey, and Jeffrey Weise. Of the 30 shooters from the United States and Canada, 10 (33.3%) were from racial/ethnic minorities.

The ages of the shooters range from 11 (Andrew Golden) to 41 (Jiverly Wong). The distribution of ages is shown in Table 6.2.

Finally, school shootings tend to occur in small towns and suburbs. Urban incidents, however, have not been totally absent. Shootings in this sample occurred in San Diego, Cleveland, Rio de Janeiro, and twice in Montreal. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and other major population centers have not experienced rampage school shootings.

6.1.2 Defining the Typology

The typology of rampage school shooters comprises three types: psychopathic, psychotic, and traumatized. As noted above, placing the shooters into one of the three categories involved a subjective review of the available information. The rationale for the categorization of many of the shooters has been presented elsewhere (Langman, 2009b, 2009d, 2010a, 2010b).

Regarding the category of psychopathic shooters, it should be noted that psychopathy is not a diagnosis but a concept that has been a topic of research for decades. The closest formal diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) is that of antisocial

personality disorder. Though there is no official definition of psychopathy, the conceptualization used here is derived primarily from the work of Hare (1999), Millon and Davis (1998), and Meloy (1988).

Psychopathic shooters have a cluster of traits including narcissism, rage, a deficient sense of empathy, a lack of guilt, a rejection of morality and law, and a sadistic delight in inflicting pain and death. Psychopathic shooters may also be skilled in impression management and take pleasure in deceiving others. How these psychopathic features manifest in a particular shooter varies, and not every shooter has each feature. Five core psychopathic shooters will be discussed, along with two who are tentatively placed in this category. The core representatives are Robert Poulin, Brenda Spencer, Wayne Lo, Andrew Golden, and Eric Harris. The tentative members of this group are Robert Steinhauser and Tim Kretschmer.

The psychotic shooters have symptoms of schizophrenia or schizotypal personality disorder. These diagnoses are defined in the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000). Regarding schizotypal personality disorder, I have also drawn on the work of Millon (1996). The relevant symptoms for identifying shooters as psychotic include hallucinations, delusions, odd or disorganized thinking, eccentric behavior, and significant impairment in social and emotional functioning. In addition, the psychotic shooters often experienced significant anxiety and/or depression.

The core psychotic shooters include Marc Lepine, Luke Woodham, Michael Carneal, Andrew Wurst, Kip Kinkel, Dylan Klebold, Alvaro Castillo, Kimveer Gill, Seung Hui Cho, Steven Kazmierczak, and Jiverly Wong. Three tentative members of this group are Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Matti Saari, and Oliveira de Wellington.

The category of traumatized shooters is based on the personal histories of the perpetrators, not the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is because it is difficult to confirm many of the criteria, such as nightmares and intrusive thoughts. It is easier to find documentation of histories of trauma, problematic parental behavior, and other features that these shooters have in common.

Traumatized shooters have histories of physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse. They tend to have parents with substance abuse problems and criminal behavior. They usually come from broken homes with frequent relocations and multiple caregivers. They also often live in squalor and/or poverty. The core group of traumatized shooters includes Jamie Rouse, Evan Ramsey, Mitchell Johnson, Jeffrey Weise, and Asa Coon. The tentative members of this group include Gary Scott Pennington, Eric Houston, and Jason Hoffman.

As noted above six shooters were not classified into the typology due to insufficient information being available. They are included in the study because they add data to several of the analyses relating to casualties, chronology, age, suicidality, and the targeting of nonrandom victims. Thus, their inclusion allows for a more robust analysis.

Finally, it is possible that the categories could overlap. For example, a shooter could develop schizophrenia and also have a history of severe trauma. Or a student who was abused could develop a psychopathic personality. Among the shooters in this sample, however, this does not appear to have occurred.

Table 6.3 Distribution of types by percentage

Type of shooter	Sample of 10 (%)	Sample of 29 (%)
Psychopathic	20	24
Psychotic	50	48
Traumatized	30	28

6.2 Results

6.2.1 Distribution of the Typology

In an initial study, I categorized ten cases were within the typology (Langman, 2009d). There were two psychopathic shooters, five psychotic shooters, and three traumatized shooters. Of the 29 shooters who are categorized in the present study (which includes the ten from the previous study), the distribution was as follows: 7 psychopathic, 14 psychotic, and 8 traumatized. Table 6.3 compares the percentages of each type in the two samples.

It is interesting that even though the second sample is nearly three times the size of the first, the percentages of each type of shooter are similar. In addition, it is important to note that approximately half of the rampage school shooters in this study were psychotic. The prevalence of psychosis among school shooters often receives insufficient recognition.

6.2.2 Casualties, Chronology, Age, and Typology

In order to explore possible trends over time, the 33 attacks were divided into 3 sets of 11. The first set includes attacks from Michael Slobodian (5/28/75) through Luke Woodham (10/1/97). The second set runs from Michael Carneal (12/1/97) through Jeffrey Weise (3/21/05). The third set encompasses rampages from Alvaro Castillo (8/30/06) through Wellington de Oliveira (4/7/11).

This analysis shows that over time rampage attacks have resulted in increasing numbers of casualties (see Fig. 6.1). The third set of attacks had nearly double the number of casualties as the first set: 202 compared to 103. In terms of deaths, the difference is even more drastic. The first 11 attacks caused 38 deaths; the last 11 caused 97.

Not only did the number of deaths increase, but the percentage of victims who were killed increased, too. Thus, in the third set the number of deaths was not far below the number of wounded (97 killed, 105 wounded), indicating that the later attacks were more deadly than the earlier ones. In the first set, 37% of the victims died. In the second, this decreased slightly to 33%. In the last set, however, 48% of the victims were killed.

Fig. 6.1 Number of
casualties by chronology
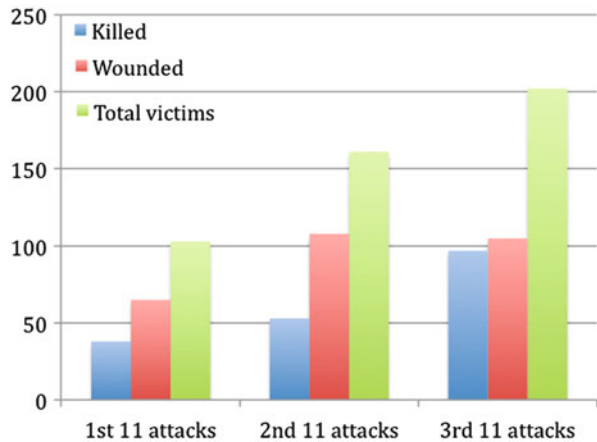
Fig. 6.2 Average
number of casualties by
age group
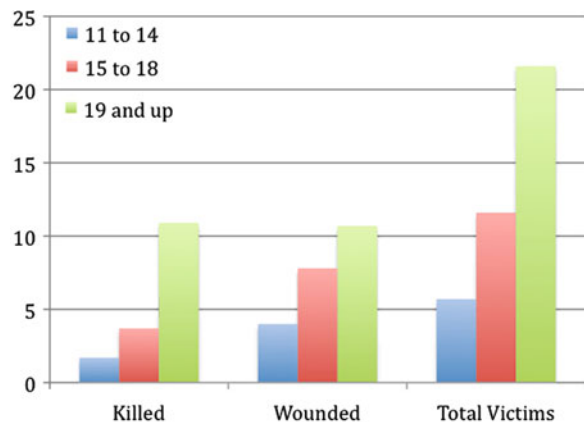
This increase in casualties appears to be related to both age and typology. Figure 6.2 shows the connection between age and casualties, with a sharp rise in victims when the perpetrators are older. The oldest group caused nearly twice as many casualties as the middle group, and nearly four times as many as the youngest group.

Figure 6.2 not only shows that older shooters caused more casualties, but also that the oldest group was more deadly in that the number of victims killed nearly equaled the number of victims wounded; in the other groups the wounded significantly outnumbered the fatalities. The greater rate of fatalities among the older shooters may be related to several factors, including method of attack. The older shooters often shot at close range and sometimes shot victims multiple times. In contrast, for example, Kip Kinkel shot 27 people at school, but only killed 2. He opened fire in the cafeteria and sprayed the room rather than shooting people at point-blank range as some of the older shooters did.

Fig. 6.3 Chronology and typology
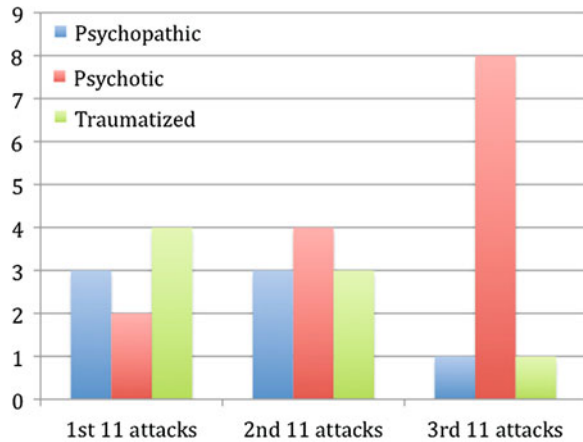
Other factors related to the increased deadliness of the attacks by older perpetrators may include weaponry, planning/strategy, and greater suicidality (this will be discussed below). Whereas younger shooters sometimes stopped their attacks and surrendered, the older shooters rarely surrendered. They murdered until they were shot or they shot themselves.

The age of perpetrators, however, cannot be the only factor in the increasing number of victims over time. The average age in the first 11 attacks was 17.5. In the second set of 11 attacks, however, the average age dropped to 15.2. In the third set the average age jumps to 22.8 (partly due to the outlier of Jiverly Wong, who was 41, but even without him the average age for this group is 21.0). Thus, the second set of 11 attacks does not fit the pattern of increasing age being correlated with more victims.

Another factor in the increasing number of victims over time appears to be the changing types of the shooters. This is shown in Fig. 6.3.

Figure 6.3 demonstrates a decrease over time in traumatized and psychopathic shooters and an increase in psychotic shooters (note: each set contains uncategorized shooters that cannot be included in this analysis). The significance of the typology is shown in Fig. 6.4, where each type is correlated with the number of casualties caused by their attacks. Psychotic and psychopathic shooters caused more than twice as many casualties as the traumatized shooters (19.1 and 15.0 compared to 6.5) and nearly three times as many fatalities as the traumatized shooters (7.8 and 7.1 compared to 2.6).

Thus, the increase in victims over time appears to be connected to the increase in prevalence of psychotic shooters and the decrease of traumatized shooters who tend to have far fewer victims. The issue of age and type are somewhat interrelated, however, because the psychotic shooters have an average age of 21.3, whereas the psychopathic and traumatized shooters have average ages of 16.7 and 16.4. Thus, the fact that psychotic shooters caused the most casualties may be due to both their psychosis and their age.

Fig. 6.4 Average
number of casualties by
type of shooter
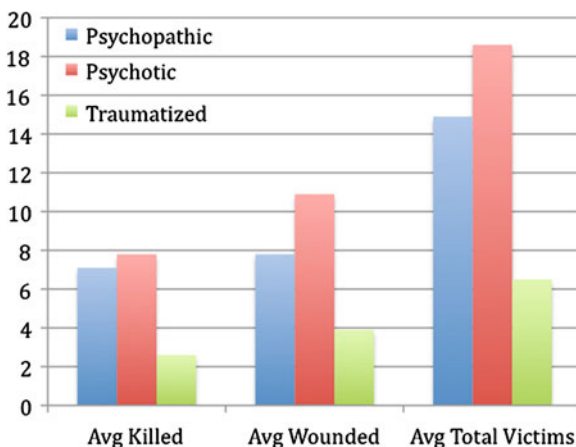
6.2.3 Suicide, Age, and Typology

Though many school shooters are suicidal at the time of their attacks, many are not. Some, such as Mitchell Johnson, were suicidal months prior to their attacks but not at the time of the attacks. Others, such as Michael Carneal, began their attack without suicidal intent, but became suicidal immediately after the shooting.

Particular cases present challenges in deciding whether the shooters went into their attacks with the intention of killing themselves or being killed by police (suicide by cop). For example, Tim Kretschmer committed suicide after his attack, but not until he had fled the scene, hijacked a car, committed spree killings along the way, and eventually been shot twice by police. It appears that he was not suicidal when he began the attack, attempted to get away with the crime, and only took his life after it became clear that he was not going to escape. In this analysis, then, Kretschmer is considered to have not viewed his attack as a suicide mission.

Of the 35 shooters, 21 (60%) were suicidal at the time of their attacks. Of these 21 suicidal shooters, 17 killed themselves. Thus, 49% of the shooters in the sample committed suicide. There are both internal and external reasons why four of the suicidal shooters did not kill themselves. In some cases, they had the opportunity but decided against it. In other cases, they were stopped by students, police, or a school resource officer.

Trends and patterns of chronology, age, and typology can be found in relation to suicide. In reviewing the data chronologically there appeared to be a shift from less suicidal to more suicidal attacks following the Jonesboro shooting on March 24, 1998. Dividing the sample into two time periods with a break after this attack, the data reveal a dramatic increase in the suicide rate (see Fig. 6.5).

Figure 6.5 shows the percentage of shooters who were suicidal at the time of their attacks, the percentage who killed themselves, and the percentage of those who were suicidal who committed suicide. This latter statistic shows essentially no
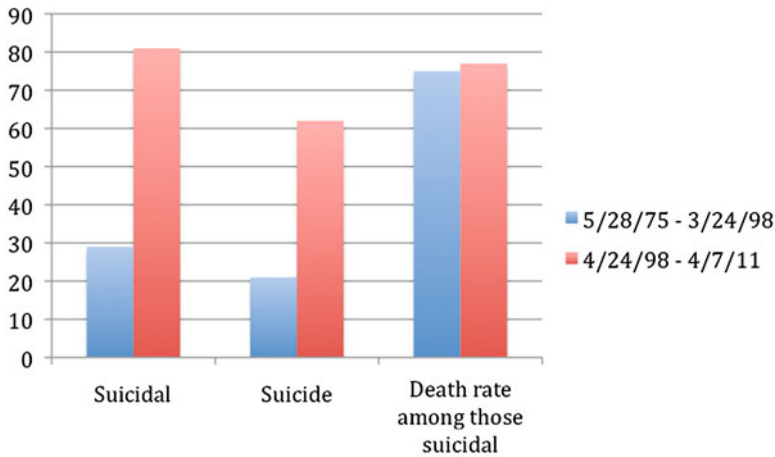
Fig. 6.5 Suicidality and chronology

difference in the suicide rate among those who were suicidal. There is a dramatic difference, however, between the two periods in the percentage of shooters who were suicidal and the percentage who committed suicide.

One factor related to these rates is age. The earlier shooters were younger, with an average age of 16.5; the later shooters had an average age of 19.6. The correlation between age and suicidality is demonstrated in Fig. 6.6. The older shooters were more frequently suicidal and more frequently killed themselves. In addition, there is a difference between the rates of completed suicide among those who were suicidal. In other words, when the older shooters wanted to die, they were less likely to change their minds or be stopped by external forces.

Suicide is also related to the typology, with psychotic shooters being the most frequently suicidal and the most likely to kill themselves. In fact, the psychotic shooters had twice the rate of suicidal intention as the psychopathic: 86 to 43%. Fifty percent of traumatized shooters were suicidal.

Though traumatized and psychopathic shooters had similar rates of suicidal ideation (50% and 43%, respectively), the traumatized shooters had a much lower rate of killing themselves. The traumatized shooters appear to be more ambivalent than the other types; only 50% of those who were suicidal killed themselves. In contrast, the psychopathic shooters showed no ambivalence: 100% of those who were suicidal went through with taking their own lives (see Fig. 6.7). These sample sizes, however, are very small and the results should be interpreted with caution. (Note: the graph shows a higher percentage of psychopathic shooters committed suicide than were suicidal; this is due to Tim Kretschmer's killing himself despite his apparent lack of suicidal intention when he began his attack).

Why were some shooters within each type suicidal while others were not? It is impossible to answer this question, but several observations can be made. Among the core psychopathic shooters who killed themselves, Poulin and Harris appear to be the two who experienced the most psychological distress in terms of depression,
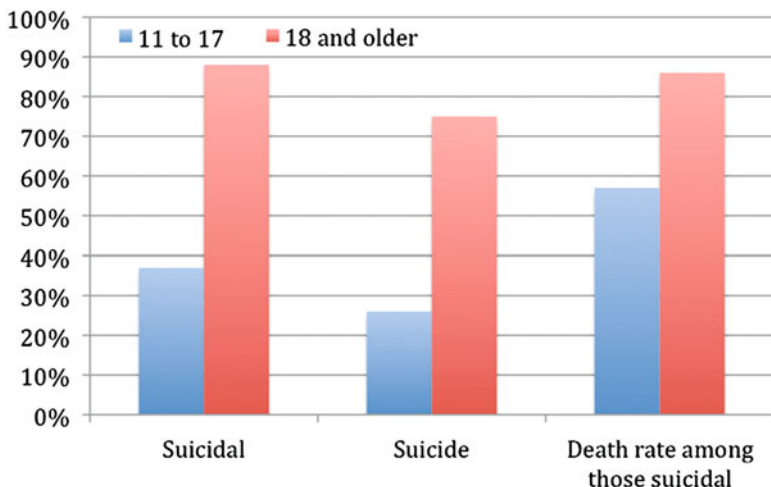
Fig. 6.6 Suicide and age of shooters
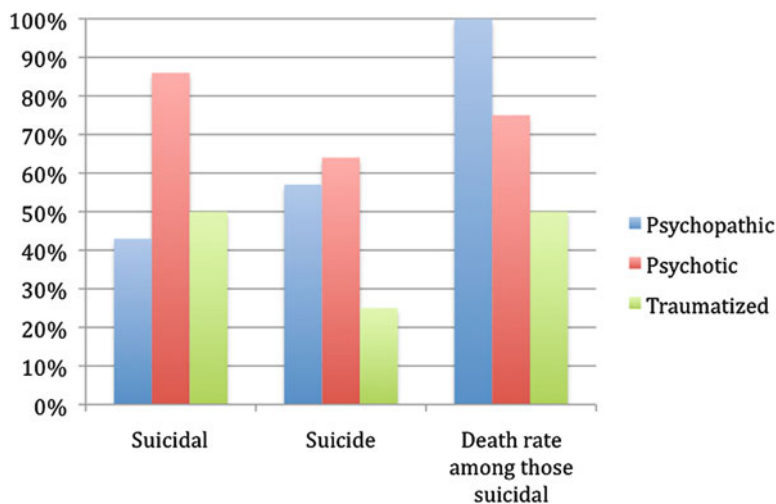
Fig. 6.7 Suicide and typology

self-hatred, and lack of confidence with women. Their distress may have been related to the fact that they both were born with chest deformities. Not only could this have a devastating impact on a young man's identity, but for boys growing up in military families and who had military aspirations of their own, the impact was likely to be even greater. They were also both desperate for sexual success with women and distraught over their failures in this domain.

Among the core traumatized shooters, those who were suicidal appear to differ from the non-suicidal in terms of their mothers. All of the traumatized shooters

experienced some form of childhood abuse and had at least one parent with a substance abuse problem. All three of the core suicidal traumatized shooters, however, had highly dysfunctional mothers.

Not only was Evan Ramsey's father in jail for 10 years, but his mother was severely alcoholic and lived with a series of violent boyfriends. Jeffrey Weise's father killed himself during an armed standoff with police; in addition, his mother was alcoholic and abusive. Less is known about Asa Coon's parents. His father was out of the picture; whether or not his mother had a substance abuse problem is not known, but based on what is known it appears that she was barely able to function. The home was notable for squalor, filth, violence, and visits by police and social workers.

In contrast to the mothers of the core traumatized shooters who were suicidal, the two core traumatized shooters who were not suicidal had stable, supportive mothers. Jamie Rouse's mother was neither alcoholic nor abusive. The same is true of Mitchell Johnson's mother, who worked in a correctional facility. This pattern suggests a connection between suicidal traumatized shooters and the presence of impaired mothers in addition to impaired and/or absent fathers.

Only two psychotic shooters were not suicidal: Michael Carneal and Luke Woodham. Two factors may have been involved in this. First, they were two of the youngest psychotic shooters (14 and 16, respectively), and as noted above, the suicide rate among school shooters increases with age. This may be due to the worsening of their psychotic symptoms and the increasing awareness of the significance of their impairment. Even so, however, two psychotic shooters who were suicidal were in the same age range: Andrew Wurst was 14 and Kip Kinkel was 15. Though both Wurst and Kinkel had intended to kill themselves, both were stopped before they did so. What separated Wurst and Kinkel from Carneal and Woodham?

Wurst had significant conflict with his parents, particularly his father. In fact, Wurst had considered killing his parents but decided against it. In addition, he believed that he was from another world and they were not really his parents. Kinkel also had significant conflict with his parents, particularly his father. Kinkel went further than Wurst, and actually murdered his parents.

In contrast to Wurst and Kinkel, Carneal came from a more stable and supportive family. No significant conflict between Carneal and his parents has been reported. The case of Woodham is not so clear. Woodham's parents were divorced when he was young, an event that he reported as devastating. Descriptions of Woodham's relationship with his mother have been so wildly discrepant that it is difficult to assess. Though Woodham killed his mother, he apparently did so under the direct command of Grant Boyette, an older peer whom Woodham looked up to.

It is worth noting (though the sample is very small) that when two shooters joined together in an attack, the partners acted together regarding the outcome. With Golden and Johnson, both attempted to escape, and with Harris and Klebold, both committed suicide. In neither case did the partners pursue divergent paths regarding surviving or taking their own lives.
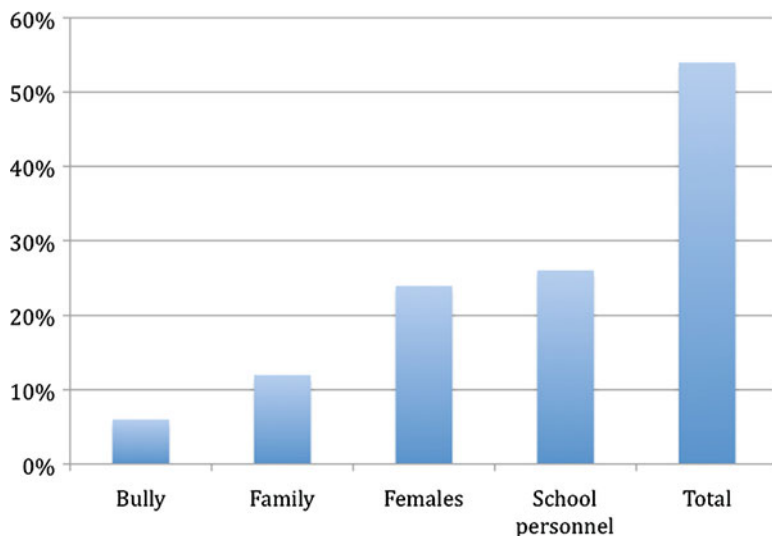
Fig. 6.8 Shooters with non-random victims

6.2.4 Nonrandom Victims

By definition, rampage school shootings include random victims. Nonetheless, many rampage attacks included nonrandom victims. In some cases these are specific people, such as a particular bully, girl, teacher, or family member. In other cases, the focus is a class of people, such as teachers in general or female students in general. (Note: though females could be bullies, in this sample there was no overlap between the two groups.) Figure 6.8 shows the number and type of nonrandom victims.

This graph shows that 54% of shooters targeted specific people or classes of people. Only two of the 35 shooters targeted a specific student who had picked on them (6%). More frequently they targeted family members (four cases), females (eight cases), and school personnel (nine cases). The infrequency of targeted attacks against peers who had picked on the shooters is particularly interesting given the frequent conceptualization of the attacks as retaliation for bullying. Family members were targeted twice as often as bullies. Females were targeted four times as often, and school personnel over four times as frequently.

This distribution of nonrandom victims indicates the varying targets of anger within the shooters. Rage against females is particularly noteworthy because many shooters struggled with their masculine identities. This has been discussed by Newman (2004) and Langman (2009d).

Figure 6.9 shows that seven out of eight (88%) traumatized shooters targeted one or more types of nonrandom victims. In five cases these were school personnel, in one case a female peer, and in one case family members. One of the shooters who targeted a principal also targeted a student who had harassed him. Among the
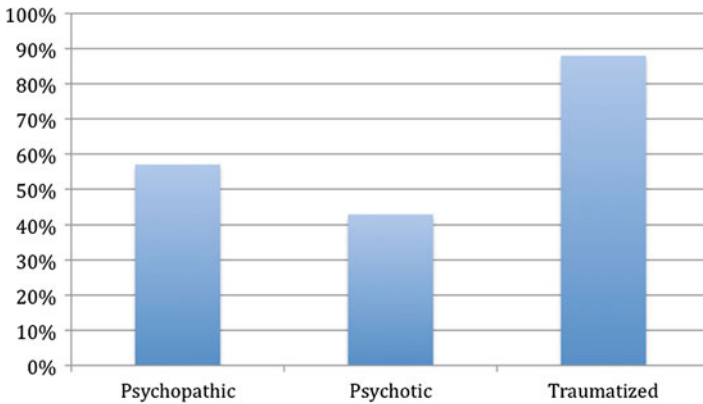
Fig. 6.9 Targeting of non-random victims by type

psychotic shooters, six out of 14 (43%) had nonrandom victims. Three targeted family members and three targeted females. The entire sample of 35 shooters includes only four who killed family members; three of the four were psychotic (Woodham, Kinkel, Alvaro). In the psychopathic group, four out of seven (57%) had nonrandom victims: two targeted females, one targeted teachers, and one focused his attack on female teachers and female students.

At least two shooters considered killing their parents but decided against this. Andrew Wurst told a peer he was thinking of murdering his mother and father. Wurst was so delusional that he believed his parents were not really his parents. He thought he was an alien from another world who had been placed with them. He had a conflicted relationship with his father that might explain his rage toward him, but why he would want to kill his mother is a mystery. Perhaps he wanted revenge on them for deceiving him, because he thought they were not his true parents. Why he decided not to kill them is unknown.

Robert Poulin also had planned to kill his parents. He decided he wanted them to suffer as much as possible, however, so instead of killing them he set their house on fire so they would lose everything they owned. The motivation for his hatred of his parents is unknown.

6.2.5 Peer Harassment and the Typology

Determining whether or not students were the victims of significant peer harassment was difficult. There were often contradictory reports by students, school personnel, and sometimes the perpetrators themselves. Furthermore, even if they were teased and/or bullied, this does not mean that the mistreatment caused the rampage. This is particularly so if the only targeted victims were family members, school personnel, or girls who did not return their affection. This section explores peer harassment to the extent permitted by the available data.
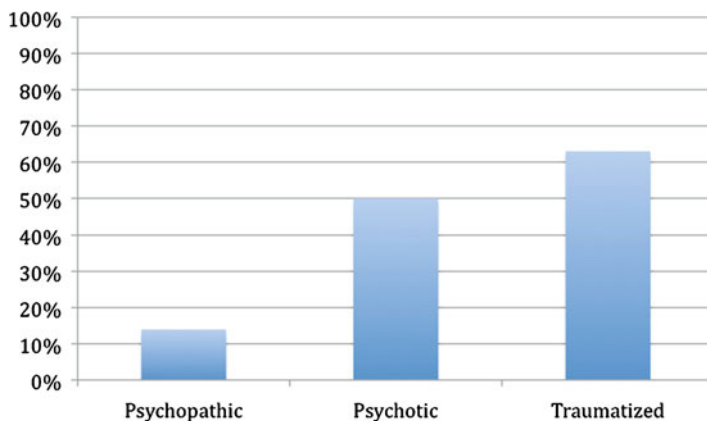
Fig. 6.10 Proportion of shooters harassed

Not every student who was ever insulted or called a name is considered to have been harassed. Rather, the ones included here are students for whom there were reasonably consistent reports of harassment that appears to have been significant. For example, Jeffrey Weise reportedly was teased, but the reports vary from claiming the harassment was severe to saying it was nothing out of the ordinary. Weise wrote that it was not as bad as it might have been because of his size (1.90 m and over 110 kg). Given his history of physical abuse, an alcoholic mother, a father who killed himself, and other traumas, maybe having a few kids tease him was the least of his problems. On the other hand, perhaps the teasing was just one more thing in his life that contributed to his misery and rage.

Looking at the sample as a whole, it appears that at least 15 of the 35 shooters (43%) experienced peer harassment. Figure 6.10 shows the percentage of each of the three types who experienced harassment.

The graph shows that only one out of the seven psychopathic shooters experienced harassment (14%). This was Eric Harris. Despite the publicity regarding bullying at Columbine, the significance of the teasing Harris experienced is difficult to assess (Langman, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a, 2009d). The general lack of harassment among the psychopaths is not surprising. These often were the ones who frightened, intimidated, and/or picked on their peers. For example, Andrew Golden and Wayne Lo both had belligerent, intimidating, and threatening behavior. Eric Harris, though he was at times teased, also made fun of and bullied his peers (Langman, 2008b, 2008c, 2009d).

Among the psychotic shooters, half of them had histories of being picked on (7 out of 14). This group appears to fall into two categories. The younger psychotic shooters experienced teasing at the schools where they committed their attacks. This includes Michael Carneal, Luke Woodham, Dylan Klebold, and perhaps Pekka-Eric Auvinen. Carneal and Klebold, however, both mistreated their peers to some extent. Carneal appears to have been more of a prankster and trouble-maker than a bully. Klebold, however, had an explosive temper that frightened students and faculty, and aggressive behavior that created problems with his peers. Thus, Carneal

and Klebold, like Eric Harris, appear to have both mistreated their peers and been mistreated by them.

The other group among the harassed psychotic shooters are older students who had been harassed when they were young but not at the time of their attacks. For example, Matti Saari was 22 years old when he committed his rampage. He had been picked on in secondary school, but had not experienced any harassment at the university where he committed his attack. Similarly, Seung Hui Cho had been teased when he was younger, but there is no evidence of harassment during his 4 years at Virginia Tech. Finally, Wellington de Oliveira reportedly had been picked on severely, including physical bullying, when he was young. At the age of 23 he returned to the school he had attended 10 years earlier and gunned down children aged 11–15 years.

In these cases, the harassment the shooters endured when they were younger may have scarred them psychologically, but there was no current peer mistreatment that triggered their attacks. Thus, when they went on their rampages, they were killing innocent people who had no connection to the harassment they had suffered. Among the younger psychotic shooters, even though they had been picked on by peers at the schools where they committed their rampages, none of them targeted anyone who had harassed them. When they did target people, it was family members, peers they envied, or girls who rejected them.

The traumatized shooters had the highest percentage of peer harassment at 63% (five of eight). Asa Coon reportedly endured significant harassment including physical altercations with peers. It does not appear, however, that he singled out anyone during his attack. Thus, he was not seeking revenge against specific individuals. Scott Pennington also endured severe teasing and bullying. He was made fun of for stuttering and was actually beaten up the week before his attack.

Mitchell Johnson presents a more complex case. He was described by some as a bully. He reportedly liked to act tough, claimed to be in a gang, and tried to intimidate people. His efforts, however, were not always successful. As a result, his peers sometimes laughed at his claims to be in a gang, dismissing him as a "gang wannabe." It does not appear that Johnson was bullied, rather that he was taunted in response to his own attempts at intimidation.

Evan Ramsey, under the direction of his friends, sought out and killed a boy who had picked on him. As noted above, Jeffrey Weise was teased, but the reports are so discrepant that it is impossible to determine the severity of the peers' behavior or its impact on Weise. Finally, one of the uncategorized shooters, Barry Loukaitis, gunned down a boy who reportedly had harassed him.

6.2.6 Peer Influence: Recruitment, Encouragement, Commands

The primary focus in the discussion about peer influence on school shootings is the impact of the shooters' enemies—i.e., bullying. An often overlooked aspect is the influence of the shooters' friends. This influence can occur as recruitment of a peer

to join the attack, encouragement by friends to go on a rampage, or direct commands to commit murder.

In two of the attacks there were a pair of shooters: Golden and Johnson, and Harris and Klebold. In both cases, psychopathic shooters (Golden and Harris) were the driving force behind the attacks. Both psychopathic shooters recruited non-psychopathic partners (Johnson was traumatized and Klebold was psychotic). This, of course, is such a small sample that it could be the result of coincidence. Nonetheless, it is worth noting.

In no cases were psychopathic shooters recruited by psychotic or traumatized shooters. In a third case, Luke Woodham was directed by an older, dominating, and manipulative young man to commit murder. Grant Boyette told Woodham to kill his mother and his ex-girlfriend and Woodham did just that.

A fourth case is less clear, but may fit this pattern. Kimveer Gill had a friend, Rajiv Rajan, who had a profound impact on him. Gill's mother commented, "Rajiv said that it was very easy to manipulate Kimveer because he's too honest and too trusting" ("Who Was Kimveer Gill", 2008). Rajan may have influenced Gill to go on a rampage. Months prior to the rampage at Dawson College, the two men took photographs of themselves posing with the gun Gill later used in his attack. Also, shortly after Gill shot 20 people, Rajan sent an email to someone announcing that unless he received ten billion dollars there would be another rampage. Rajan reportedly had vowed to follow in Gill's footsteps. Thus, this may have been another case of a dominating peer influencing someone to commit a rampage.

Among the traumatized shooters there is a pattern of their being influenced by their peers to varying degrees. In fact, in four cases friends of the traumatized shooters were arrested following the attacks for their involvement in the rampages.

Mitchell Johnson was recruited by Andrew Golden; Golden, of course, was arrested for murder. Evan Ramsey had planned to kill himself; when he told this to two of his friends, they convinced him to commit murder, gave him a hit-list, and showed him how to use a shotgun. Both of these boys were arrested for their role in the attack.

Jeffrey Weise communicated with his friend and cousin Louis Jourdain for months before Weise's rampage. The content of those communications has not been made public, but Jourdain's involvement was significant enough that he was arrested for playing a role in the school shooting.

A friend of Jamie Rouse was also arrested for playing a role in the attack, but it is not clear that he knew what Rouse was planning. He had heard Rouse talk about shooting people, and on the day of the attack, the friend saw Rouse had a gun and gave him a ride to school. The friend, however, said he thought Rouse was joking about shooting people.

One of the uncategorized shooters, Charles "Andy" Williams, also had peer encouragement. Several students had promised to join the attack. Williams reported that when he realized his friends were not going to join him he went ahead with the plan to show that he was not afraid.

In summary, at least six rampages involved the direct influence of one or more peers on the perpetrators' behavior. Shooters who were influenced by their peers

include Johnson, Klebold, Woodham, Weise, Ramsey, and Andy Williams. Other attacks may have involved peer influence; these include Gill and Rouse. Finally, Andrew Wurst attempted to recruit a friend, but the boy declined the offer.

6.2.7   Firearms in the Family

Previous research found patterns regarding firearm use in the families of the psychopathic and traumatized shooters (Langman, 2009d, 2010b). These patterns continue to appear in the sample presented here. Though some families of psychotic shooters owned guns, firearm use does not appear to be a significant factor in these families.

The families of psychopathic shooters are notable for the prevalence of firearms in legal and socially accepted contexts. Three of the shooters came from military families. In fact, Robert Poulin, Wayne Lo, and Eric Harris all had fathers who were retired air force pilots. Andrew Golden's grandfather was a game warden and his parents were the leaders of a local pistol association. Tim Kretschmer's father was a gun enthusiast with a collection of 16 weapons and a firing range in his basement. The evidence is not as clear with Brenda Spencer. Because she shot a BB gun (air gun) at a young age and her father gave her a rifle for her 16th birthday, however, it seems plausible that Mr. Spencer was familiar with firearms.

At least six out of seven psychopathic shooters came from families in which firearms were common, but were used legally. Thus, the psychopathic shooters defied their upbringing in choosing to use guns illegally.

In the families of traumatized shooters a different pattern exists. Of the five core shooters in this group, all had older male family members who engaged in the illegal use of guns. Evan Ramsey's father went on a rampage with guns and spent 10 years in prison. In addition, Ramsey's older brother committed an armed robbery a week before Ramsey's school attack. Ramsey referred to this legacy as a "family curse." Jamie Rouse's father used a shotgun to kill six of the family's cats. Jeffrey Weise's father shot himself during an armed standoff with police. Mitchell Johnson's stepfather had been in prison on several charges including firearms violations; Johnson reportedly was impressed by this and admired his stepfather. Finally, Asa Coon's older brother served time on numerous charges, including firearms violations. As far as has been determined, no psychopathic or psychotic shooters had parents who used guns illegally.

6.2.8   Types of Attack

Though the rampage school shootings discussed here may seem to be similar, there are many variations in the attacks. These include the amount of planning, the number of people carrying out the attack, the holding of hostages, and the style or method of the attack itself.

Among the psychopathic shooters several features can be noted. First, both attacks in which there were two perpetrators were led by psychopathic shooters. Other shooters such as Andrew Wurst and Andy Williams tried to recruit their peers, but only Andrew Golden and Eric Harris succeeded in getting someone to join them.

Second, the psychopathic shooters do not appear to have been impulsive in their attacks. Harris planned his for a year or more. Golden first mentioned the attack to Johnson 3 months before the shooting. Brenda Spencer talked to friends about planning something big that would get her on television. Robert Poulin planned his attack carefully, including maximizing his parents' suffering by burning the house down after payday so they would lose more money. Speaking generally, the psychopathic shooters do not appear to have erupted with rage. Their actions were methodical and premeditated.

Third, several of the psychopathic attacks involved killing at a distance. Spencer carried out a sniper attack from the safety of her house. Golden carried out a sniper attack from the safety of a wooded hill by the school. Harris and Klebold planted bombs in the school's cafeteria to bring the building down and stationed themselves outside to shoot people as they fled. They only entered the school after it became apparent that the bombs were not going to detonate. This style of attack minimized the risk to the shooters. For Spencer and Golden this was particularly important because they had no intention of dying in their attacks.

Poulin's attack was notable because it was the only one that also involved a sexual crime. Prior to the rampage at school, Poulin bound a girl he apparently had a crush on to his bed and molested her; then he stabbed her to death. Poulin then set his house on fire as a way of attacking his parents. Thus, his attack involved his family, a girl at his home, and random victims at school.

Poulin stands out among the psychopathic shooters because he was neither a swaggering tough guy nor a charming con artist. He does not fit the typical images of a psychopath. He does fit the description, however, of what Millon (1996) called the "nomadic antisocial." This is someone who combines the lack of empathy and disregard for social norms seen in people with antisocial personality disorder with schizoid or avoidant personality features. They tend to be discouraged and bitter misfits. According to Millon, such people may act out "their pent-up frustrations in brutal assaults or sexual attacks upon those weaker than themselves" (1996, p. 453). This describes the rampage by Poulin.

Regarding the attacks of the psychotic shooters, the older members of this group seemed to have generally engaged in more planning than the younger ones. For example, though Kip Kinkel had been building toward violence for months, there is no evidence that he had planned his attack for a particular day. His attack, in which he killed his parents, appears to have been in response to being suspended and being threatened by his father with being sent to a military school. Luke Woodham, Michael Carneal, and Andrew Wurst planned their attacks in advance, but without any particular strategy.

Among the older psychotic shooters, however, attacks tended to involve more preparation and strategy. For example, Seung Hui Cho created a diversion by killing two people in a dormitory, then mailed his carefully prepared multimedia manifesto

to MSNBC, went to a classroom block, chained the doors shut, and proceeded with his attack. Pekka-Eric Auvinen and Matti Saari prepared videos and/or manifestoes that they posted online prior to their attacks. They also brought flammable materials and set fires after killing people.

Another difference between the younger and the older psychotic shooters is that the older were far more deadly. For example, Kip Kinkel sprayed a cafeteria with gunfire, hitting 27 students but only killing two. In comparison, Lepine, Cho, Auvinen, and others shot people at close range, often shooting them more than once. The young psychotic shooters (ages 14–18) averaged 3.0 fatalities in their attacks. The older psychotic shooters (ages 19 and up) averaged 12.6 deaths.

There is no clear pattern of attack among the traumatized shooters. Jeffrey Weise may have planned the most. He first went to his grandfather's house and murdered his grandfather and the grandfather's girlfriend. He then took firearms from his grandfather's house and drove the grandfather's police cruiser to the school where he proceeded with his attack. In contrast to Weise, Jamie Rouse walked into a hallway at school and opened fire. There was no advance planning or strategy; he apparently decided that the time had come for his attack. This appears to have been the case with Asa Coon, too.

Evan Ramsey was talked into the attack by his friends just days before the rampage; the day before the incident a friend showed him how to use a shotgun. Ramsey apparently had no plan other than to shoot a particular peer and the principal.

Another factor in the attacks is that some of the shooters were no longer students at their schools when they committed their rampages. This is true of shooters in all three categories. Three of the seven psychopathic shooters committed their attacks at schools they had attended in the past. Brenda Spencer had graduated from Cleveland Elementary School several years before her attack there. Robert Steinhauser had been expelled from his school months before his attack. Tim Kretschmer graduated nearly a year before his rampage.

Several psychotic shooters were former students at the schools they attacked. Steven Kazmierczak had been a student at Northern Illinois University (NIU) but had transferred to a different school; he returned to NIU to commit his rampage. Jiverly Wong was no longer taking English classes at the American Civic Association he attacked. Wellington de Oliveira returned to the school he attended 10 years before and gunned down children. Alvaro Castillo had graduated over a year before his attack at his former high school.

Among traumatized shooters, Eric Houston was not enrolled at his school at the time of the attack. He committed his rampage 3 years after he should have graduated. Jeffrey Weise also was not attending his school at the time of his attack, having been on home-bound instruction for some time prior to his rampage (reports regarding the length of time he had been out of school, as well as the reason for this, are widely discrepant; see Langman (compiled), "Jeffrey Weise: Timeline").

The motivations for attacking schools they no longer attended appear to vary across shooters. For example, Eric Houston's primary purpose seems to have been the murder of a teacher who reportedly had molested him. Robert Steinhauser had been expelled from school; he focused his attack on the school staff, killing 12

teachers and 1 administrator. Brenda Spencer had no known hostility toward anyone at her school. Because it was across the street from her home, she may have simply chosen it as a convenient target. Why Wellington de Oliveira attacked the school he had attended 10 years earlier is unknown. Perhaps the school symbolized for him the persecution he had experienced as a student.

Finally, three shooters held hostages before surrendering. These include Eric Houston, who held 70 students hostage for over 8 h, Barry Loukaitis, who held his class hostage for 15 min, and Gary Scott Pennington who also held a class hostage for 15 min. Loukaitis and Pennington both reportedly imitated a scene from the book *Rage* (written by Stephen King under the pen name Richard Bachmann). If this is true, then they may have planned the hostage situation. Whether or not Houston planned to take hostages or decided in the moment is not known.

6.2.9 Ideologies

The behavior of school shooters was generally driven by their private feelings of rage and anguish. In several cases, however, the shooters created or found ideologies that in their minds justified their actions and gave a larger purpose to their rampages. The rationales for the attacks included the desire to destroy humanity, to improve humanity by killing inferior people, to overthrow governments and revolutionize society, to sacrifice children to protect them from sin, to defend the weak, and to kill feminists.

Only one psychopathic shooter gave his attack an ideological purpose. Eric Harris alternated between desiring humanity's improvement and its destruction. Influences on his thinking included Hitler, Hobbes, Nietzsche, and perhaps Charles Manson (Langman, 2008a). Harris became obsessed with the idea of natural selection and the elimination of inferior beings (Langman, 2009c). On the day of his rampage, he wore a shirt that read "Natural Selection." Thus, Harris framed his attack as the elimination of inferior beings by one who was superior. The irony is that he has often been interpreted as a social inferior attacking higher-status peers. Harris made clear in his writings, however, that he saw himself as a god-like being looking down with contempt on the lowly masses of humanity (Langman, 2009c, 2009d).

Harris also hoped that his attack would "kick-start" natural selection and have a global impact. He wrote, "the human race is still indeed doomed. It just needs a few kick starts, like me" and "We need to fucking kick-start the revolution here! …. If we have a fucking religious war—or oil—or anything. We need to get a chain reaction going here" (Langman, 2009c, p. 5). Harris had a grandiose view of himself and a global vision for the destruction of the human race. "If you recall your history the Nazis came up with a 'final solution' to the Jewish problem. Kill them all. Well, in case you haven't figured it out yet, I say 'KILL MANKIND' no one should survive" (Langman, 2009c, p. 3).

Several psychotic shooters also framed their attacks within larger ideologies. Pekka-Eric Auvinen borrowed heavily from Harris's writings and, like Harris, he admired

Nietzsche. He defined his attack as "political terrorism" and hoped to spark a revolt against totalitarian regimes, writing "Long live the revolution… revolution against the system" (Pekka-Eric Auvinen Online, p. 5). He also imitated Harris's preoccupation with natural selection, and was influenced by the writings of the extremist Finnish thinker Pentti Linkola, who has written about violence as a way to reduce the human population. Auvinen wrote, "The faster human race is wiped out from this planet, the better… no one should be left alive" (Pekka-Eric Auvinen online, p. 3).

Alvaro Castillo believed he was saving children from a world of sin. He wrote of his upcoming attack, "Sacrifice will occur and those children will be freed from evil…. We have to die and leave this sick, drinking, sex-crazed, drug using, sadistic, masochistic world" (State of North Carolina, 2010). Thus, his attack was not a personal vendetta but rather a grand mission to make the world a better place by saving children from the evils of contemporary life.

Seung Hui Cho railed against hedonists and "Apostles of Sin." He, too, wrote about starting a revolution and saw himself as a grandiose figure. He wrote, "Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and defenseless people," and "Let the revolution begin!" (Seung Hui Cho's "Manifesto," pp. 7, 20). He envisioned massive destruction following in the wake of his attack: "the vendetta you have witnessed today will reverberate throughout every home and every soul in America and will inspire the Innocent kids that you have fucked to start a war of vendetta. We will raise hell on earth that the world has never witnessed" (Seung Hui Cho's "Manifesto," p. 15).

Wellington de Oliveira wanted to make the world a better place. He said, "Our fight is against cruel people, cowards, who take advantage of the kindness, the weakness of people unable to defend themselves" (Associated Press, 2011). What is bizarre about both Cho's and de Oliveira's attacks is that they proclaimed themselves as champions of the weak as they gunned down innocent and defenseless people, including children.

Marc Lepine justified his attack as revenge against feminists. He wrote, "I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker" ("Marc Lepine's Suicide Note"). None of the traumatized shooters framed his attack within any ideologies.

A number of other shooters were attracted to Nazi ideology, Nietzsche's writings, or satanism,[1] but did not leave evidence explicitly connecting these interests to their attacks. Kimveer Gill perhaps came the closest. He admired the Nazis and wrote online "Heil Heil Heil" and other German phrases, including "Ich bin Gott" ("I am God"). He once described his mood as "Destroy all mankind" and wrote passages containing graphic violence, mutilation, and mass murder (Kimveer Gill Online).

Other shooters attracted to ideologies of power include Luke Woodham (Nietzsche, Nazis, satanism), Andrew Wurst (Anti-Christ/Satan, Hitler), Steven

---

[1] Including Nietzsche in the same sentence as the Nazis and satanism is not meant to equate his philosophy with these other belief systems. To school shooters, however, his ideas about rejecting conventional morality, the will to power, and supermen had a great appeal. See my article, "Influences on the Ideology of Eric Harris" (www.schoolshooters.info) for an in-depth discussion of this appeal.

Kazmierczak (Nietzsche, Nazis, satanism), Marc Lepine (Nazis), and Jeffrey Weise (Nazis). In general, the psychotic shooters were most likely to be drawn to ideologies of power (9 out of 14, 64%). Harris stands out among the psychopathic shooters for his ideology (one out of seven, 14%), and Weise stands out among the traumatized shooters with his interest in the Nazis (one out of eight, 13%).

6.2.10 Role Models

Apart from admiring Hitler and the Nazis, many shooters were influenced by notorious killers. Kip Kinkel reportedly talked about wanting to be the next Unabomber. Steven Kazmierczak was fascinated with killers such as Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer. Dylan Klebold imitated Charles Manson. Marc Lepine appears to have been inspired by Denis Lortie, who stormed the National Assembly in Quebec in 1984 in a murderous rampage against government employees.

The trend for school shooters to use previous school shooters as role models began in 1998. Following the attack by Golden and Johnson, both Andrew Wurst and Kip Kinkel commented that someone should do a rampage at their schools. Within 2 months, each of them did.

After the attack at Columbine High School, many shooters cited Harris and Klebold as influences, including T. J. Solomon, Seth Trickey, Alvaro Castillo (who was also influenced by Kinkel), and Steven Kazmierczak (who was also fascinated by Seung Hui Cho). Pekka-Eric Auvinen was heavily influenced by Eric Harris's writings, Kimveer Gill referred to Harris and Klebold as saints, and Seung Hui Cho referred to them as martyrs. In Finland, Pekka-Eric Auvinen and Matti Saari were fascinated by Columbine. Finally, Wellington de Oliveira cited Seung Hui Cho as an inspiration.

Not all role models were notorious killers. Seth Trickey, besides being influenced by Columbine, was also driven "by an obsession with military tactics and a personal identification with World War II-legend Gen. George Patton. The boy even wondered, with tragic consequences, whether he could perform under fire as calmly as his hero had" (Cooper & Walton, 2000).

Following in the footsteps of previous killers was most common among psychotic shooters. The psychopathic and traumatized shooters generally acted without reference to either ideologies or role models.

6.3 Summary

Based on the data analyzed here, school shootings have become more deadly over time. There has been a trend toward older shooters and a greater prevalence of psychotic shooters; both factors are correlated with higher numbers of casualties. School shooters have also become more frequently suicidal over time. Overall, 60%

were suicidal at the time of their attacks and 49% committed suicide. Regarding peer harassment, 43% appear to have experienced teasing or bullying. Nonrandom victims were present among 54% of the shooters. In order of descending frequency, these victims were school personnel, females, relatives, and bullies.

Among the three types of shooters, several patterns emerged. Traumatized shooters caused far fewer casualties and committed suicide less frequently than psychopathic and psychotic shooters. Traumatized shooters were the most harassed and most frequently had nonrandom victims. They also had the most frequent peer support for their attacks.

Psychotic shooters had the highest suicide rate and caused the greatest number of casualties. They were also the most likely to be fascinated by previous killers, attracted to ideologies of power, and to view their attacks as serving a larger purpose.

Psychopathic shooters were by far the least harassed of the three types. Their rate of suicide and average number of casualties were close to those of psychotic shooters. The psychopathic shooters often committed atypical attacks, including several who killed—or tried to kill—from a distance.

Regarding firearm use in their families, psychopathic shooters generally came from homes where there was significant—but legal—use of weapons. The traumatized shooters typically had older male relatives who engaged in the illegal use of guns. Firearm use did not appear to be a factor in the families of psychotic shooters.

6.4   Conclusion

This article provides a data-based understanding of school shooters, as well as highlighting the differences among school shooters and their attacks. Beyond the typology itself, there are differences in peer experiences, family use of firearms, suicidal intention, attack styles, victim selection, deadliness, and other factors. The incidents ranged from small-scale assaults by abused youth lashing out briefly and then surrendering, to carefully planned attacks with dozens of casualties; from an 11-year-old class clown to a 41-year-old immigrant struggling with acculturation and schizophrenia; from calculating psychopaths to paranoid psychotics to traumatized adolescents who were talked into killing by their friends; from the targeted killing of ex-girlfriends or bullies to plans to start global revolutions and destroy humanity. Efforts to increase understanding of school shooters need to recognize the diversity of the perpetrators and their actions.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, Text Revision* (4th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.

Associated Press. (2011, April 14). Brazilian school shooter Wellington Oliveira rambled about plans in video. *New York Daily News*.

Cooper, S., & Walton, R. (2000, June 11). Closer to why: Testimony sheds new light on school shooting. *Tulsa World*.

Hare, R. (1999). *Without conscience: The disturbing world of the psychopaths among us*. New York: Guilford.

Meloy, J. (1988). *The psychopathic mind: Origins, dynamics, and treatment*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Langman, P. (2008a). *Influences on the ideology of Eric Harris*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/ideologyof-eric-harris.pdf.

Langman, P. (2008b). *Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Columbine documents organized by theme*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/jcsocolumbine-documents.pdf.

Langman, P. (2008c). *The search for truth at Columbine*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Articles_files/The%20Search%20for%20Truth%20at%20Columbine.pdf.

Langman, P. (2009a). *Eric Harris: The search for justification*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Articles_files/Eric%20Harris-%20The%20Search%20for%20Justification%201.1.pdf.

Langman, P. (2009b). Rampage school shooters: A typology. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 14*, 79–86.

Langman, P. (2009c). *Themes in the writings of Eric Harris*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/themes-in-the-writings-of-eric-harris.pdf.

Langman, P. (2009d). *Why kids kill: Inside the minds of school shooters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Langman, P. (2010a). *Adult school shooters*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Articles_files/Adult%20School%20Shooters.pdf.

Langman, P. (2010b). *Expanding the sample: Five school shooters*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/expanding-the-sample.pdf.

Langman, P. (compiled). *Jeffrey Weise: Timeline*. http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Edited_Data_files/Jeffrey%20Weise%20timeline.pdf.

Marc Lepine's Suicide Note. http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Subject-Lepine_files/Lepine%20note.pdf.

Millon, T., & Davis, R. (1998). Ten subtypes of psychopathy. In T. Millon, E. Simonsen, M. Birket-Smith, & C. Davis (Eds.), *Psychopathy: Antisocial, criminal, and violent behavior* (pp. 161–170). New York, NY: Guilford.

Millon, T. (1996). *Disorders of personality: DSM-IV and beyond*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.

Newman, K. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Pekka-Eric Auvinen Online. http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Original_Documents_files/Pekka-Eric%20Auvinen%20Online.pdf.

Seung Hui Cho's "Manifesto." http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Original_Documents_files/Cho%20manifesto.pdf.

State of North Carolina v. Alvaro Rafael Castillo, North Carolina Court of Appeals, No. COA10-814, September 19, 2010.

Who Was Kimveer Gill? (Part 3). (2008, September 4). *The Gazette (Montreal)*.

Part II
Case Studies and Perspectives

Chapter 7
Legitimated Adolescent Violence: Lessons from Columbine

Ralph W. Larkin

> *Columbine is a clean, good place except for those rejects
> [outcast students, including Klebold and Harris]. Most kids
> didn't want them here. They're into witchcraft. They were into
> voodoo dolls. Sure, we teased them. But what you expect with
> kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their
> hats? It's not just jocks; the whole school's disgusted with them.
> They're a bunch of homos, grabbing each others' private parts.
> If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease 'em. So the
> whole school would call them homos, and when they did
> something sick, we'd tell them, "You're sick and that's wrong."*

<div align="right">(Gibbs and Roche 1999)</div>

This statement by an athlete in the wake of the shootings at Columbine High School
reflects attempts to counter criticism of what was referred to as the "cult of the athlete"
that many students and parents said pervaded the climate of the school (Adams and
Russakoff 1999; Kurtz 1999). Although most students, parents, and the administration
of the school denied that the so-called "jocks" engaged in systematic violence, harass-
ment, and intimidation, investigations into the school climate indicated that the
coaches ran the school and the athletes controlled the halls, the athletic fields, and
wherever they happened to be at the time (Huerter 2000; Larkin 2007).

Rampage shootings have been defined as attacks on institutions (Harding et al.
2002; Muschert 2007; Newman 2004). Although certain individuals may be tar-
geted, as was the case in Columbine and numerous other rampage shootings, the
focus of such attacks are the schools that allow and tolerate predatory violence that
the shooters have experienced, usually over a long period of time. Klebold and

R.W. Larkin (✉)
Department of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
The City University of New York, 899 Tenth Avenue,
New York, NY 10019, USA
e-mail: rlarkin13@verizon.net

Harris complained bitterly about the treatment they received at the hands of the jocks. Their rampage shooting at Columbine High School was in revenge not only for their harassment and humiliation at the hands of the jocks, but also against their peers who tolerated the violence and maintained the same attitudes toward outcast students as the jocks, but did not act upon those impulses. Unless otherwise cited, all data in this article are derived from *Comprehending Columbine* (Larkin 2007).

The Columbine shootings, because of their notoriety, body count, and vast media coverage, became a cultural watershed (Muschert 2002) and the template for most subsequent rampage shootings and attempts (Larkin 2009). When students make threats against their schools, they are likely to state that they are going to "do a Columbine" on them. The emergence of rampage shootings as a social phenomenon in the early 1980s, escalating in frequency and intensity until 1999 with the Columbine shootings (Moore et al. 2003), focused researchers' attentions on bullying. Most of the rampage shootings prior to the Columbine massacre were revenge shootings against peers who had bullied and intimidated the shooters (Newman 2004). Because Klebold and Harris meticulously videotaped themselves explaining exactly why they were planning to attack their high school and their vilification of jocks and Evangelical students for their hubris and snobbery, the issue of bullying came to the forefront of public consciousness (Garbarino and deLara 2002).

Given all that has been written about the Columbine shootings, its etiology is not well understood. By far the most popular book written about Columbine was written by journalist Dave Cullen (2009) who claimed that bullying had nothing to do with the shootings and that they were the consequences of the mental disorders of the shooters.

7.1 Adolescent Bullying and Peer Structure

Much of the bullying literature focuses on the elementary and middle school years (Espelage 2002; Espelage and Holt 2001; Graham and Bellmore 2007; Juvonen and Ho 2008; Olweus 1993; Pellegrini 2001; Pellegrini et al. 2010). Although this literature is extremely helpful in understanding the role of the peer group in bullying, especially in the years where it is most prevalent, high school bullying and retaliation involves a different dynamic. Although there are status hierarchies among preadolescents, the peer group structure tends to be more fluid and not grounded in cultural differences as in the case of adolescent subcultures (Adler and Adler 1998).

Researchers have noticed that bullying increases dramatically beginning in middle school (Espelage 2002; Nation et al. 2008; Pellegrini et al. 1999). Pellegrini (2001) suggested that when peer relationships become unstable, bullying increases. Spikes in the incidence of bullying occur during transition periods, primarily in early middle school and in the transition from middle to high school. This increase in bullying occurs because as students are thrown into new organizational environments, new hierarchies emerge whose status has not been validated. Among males,

athleticism and physical domination have long been the determinants of elite social status in US high schools (Coleman 1961; Garner et al. 2006; Wooden and Blazak 2001). Therefore, adolescent peer groups validate their positions in the social hierarchy through violence and intimidation. Although there is a dearth of studies on the social structure of middle and junior high schools and a plethora of research on bullying during those school years, the data indicate that bullies tend to be popular, socially adept, and athletic (Dijkstra et al. 2008; Erath et al. 2008; Pellegrini and Bartini 2000). Because of the lack of interscholastic sports in middle and junior high schools and the lack of research on peer group structures in those institutions, it is assumed that peer group structures among young adolescents are more fluid and less crystallized than in high school. As students graduate from elementary to middle or junior high school, they are thrown into an entirely new competitive arena, that of the adolescent peer group. It is during these formative years that adolescent identities are shaped, statuses are consolidated, and the peer group structure crystallizes. For those at the bottom of the structure, there is little opportunity for upward mobility because social position is incorporated into identity, which is very difficult to change (Milner 2006).

Although studies consistently show a decline in the proportion of victims from early to later adolescence (DeVoe et al. 2005; Espelage and Holt 2001; Pellegrini and Bartini 2000; Pellegrini and Long 2002), the research has not clearly indicated whether there is a decline in bullying, as suggested by Espelange (2001) or an increase in targeting, as suggested by Pellegrini and Bartini (2000) and Nation et al. (2008). In other words, between middle and high school, the level of bullying may decline somewhat or remain relatively constant, but becomes less indiscriminate and directed toward specific individuals or members of despised subcultures. Students at Columbine High School, especially those associated with athletics, claimed that bullying was "middle school stuff," and did not exist at Columbine (Larkin 2007). However, students who were members of outcast groups claimed that they were harassed and intimidated on a daily basis.

In white-dominated suburban communities, there is almost always a differentiation and hostility between "jocks" and "burnouts" (Eckert 1989; Wooden and Blazak 2001). Although there is general consensus about the existence and status of jock subcultures in American high schools, outcast subcultures, sometimes loosely categorized as "Goths," tend to be highly localized. A small number of Goth students, perhaps 20 in a school of 1,800, populated the halls of Columbine High School. They may or may not have been members of the Trenchcoat Mafia, a collection of 10–12 outcast students who found that developing a group identity by wearing dusters to school made them less vulnerable to bullying by the jocks (Larkin 2007). Luke Woodham, who killed two students at Pearl High School in a suburb of Jackson, Mississippi, in 1997, belonged to a group of outcast students who engaged in Dungeons & Dragons-like role-play games and dabbled in Satanism. They called themselves "The Kroth," an ancient word for toad, which in mythology is associated with devil worship (Bellini 2001). Wooden and Blazak (2001), in a study of four suburban California high

schools, found jocks at the top of each school's peer hierarchy. Those at the bottom had a variety of pejorative names, such as "smacks," "dirt-bags," "geeks/nerds," "sluts," and "punks." In three out of four of the schools, the lowest of the low were called "brains."

7.2   The Formation of Adolescent Subcultures

Adolescent elites begin forming in middle school. In nearly all American schools, they are organized around athletics (Adler and Adler 1998); by high school, the elite crowd coalesces around the football team and its supporters. Although there are rare exceptions to the rule, nearly every high school that has a football team finds football players and cheerleaders at the top of the peer structure (Coleman 1961; Eckert 1989; Wooden and Blazak 2001). At Columbine High School, the structuration of the adolescent peer group coalesced around star athletes who played in the local Columbine Sports Association, which sponsored several age-graded football leagues. Those leagues were closely observed and supervised by the coaches at Columbine High School, who used the leagues as recruiting grounds for the Columbine Rebel football team (Larkin 2007).

In most cases, the adolescent peer group is trifurcated (Eckert 1989; Larkin 2007; Wooden and Blazak 2001); jocks are at the top, outcasts are at the bottom, and the vast majority is in the middle, differentiated by interests, activities, academic tracks, musical tastes, cultural affinities, drug preferences (including cigarettes), and so forth. Students can dissect the social structure of their schools with a great deal of precision and locate themselves in it (Larkin 1979; Milner 2006). Typical status groups include "bandies" or "band fags" (members of the school marching band), "stoners" or "druggies" or "burnouts" (usually heavy marijuana users), "drama kids" (or "queens" for both sexes), "skaters" or "boarders" (skateboarders), and, of course, "brains," "nerds," "brainiacs," "dweebs" (high achievers with low social skills). Although local parlance may provide a variety of colorful terms to describe various student social categories, students at the bottom are there because of perceived personal inadequacies; they are members of despised ethnic groups, or of disaffected youth subcultures, often categorized under the generic label "Goth" (Hodkinson 2002).

The consolidation of the adolescent peer group is a highly complex process. During this particular phase, peer relationships are unstable and fraught with conflict (Eder and Sandford 1986; Pellegrini and Bartini 2000; Pellegrini and Long 2002). Even elite status is no bulwark against rejection. Saying the wrong thing, being seen with the wrong people, or alienating the wrong person can change a young adolescent's status literally overnight (Milner 2006). The peer group can be unforgiving.

Milner (2006) notes that gossip plays an important role in the structuration of the adolescent female peer group. Among female adolescents, position in the informal information network is a prime indicator of social status. Gossip, as the transmission of negative information about an individual or group, is used as a weapon in the

status struggle. It is used to lower the status of those it targets. For example, at Columbine High School, the homecoming queen and girlfriend of the star of the football team tried to break up with him because of his possessiveness and threatened violence toward her. He became so violent that she obtained a restraining order against him. In retaliation, his buddies on the football team claimed that she was a slut and was having sexual relations with numerous team members. The following interview excerpt also illustrates the point:

RL: How would you know that you're getting ahead?

Female Student 2:   It's a jealousy/gossip game. It went, "Oh, hi! I have more money than you do, but I need to keep my status, so I'm going to pretend like I like you, that I like these other people who have more money than I do." . . . I did hang out with this girl who hung out with a lot of the very popular girls, and so I'd be around them, and they would talk and say horrible things about her, and she would go and say horrible things about them, and it's just like I never understood it but it's a whole status thing . . .

FS3:   Where you try to slander someone else's name to [raise your own status].

FS2:   . . . It's like people with nothing better to do than to try and make gossip about someone else so they can have status in our school (Larkin 2007, pp. 69–70).

Gossip, however, is a double-edged weapon. It can be used to tear down the reputation of a rival (Adler and Adler 1998), but the spreading of gossip can boomerang. Perhaps the target is more powerful than originally thought or the circumstances are disadvantageous. Status in the peer group can determine who can say what about whom. If a lower-status member of the group initiates gossip about a higher-status member, such behavior may be perceived as inappropriate to her status and she can be sanctioned accordingly.

7.3   The Rewards of Bullying

Researchers point out that one way to reduce bullying in schools is to eliminate the rewards for bullying (Garbarino and deLara 2002; Olweus 1993). One of the more intriguing outcomes of the research on bullying is the observation that bullies tend to have higher social status than their victims (Espelage and Holt 2001; Salmivalli et al. 1996). Bullying provides individual and collective rewards. The individual bully demonstrates dominance over the victim, which enhances self-esteem and self-perceptions of social competence (Graham and Bellmore 2007; Nation et al. 2008) and acceptance among like-minded peers (Espelage et al. 2003; Olthof and Goossens 2008; Pellegrini and Blatchford 2000).

Social hierarchies of dominance and subordination are maintained, in part, through aggression and violence (Kolbert and Crothers 2003), where elites maintain their domination and increase their social distance from their inferiors through the threat and judicious use of interpersonal violence (Milner 2006; Pellegrini and

Long 2002). The reward for violence down the social hierarchy is enhanced social status. Research conducted by Salmivalli et al. (1996), Rodkin et al. (2000), and Adler and Adler (1998) demonstrates that there is usually a coterie of aggressive bullies within the popular student crowd. That is, the dominant group of elite students usually contains a subcategory of enforcers. It is not surprising that these enforcers tend to be members of the wrestling and football teams, both of which are contact sports and around which a cult of violence exists (Kreager 2007). The function of the enforcers is to maintain social distance between elites and lower-status peers. Because all elite students benefit from the violence perpetrated by the enforcers, even though many might find such violence personally objectionable, it is tacitly accepted, especially when it is directed towards outcast students who regard the social structure as unjust and illegitimate. Although this violence may be direct or indirect, dyadic or perpetrated by large groups, all students participate in it within the social system of the school, even, or perhaps especially, when they reject it, which may make them targets of predatory violence. No student is spared.

Within the student culture of Columbine High School, students differentiated between "athletes" and "jocks," with the former term designating students who played sports and were recognized for their athletic contributions and the latter applied to a status group among athletes who were aggressive, intimidating, and responsible for most of the bullying at Columbine (Huerter 2000). The following interview illustrates the point.

> To me there . . . were the *jocks* and there were the *athletes*. "Jocks" were the jerks who made fun of people and, who decided to, they were just ignorant and stupid; they weren't, they didn't use their brains like they should have. "Athletes," on the other hand, participated in sports and used their brains and were nice caring people (Larkin 2007, pp. 67–68).

Students in school are powerless relative to the adults. However, it is not true that all are equally powerless; some students have much more power than others. The differentiation of the adolescent social structure reveals that students at the top are ceded power to control the behavior of their lower-status peers (Milner 2006). In my study of an upper-middle-class high school in the wake of the student movements of the 1960s and early 1970s (Larkin 1979), I reported that the "radicalized" politically active students found themselves in the unenviable position of having to sanction oppositional behavior of their peers, such as minor acts of vandalism and smoking marijuana on campus, for fear that such behaviors would lead to a crackdown by the administration that would reduce student rights and participation in the school's political processes, which eventually occurred. The principle of ceding authority to elite students to sanctioning their own in schools where the elites are not so conscientious rapidly leads to physical and emotional abuse. Dominant student elites view it as their legitimate right to intimidate, harass, humiliate, and commit violence against their lesser peers, not just because of the acquiescence of lower-status students, but because there is a tacit social contract between adult authorities and student elites. At Columbine, teachers did not want to get involved in what they perceived as "student disputes," and the administration tended to be comprised of

coaches and former coaches, who accepted—and in some cases actively participated in—the school ethos of hypermasculinity. A student at Columbine High School wrote (Brown and Merritt 2002, p. 50):

> One guy, a wrestler who everyone knew to avoid, liked to make kids get down on the ground and push pennies along the floor with their noses. This is what happened during school hours, as kids were passing from one class to another. Teachers would see it and look the other way. "Boys will be boys," they'd say, and laugh (Brown and Merritt 2002, p. 50).

The social contract between adult authorities and student elites allows the latter a wide range of behaviors in their relationships with their lower-status peers. Student elites are provided a bounded autonomy in peer relations that is not granted to other students. They are allowed to sanction their peers to the extent that it does not disrupt the functioning of the school, threaten the authority of the adults, or become so egregious that it threatens the social contract by becoming visible to other authorities, as was evidenced in the Glen Ridge rape case, which is described below (Lefkowitz 1997).

7.4 Differential Treatment of Student Elites

The literature is rife with instances of differential treatment of elite and non-elite students (Eckert 1989; Milner 2006; Kovach and Campo-Flores 2007). Studies of Columbine High School report numerous instances of differential treatment (Huerter 2000; Larkin 2007). A championship wrestler who smashed up his car and was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol was bailed out of jail by his coach who, instead of having him suspended, personally drove him to a wrestling match so that he could compete. After the Columbine shootings, an all-star fullback for the Columbine High School Rebel football team, whose girlfriend obtained a restraining order against him because he was stalking her, was allowed to remain in school while the girlfriend was offered home schooling to prevent him from violating the terms of the restraining order. The administration of Columbine High School ignored the behavior of two athletes who were harassing a Jewish student with anti-Semitic remarks and assaults until his father threatened to call the police. One student, who was a member of the infamous Trenchcoat Mafia related the following story:

> I was sitting in the lunchroom in my free hour, just talking with my friends, and the guy who was most popular at the time . . . He would come down . . . it seemed like he was trying to pick a fight with me or just trying to belittle me, and one of the—he happened to be the star player on one of the wrestling teams—but I don't think it was his coach, but like an assistant coach or something, who also happened to be the vice principal at the time, came up and also joined in.
> Interviewer: What did the Vice Principal say?
> It wasn't really that he said anything. He was kind of in there, cheering him on. Basically the "attaboy" type of thing (Larkin 2007, p. 99).

Another student named the same coach in an incident in the hallway where the coach, who was using a bull horn to control traffic in the hallway, handed it over to

an athlete who used it to publicly call the girlfriend of the all-star fullback a whore. She stated that the coach thought that the incident was very funny until he realized that he could get in trouble for it; he then retrieved the bullhorn from the athlete.

Lefkowitz (1997) describes how elite students are given greater latitude than their lesser status peers in his study of the infamous Glen Ridge High School rape case where 13 athletes conspired to rape a mentally retarded peer. In this particular community, the elite athletes, although not particularly good on the football field, were completely out of control. Prior to the rape, they stole several hundred dollars at the Christmas prom by rifling through the wallets left in the pockets of jackets hung on the backs of chairs, completely trashed a house in a neighboring community, burning pets in the process, and were routinely drunk and disorderly in the town. The police were accused of treating athletes differentially by taking them home when they were drunk while arresting their lower-status peers for the same crimes. In addition, because the police chief's son was one of the rapists, they attempted to cover up the rape and pressure the parents of the victim to withdraw the charges. The school administration also attempted to minimize the criminal behavior of the boys. In the case of the stolen wallets, the administration demanded restitution without punishment. Athletes involved in the house trashing, which was estimated at $60,000 worth of damage, were released to their parents, again, without punishment.

Another celebrated instance of differential treatment was the Spur Posse scandal at suburban Lakewood High School in Los Angeles County. The Spur Posse was a self-formed fraternity of star athletes whose goal was to have sex with as many girls as possible (Faludi 1999; Wooden and Blazak 2001), mimicking the behavior of members of the San Antonio professional basketball team, from which they took their moniker. They then publicly labeled girls with whom they had sex as sluts and whores. Eight members were arrested by the police on a variety of charges, including rape, burglary, assault, and intimidation of witnesses. When the indictments were announced, the students became celebrities, and their accusers were defamed by other students who supported the Spur Posse members. Several of the boys made appearances on talk shows including *The Jenny Jones Show*, *The Jane Whitney Show*, *Maury Povich*, *Dateline NBC*, and *The Tonight Show*. One parent bragged to the press about the virility of his son.

Such egregious behavior is not exclusive to male students. At McKinney North High School in a suburb of Dallas, several members of the cheerleading team, led by the daughter of the principal, apparently had free reign over the school without fear of sanction (Kovach and Campo-Flores 2007). Teachers had no authority over their behavior, which included talking on cell phones during class, talking back to teachers and ignoring requests and demands to stop disrupting class, intimidating cheerleading coaches, public drunkenness, and posting sexually suggestive pictures of themselves on MySpace.com. Their behavior and its tolerance created such an outrage that the community rose up and forced the school board to terminate the principal's contract.

7.5 Learning One's Place

The adolescent peer structure is highly conservative and demands conformance, especially in the early years (Eder and Sandford 1986; Milner 2006). The adolescent peer group is at its most tyrannical in early adolescence, when the structure is more fluid, statuses are liminal, and identities are in formation (Pellegrini et al. 2010). As students mature and the peer structure consolidates, students become more sophisticated and less intimidated by the behavior of their peers. For example, one high school student related the following:

> You had your skaters, you had your stoners, you had your academics or nerds, I guess, and the crowd I ran with for the most part, we really didn't feel into anything. There was no real archetype for us. We called ourselves "the posse" and included eight guys from the school and then there were two guys who didn't go to the school. And one guy was a football player, a couple were stoners, some were academics or nerds, if you want to call them that. A couple of other guys were on the swim team with me. Another guy was a skater, all that kind of stuff. We were just the melting pot of different male cliques within the school (Larkin 2007, p. 74).

Many high school students, especially those in the middle, tended to view the peer structure of their high schools and the importance of status as something alien to themselves. The speaker above almost views his particular clique as outside the social structure and unidentifiable because of its diversity of membership. Other students viewed themselves as "floaters" that drifted among the various status groups. For example:

> I guess some of the people I hung out with, we were more, I guess, floaters, you know, where we wouldn't be strictly stuck into one group. I didn't hang out with the jocks or anything like that, but, you know, I'd hang out kind of with the members of different groups of people (Larkin 2007, p. 76).

This form of independence is a luxury of being in the middle of the peer group structure (Adler and Adler 1998; Eckert 1989). It is for several reasons not an option for students either at the top or at the bottom. First, students at the top have a vested interest in their own elite status. It is a possession to be guarded at all costs in a zero sum game. As stated by Milner:

> Because status is relatively inexpansible, those who initially gain high status are very reluctant to improve the status of inferiors by associating with them. Intuitively they know that allowing others to move up threatens their own position. . . . In most high schools, very few people are able to change their status or their group ties after the first or second year (2006, p. 85).

Second, high social status confers social privilege. Others acknowledge elite status, even if grudgingly. Popularity, public esteem, notoriety, reputation as a person to be reckoned with are all outcomes of high status. As noted above, elite students are allowed a wider a range of legitimated behaviors than their lower-status peers. When confronted by adult authorities, they are given the benefit of the doubt. In more egregious cases, behavior that adults would not tolerate for non-elite students is excused, and in some cases, even felonious behavior was covered up (Kovach and Campo-Flores 2007; Larkin 2007; Lefkowitz 1997).

Autonomy from the status structure is not available to students at the bottom either. As with elites, they are publicly identified; they are also stigmatized. As such, they become targets for predation, humiliation, and violence. Because of their degraded status, there is a public assumption that they "deserve" the indignities visited upon them by others (Larkin 2007; Milner 2006). Students at the low end of the peer structure tend to cohere in dissident subcultures that reject the legitimacy of the status system that degrades them. They act differently, dress differently, listen to different music, and do not have the "school spirit" that other students have. They are not going to cheer on a football team whose members routinely harass and humiliate them.

Even though they reject the legitimacy of the adolescent peer structure, they cannot escape from it because they are identified as its "losers" and subjected to indignities visited upon them as a consequence of their status (Gaines 1993). For many, their outcast status becomes a badge of honor. This was the case with the Trenchcoat Mafia at Columbine High School (Larkin 2007).

Even though outcast students perceived the peer structure as lacking legitimacy, the vast majority of students did not. In addition, the adults within the community accepted the facticity of the adolescent peer structure and many supported it because the athletes at the top gave the school visibility through its championship sports teams. The violence perpetrated within adolescent peer structure, at least at Columbine High School, created a living hell for outcast students (Larkin 2007). They could not possibly extricate themselves from the web of social relationships in which they were defined as the lowest of the low, and therefore objects of predatory violence.

7.6 The Legitimation of Elite Violence

Research consistently indicates that in the vast majority of suburban and rural high schools in the United States, the jocks form the dominant elite (Bissinger 1990; Coleman 1961; Eckert 1989; Gaines 1993; Larkin 2007; Milner 2006; Wooden and Blazak 2001). This puts them in a power position where they sanction other students and protect and enhance their own positions. Because adolescents are not fully mature human beings and because, for the most part, their behavior is not closely monitored by adult authorities, they are not constrained from using psychological and physical violence. Milner referred to such ubiquitous low-level violence as "small cruelties" (2006, p. 87). However, these small cruelties build up over time, especially since they tend to be visited on the same victims repeatedly because of their vulnerability. In addition, small cruelties easily escalate into a culture of violence, in which the bullying of the elites sets an example for the rest of the school and generates a norm in which it becomes permissible to harass and humiliate those of lesser status because they are perceived as occupying not only a position of lower social status, but of lower moral status. Therefore, psychological and physical

violence become legitimated as sanctioning techniques designed ostensibly to keep potentially deviant students in check.

The following was reported in the Columbine study:

> Harris and Klebold . . . would follow my brother around and threaten they were going to kill him. It got to the point where my brother didn't want to go to school at all, because he was very intimidated by them (Larkin 2007, p. 92).

Harris and Klebold were at the bottom of the peer structure. The brother of the interviewee was a special education student, a member of a status group that was even lower than Harris and Klebold. Given the climate of the school where bullying was tolerated among the elite students, some non-elite students intuited that bullying would not be sanctioned as long as the victims were of low status, thus establishing a pecking order (Phillips 2003). The first student Harris and Klebold killed when they entered the library was a Hispanic special education student named Kyle Velasquez.

7.7   Bullying and School Rampage Shootings

This researcher created a database of US secondary school rampage shootings and verified post-Columbine (1999–2007) attempted shootings (Larkin 2009) classified by whether there was evidence of bullying and the motivation of the shooter. The database begins in 1974 with the rampage shooting of Anthony Barbaro in Olean, NY, and ends in March 2012 with T. J. Lane in a Cleveland, Ohio, suburb. Sources for the list include Newman (2004), the US Secret Service (Moore et al. 2003), compilations by Lampe (2000, 2005, 2007), and entries on recent shootings compiled from media reports. The database uses the definition of rampage shootings promulgated by Newman (2004), Muschert (2007), and Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002), described in the introduction. Because many of the lists contain school shootings that do not conform to the definition of rampage shootings, each shooting was examined through media accounts, journal articles, and books. Those that did not conform were not included in the database.

The compilation contains 38 middle and high school rampage shooters from 36 separate instances (Columbine and Jonesboro, Arkansas, were perpetrated by two shooters each). Of those 38 shooters, at least 20 (52.6%) were motivated by revenge against bullying, harassment, and intimidation by their peers. In some cases, especially those prior to Columbine, the media focused on the family relations and psychology of the shooter and did not comment on peer relations. Of the 11 verified post-Columbine attempted shootings (disrupted within days and sometimes hours of the planned attack), all were self perceived as revenge killings for bullying and harassment (Larkin 2009).

In some cases, as with Charles "Andy" Andrew Williams, the bullying was so intense it bordered on torture (McCarthy 2001; Williams 2005). In addition to taunting, stealing his property, pushing, shoving, and hitting, bullying students burned his skin with cigarette lighters. In several of the most violent rampage shootings, the

shooters complained bitterly about bullying, harassment, and disrespecting behaviors on the part of their peers. This was certainly true of the Columbine shooters, who wrote extensively about the harassment and the desire for revenge (Böckler et al. 2011; Larkin 2007). Barry Loukaitis, who killed three persons and wounded one in Moses Lake, Washington, in 1966, and Luke Woodham, who killed two and wounded seven in Pearl, Mississippi, in 1967, were both loners who were severely bullied by their peers (Bellini 2001; Lieberman 2006). In the Finnish cases of Pekka-Eric Auvinen and Matti Saari, revenge for harassment and bullying was the motivation of the killers and peers were their targets (Kiilakoski and Oksanen 2011).

In at least three cases, students who threatened or "leaked" their intentions of engaging in a rampage shooting were goaded by peers to carry them out. When Andy Williams claimed he was going to "do a Columbine" on his high school in Santee, California, fellow students claimed that he was too much of a "pussy" to carry it out (Ames 2005). Similarly, Michael Carneal, who killed three students and wounded five others in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1997, revealed his plans to a group of students he wanted to impress. They claimed he was too much of a wimp to enact his plans, so he told them where they should stand to witness the shootings (Newman 2004). Luke Woodham was also goaded into his rampage shooting by a fellow member of his Dungeons & Dragons group (Bellini 2001); Woodham, a bright student who lacked social skills, was manipulated into his rampage by Grant Boyette, 2 years his senior, who was convicted of conspiracy in the shooting.

The evidence suggests that the majority of school rampage shootings result from intergroup conflict among the students. In 24 of the 36 shootings (66.7%), the prime target was peers. The shooter's peer status was determined in 25 of the 38 cases. Of those 25 students, 21 (84.0%) were either outcasts or loners who were rejected by their peers either as individuals or as members of identifiable low-status collectivities, such as Columbine's "Trenchcoat Mafia." These data suggest, as do the perpetrators' testimony, writings, videotapes, manifestos, and self-composed websites and YouTube videos, that school shootings tend to be motivated by revenge among despised and rejected students for the abuse they receive at the hands of their higher-status peers.

7.8 Ideological Blindness

It is almost a truism that school authorities underestimate the amount of violence in their schools relative to student perceptions (Sanko 2000). Not only do almost all interpersonal violence, harassment, and intimidation occur outside the purview of adults, but given the social contract, adult authorities tend to exhibit ideological blindness to elite violence while pursuing hypervigilance against violence from outcast or anti-school-oriented students (Prendergast 1999).

All social institutions, including schools, have a cultural dimension. It is nothing new to refer to the "culture" of the school (Maehr and Midgley 1996). Because schools are hierarchical structures in which power is unequally distributed between

adult authorities and students, a major aspect of that culture justifies the hierarchy and the exercise of power by officeholders within that structure. The worldview that justifies the hierarchical power arrangements I will call, after Gramsci (1957), the "hegemonic interpretation of reality." Although some parts of this reality system are codified in legal codes and administrative rulings, most of it is a loosely held set of assumptions, some of which may be contradictory. For example, it is assumed that a high school is a place of learning; it is also a place where teenagers are compelled under threat of law to be supervised by adults. The hegemonic interpretation of reality emphasizes the former and de-emphasizes the latter (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Foss and Larkin 1986).

The hegemonic interpretation of reality is reproduced at every level of social organization from societal to institutional, organizational, and interpersonal. It is mediated by language and is seen from the outside as a shared culture. Within the school it defines what an administrator is and does, the role obligations of teachers, and the responsibilities and autonomous areas of control ceded to students. As a worldview it has a certain amount of cohesiveness; however, because of necessary contradictions, reality leaks. Moreover, each identifiable status group within the organization has its own way of interpreting reality in line with its interests. Administrators, teachers, and students have their own interpretations of reality, varying around a set of core values that are accepted by all or nearly all. It is generally accepted that grades are reflective of learning and achievement, that teachers have a legitimate right to dispense information to students and to test them on their knowledge of it, that they have the right and responsibility to intervene in conflicts between students, and so forth. Sexual relations between students and adult authorities are proscribed. Students are not allowed to harass, bully, or intimidate their peers.

A major function of the hegemonic ideology is to present the social organization as more cohesive than it actually is (Foss and Larkin 1986). Therefore, those who accept the hegemonic ideology will downplay conflicts and highlight consensus. The study of Columbine High School, the site of the worst high school rampage shooting in US history, found two sets of realities: that accepted by the vast majority of administrators, teachers, students, and community members, and an opposition ideology reflective of the experiences of the outcast students, which belied the beliefs shared by the rest of the community. After the shootings, as the community agonized over the question, "How could it happen here?" investigators and reporters began to explore "the cult of the athlete" (Adams and Russakoff 1999) at the high school. The school, which had been lauded for its high-powered academic program, sports achievements, and good student behavior, was now subject to scrutiny of the violence visited on the rest of the student population by a coterie of members of the football and wrestling teams. The hegemonic ideology had been punctured and a new version of the internal culture of Columbine High School was presented to America: one that tolerated violence and deviance in the service of maintaining championship sports teams (Larkin 2007). No longer could organized violence from above be defined out of existence, at least temporarily. But just a year later, the school had returned to the status quo ante (Meadows 2003).

7.9   Conclusion

Schools are both more and less violent than popular perceptions would suggest. On the one hand, schools are the safest environment for children (Brooks et al. 1999). Young people are less likely to be injured or killed in school than in any other environment. On the other hand, schools are arenas of bullying, intimidation, and humiliation for many (Garbarino and deLara 2002). The problems of bullying and interpersonal violence in schools have become an increasingly serious concern in recent years among both the general public and educational professionals (Larkin 2007).

The thesis of this paper is that much of the violence in middle and high schools is perpetrated by student elites organized around athletics that incorporate a norm of hypermasculinity. They use physical violence to enhance their own status and create social distance between themselves and their lower-status peers. Among females, the violence used to enhance their own status tends to be more psychological in nature, but is every bit is devastating to the victims.

Elite violence tends to be hidden and legitimized because it is perpetrated by the jocks/cheerleader set, who are supported by the adults because they provide the school its visibility and reputation by virtue of the exploits of its sports teams. Adults cede authority to peer group elites to police their own in so far as they do not undermine adult authority, interfere with the functioning of the school, or come to the attention of authorities outside the school. Because of tacit adult support, student elites perceive themselves as enforcing the moral order of the school. They themselves perceive their predatory behavior toward lower-status students, especially outcast students as giving lowlifes their just desserts because they do not share the attitudes, orientations, and behaviors of the majority. Such sanctioning usually occurs outside the purview of adults; it is often defined out of existence by elite students who claim that such behaviors are harmless, "boys will be boys," and they are just fooling around (Larkin 2007).

Because of its legitimated status among the adults as well as the students, predatory behavior among the elites becomes invisible, under a hegemonic ideology that defines student elites as "the good students," compared to the outcast students, who are often bright and intellectual but do not share in the hegemonic ideology. Because they are the victims of the violence, they see adult authorities as biased against them and do not trust them. They understand that the rest of the student body rejects them and sees them as a blight on the good reputation of the school. Every once in a while, as in the case of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, they will pick up the gun and exact revenge for the predation visited upon them.

Zero tolerance policies have been criticized for negative emphasis, raising tensions within the school, and lacking effectiveness in lowering violence (Brooks et al. 1999; Garbarino and deLara 2002). When school authorities expect violence and become hypervigilant, giving the school the atmosphere of a minimum security prison, it is increasingly likely that students will meet expectations of increased violence. However, given the stratified nature of the school community, zero tolerance policies will be

differentially applied, exacerbating the feelings of alienation of outcast students who, given the hegemonic ideology, will become targets of increased surveillance.

High schools exist in an open relationship with the communities they serve. That is, they reflect the stratification of and relationships between status groups in the larger community. They also have the power to influence the normative structure in the communities in which they exist, because they are responsible for socializing their children. In the neighborhoods surrounding Columbine High School, intolerance to difference festered, and was encouraged by evangelistic clergy competing for membership in their congregations. Administrators, coaches, and teachers turned a blind eye to that intolerance and allowed and even abetted the persecution of a small group of students who rejected the dominant ideology of the school and bent norms on dress, musical preferences, and gender roles. The failure at Columbine is too often replicated throughout American high schools, which need to develop environments of tolerance, cooperation, respect for differences, and conflict mediation.

Adult authorities in schools are role models for their students. If they abdicate their responsibilities as upholders of democratic norms of equal treatment for all and the inherent value of the individual, and are not willing to stand up against injustice wherever it may occur, they merely exacerbate intergroup conflicts within the school—and Columbine was a school that was overwhelmingly white and middle-class. There were simply not enough Hispanics or African-Americans to create a critical mass of identifiable ethnic groups, even though of the 12 students killed, one was a Hispanic and the other was selected for death because he was an African-American.

It is the moral obligation of adult authorities in high schools to create a climate of tolerance and to include students to the greatest possible extent in maintaining a peaceable social climate. In these days of declining investment in education in the United States, with increased competition among students for scarce resources and access to institutions of higher education, educators need to provide a counterbalance that focuses on cooperation, mutual aid, and community building within the walls of their schools. High school students are adolescents in transition between childhood and adulthood. Beyond SAT scores, college applications, and their adult futures, they need to experience the reality of living cooperatively and peacefully in a community in which all contribute according to their ability and in which all receive according to their need.

References

Adams, L., & Russakoff, D. (1999, June 13). High schools' "cult of the athlete" under scrutiny. Washington Post, 1ff.

Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (1998). *Peer power: Preadolescent culture and identity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ames, M. (2005). *Going postal: Rage, murder, and rebellion from Reagan's workplaces to Clinton's Columbine and beyond*. New York: Soft Skull.

Bellini, J. (2001). *Child's prey*. New York: Pinnacle.

Bissinger, H. G. (1990). *Friday night lights: A town, a team, and a dream*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2011). School shootings: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage in association with Theory, Culture & Society, Dept. of Administrative and Social Studies, Teesside Polytechnic.

Brooks, K., Schiraldi, V., & Ziedenberg, J. (1999). *School house hype: Two years later*. Washington, DC: The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice.

Brown, B., & Merritt, R. (2002). *No easy answers: The truth behind death at Columbine*. New York: Lantern.

Coleman, J. S. (1961). *The adolescent society; the social life of the teenager and its impact on education*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

Cullen, D. (2009). *Columbine*. New York: 12 Press.

DeVoe, J. F., Kaffenberger, S., & Chandler, K. (2005). *Student reports of bullying: Results from the 2001 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

Dijkstra, J. K., Lindenberg, S., & Veenstra, R. (2008). Beyond the class norm: Bullying behavior of popular adolescents and its relation to peer acceptance and rejection. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 36*(8), 1289–1299.

Eckert, P. (1989). *Jocks and burnouts: Social categories and identity in the high school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Eder, D., & Sandford, S. (1986). The development and maintenance of interaction norms among early adolescents. In P. A. Adler & P. Adler (Eds.), *Sociological studies of child development* (Vol. 1, pp. 283–300). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Erath, S. A., Flanagan, K. S., & Bierman, K. L. (2008). Early adolescent school adjustment: Associations with friendship and peer victimization. *Social Development, 17*(4), 853–870.

Espelage, D. L. (2002). *Bullying in early adolescence: The role of the peer group*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 471912) Retrieved February 2, 2011 from http://www.ericdi-gests.org/2003-4/bullying.html.

Espelage, D. L., & Holt, M. K. (2001). Bullying and victimization during early adolescence: Peer influences and psychosocial correlates. *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 2*(2/3), 123–142.

Espelage, D. L., Holt, M. K., & Henkel, R. R. (2003). Examination of peer-group contextual effects on aggression during early adolescence. *Child Development, 74*(1), 205–220.

Faludi, S. (1999). *Stiffed: The betrayal of the American man*. New York: William Morrow.

Foss, D. A., & Larkin, R. W. (1986). *Beyond revolution: A new theory of social movements*. South Hadley, MA: Bergen & Garvey.

Gaines, D. (1993). *Teenage wasteland: Suburbia's dead-end kids*. New York: HarperCollins.

Garbarino, J., & deLara, E. (2002). *And words can hurt forever*. New York: The Free Press.

Garner, R., Bootcheck, J., Lorr, M., & Rauch, K. (2006). The adolescent society revisited: Cultures, crowds, climates, and status structures in seven secondary schools. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(6), 1023–1035.

Gibbs, N., & Roche, T. (1999, December 20). The Columbine tapes. *Time Magazine*, 4ff.

Graham, S., & Bellmore, A. D. (2007). Peer victimization and mental health during early adolescence. *Theory Into Practice, 46*(2), 138–146.

Gramsci, A. (1957). *The modern prince and other writings*. New York: International Publishers.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. D. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies. *Sociological Methods & Research, 31*(2), 174.

Hodkinson, P. (2002). *Goth: Identity, style and subculture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Huerter, R. (2000). *The culture of Columbine*. Denver, CO: Governor's Columbine Commission.

Juvonen, J., & Ho, A. Y. (2008). Social motives underlying antisocial behavior across middle school grades. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*(6), 747–756.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011). Cultural and peer influences on homicidal violence: A Finnish perspective. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 31–42.

Kolbert, J. B., & Crothers, L. M. (2003). Bullying and evolutionary psychology: The dominance hierarchy among students and implications for school personnel. *Journal of School Violence, 2*(3), 73–91.

Kovach, G. C., & Campo-Flores, A. (2007). Scandal: Cheerleaders run amok in Texas. *Newsweek*. Retrieved October 17, 2011 from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16441559/site/newsweek/page/2/print/1/displaymode/1098.

Kreager, D. A. (2007). Unnecessary roughness? School sports, peer networks, and male adolescent violence. *American Sociological Review, 72*(5), 705–724.

Kurtz, H. (1999, 25 July). Columbine like a hologram: Life at school depends on angle of one's view. *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 4A.

Lampe, A. (2000). Violence in our schools: January 1, 1980 through December 31, 1999. Retrieved December 24, 2007 from http://www.columbine-angels.com/Shootings-1980-2000.htm.

Lampe, A. (2005). Violence in our schools: January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2004. Retrieved December 24, 2007 from http://www.columbine-angels.com/Shootings-2005-2009.htm.

Lampe, A. (2007). Violence in our schools: January 1, 2005 through July 31, 2007 Retrieved December 24, 2007 from http://www.columbine-angels.com/Shootings-2005-2009.htm.

Larkin, R. W. (1979). *Suburban youth in cultural crisis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Lefkowitz, B. (1997). *Our guys*. New York: Vintage.

Lieberman, J. (2006). *The shooting game*. Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks.

Maehr, M. L., & Midgley, C. (1996). *Transforming school cultures*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

McCarthy, T. (2001). Warning: Andy Williams here. Unhappy kid. Tired of being picked on. *Time.com*. Retrieved May 26, 2012 from http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,102077,00.html#.

Meadows, S. (2003, November 3). Ghosts of Columbine. *Newsweek,* 54–57.

Milner, M., Jr. (2006). *Freaks, geeks, and cool kids: American teenagers, schools, and the culture of consumption*. New York: Routledge.

Moore, M. H., Petrie, C. V., Braga, A. A., & McLaughlin, B. L. (2003). *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Muschert, G. W. (2002). *Media and massacre: The social construction of the Columbine story*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.

Nation, M., Vieno, A., Perkins, D. D., & Santinello, M. (2008). Bullying in school and adolescent sense of empowerment: An analysis of relationships with parents, friends, and teachers. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 18*(3), 211–232.

Newman, K. S. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

Olthof, T., & Goossens, F. A. (2008). Bullying and the need to belong: Early adolescents' bullying-related behavior and the acceptance they desire and receive from particular classmates. *Social Development, 17*(1), 24–46.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Pellegrini, A. D. (2001). The roles of dominance and bullying in the development of early heterosexual relationships. *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 2*(2/3), 63–73.

Pellegrini, A. D., & Bartini, M. (2000). A longitudinal study of bullying, victimization, and peer affiliation during the transition from primary school to middle school. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*(3), 699–725.

Pellegrini, A. D., Bartini, M., & Brooks, F. (1999). School bullies, victims, and aggressive victims: Factors relating to group affiliation and victimization in early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*(2), 216–224.

Pellegrini, A. D., & Blatchford, P. (2000). *The child at school: Interactions with peers and teachers*. London: Oxford University Press.

Pellegrini, A. D., & Long, J. D. (2002). A longitudinal study of bullying, dominance, and victimization during the transition from primary school through secondary school. *The British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 20*(2), 259.

Pellegrini, A. D., Long, J. D., Solberg, D., Roseth, C., Dupuis, D., & Bohn, C. (2010). Bullying and social status during school transitions. In S. R. Jimerson, S. M. Swearer, & D. L. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 199–210). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Phillips, C. (2003). Who's who in the pecking order? Aggression and 'normal violence' in the lives of girls and boys. *British Journal of Criminology, 43*(4), 710–728. doi:10.1093/bjc/43.4.710.

Prendergast, A. (1999). Doom rules: Much of what we think we know about Columbine is wrong. Retrieved June 13, 2004 from http://www.westword.com/1999-08-05/news/doom-rules/.

Rodkin, P. C., Farmer, T. W., Pearl, R., & Van Acker, R. (2000). Heterogeneity of popular boys: Antisocial and prosocial configurations. *Developmental Psychology, 36*(1), 14–24.

Salmivalli, C., Lagerspetz, K., Bjorkqvist, K., Osterman, K., & Kaukiainen, A. (1996). Bullying as a group process: Participant roles in their relations to social status within the group. *Aggressive Behavior, 22*(1), 1–15.

Sanko, J. (2000, 18 September). School bell brings bullies, drugs across Colorado, kids paint unsettling picture of student life for touring Salazar, Elliott, *Rocky Mountain News,* pp. 1A, 8A. Retrieved May 27, 2002 from http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-81067980.html.

Williams, C. A. (2005). Andy speaks. Retrieved January 2, 2008 from http://www.andyspeaks.com/main.html.

Wooden, W. S., & Blazak, R. (2001). *Renegade kids, suburban outlaws: From youth culture to delinquency* (2dth ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Chapter 8
Jeffrey Weise and the Shooting at Red Lake Minnesota High School: A Behavioral Perspective

Mary Ellen O'Toole

As you read this, Jeffrey Weise will have been dead for years. So are the nine people he killed that morning of March 21, 2005. He was the tenth victim. The shooting at Red Lake High School is one of the four most lethal school shootings to have ever occurred in the United States. The others, over the past half-century, were: The Texas Tower Shooting on August 1, 1966; The Columbine School Shooting, April 20, 1999; The Virginia Tech University Shooting, April 16, 2007.

School shootings of this magnitude are a phenomenon that emerged in the last half of the twentieth century when the heavily armed Charles Whitman walked to the top of the tower on the campus of the University of Texas. Over the course of 90 min Whitman shot and killed 16 people and injured another 32 (FBI, 2009; Lavergne, 1997). Prior to the Whitman shooting, this type of crime was unheard-of. In fact, there had been only one previous major school mass killing event in the United States. This incident occurred in Bath, Michigan in 1927 when 55-year-old Andrew Kehoe placed explosives in the school basement over a period of 6 months. Kehoe was reportedly upset over a new school tax that was being levied on city residents. Prior to detonating the explosives at the school, he killed his wife and many of his farm animals. At the end of the day, Kehoe had killed 45 people including himself and injured more than 56 (Bernstein, 2009).

While these lethal school shootings are rare, when they occur they are devastating, life-changing events, and always leave people shaking their heads and asking the question: "What was the motive?"

M.E. O'Toole (✉)
Behavioral Analysis Unit, Federal Bureau of Investigation (Retired),
Quantico, VA, USA
e-mail: maryellen.otoole@gmail.com

There are some who might say that these shooters *snapped* and became violent. But this could not be further from the truth. Cases like Red Lake High School show behavioral evidence of preplanning, and appear predatory in nature. Predatory behavior within the context of a crime indicates the offender's violence appears purposeful, focused, and cold-blooded (Cornell et al., 1996; O'Toole, 2007; Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Predatory behavior also suggests the offender's cognitive abilities are functioning and he or she is able to make strategic decisions even surrounded by chaos. These offenders also seem hypoemotional (lacking in emotion) and mission-oriented—committed to achieving their goals, which can include maximum lethality (Niehoff, 1999; O'Toole, 2008).

In order to understand Jeffrey Weise and what happened, let us go back to that day in March 2005, and look at this case from several *behavioral* perspectives, i.e., looking at Jeffrey Weise's crimes through a behavioral lens—his behavior before, during, and at the conclusion of the crime and consider *possible* interpretations for this behavior.

8.1 Red Lake High School

Red Lake High School is located in a remote part of Minnesota on the Red Lake Indian Reservation and about 75 miles (120 km) south of the Canadian border. It is approximately 250 miles (400 km) northwest of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, known as the Twin Cities. At the time of shooting, most of the students were native Americans, and many were members of the Chippewa Tribe.

Jeffrey Weise was a 16-year-old Native American who was living with his grandmother in Red Lake. He had been suspended from the high school and was being tutored at home by a visiting teacher (Troubled teen kills nine and himself, at Red Lake, 2005).

Jeffrey was the only child of an unwed couple from the area. His mother was living in a nursing home in another city, suffering from brain damage as the result of a car accident. His father had committed suicide years before. Jeffrey's family dynamics are interesting. However, this was a criminal investigation and not a psychological autopsy, and exactly how these dynamics factored into Weise's development and his decision to commit the murders is not clear and is therefore open to some speculation (Shooter obsessed with violence, 2005).

8.2 Understanding Jeffrey Weise

There remain many questions about Jeffrey Weise: who he was, his motivations, his family dynamics, and the role these dynamics played in his development toward becoming a mass killer.

Jeffrey first began attending Red Lake High School in 2003. However the following year he was suspended after being suspected of making threats about "shooting

up" the school around the time of the anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting (Minnesota killer admired Hitler, 2005).

Some people who knew Weise reported he had been bullied on occasion in school. However, it is likely that because Weise was large for his age compared to the other students, and seen by some as having problems, he may have been viewed as somewhat intimidating to some students and less likely to be bullied on a regular basis. Also, at the time of the shooting, he had not been attending the school, and was therefore not exposed to ongoing bullying behavior. Weise reportedly liked Goth and preferred dressing in black clothes including a long black trench coat, which he wore on the day of the shooting (Gunderson, 2005; Minnesota killer admired Hitler, 2005; School gunman stole police pistol, vest (2005)).

There were conflicting descriptions of Weise's personality by people who knew him. In the beginning of his time at Red Lake High School some described Weise as more of a loner, "weird," with behavior problems. However there were also those who described him as more outgoing, a person who had a circle of friends (Gunderson 2005; Minnesota killer admired Hitler, 2005; Shooter obsessed with violence, 2005).

Weise suffered from bouts of depression and may have attempted suicide on a prior occasion. He was fascinated by the Columbine High School shooting, watching videos, and movies about the shooting and discussing his fascination with Columbine with others as well as online. Weise also had an interest in Adolf Hitler and it was suggested he actually planned his shooting to correspond with Hitler's birthday on April 20, but for unknown reasons carried it out nearly a month ahead of this date (Minnesota killer admired Hitler, 2005).

8.3 Criminal Investigative Analysis: A Behavioral Approach Toward Understanding Violent Criminal Behavior

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU), which is part of the FBI's Critical Incident Response Group is located at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. The BAU evolved out of the Behavioral Sciences Unit (BSU), which was established in the mid-1970s. While both Units still exist, their law enforcement missions are different. The BSU is primarily a research and training Unit, training both new agents as well as students attending the FBI's National Academy, a 3-month academy attended by law enforcement executives from all over the world.

The BAU is primarily an operational unit, and its Agent–Analysts assist law enforcement agencies internationally by analyzing violent crime scene behavior and preparing behavioral assessments of the crime and type of person responsible. The BAU's FBI Agents are highly trained and experienced investigators with specialized training in a wide range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, forensics, forensic pathology, adolescent violence, sex crimes, crime analysis, interviewing, statement analysis, and crime patterns (O'Toole, 2007).

The FBI uses a unique two-part process to analyze violent crime scenes. This process, known as Criminal Investigative Analysis (CIA), involves identifying every behavioral and forensic variable at a violent crime scene and then behaviorally interpreting these variables as an aggregate. Some of these variables include victimology; the victim selection process; offender risk level; offender–victim relationships; offender–victim verbal, physical, and sexual interaction; injury pattern to the victim and body disposal method and style of assault, including sexual assault; the degree of control exercised by the offender; the amount of planning involved in the crime; the degree of criminal sophistication; choice of weapon; and forensic evidence recovered from the scene. Singular crime scene behaviors are not isolated or ascribed a greater significance over clusters of crime scene behaviors. Violent crime scene behaviors are analyzed as an aggregate, *the totality of the circumstances*, in order to construct a behavioral blueprint of the crime and the personality of the offender (O'Toole, 2007).

Once crime scene behaviors have been identified, their meaning must be interpreted. The ability to interpret crime scene behavior is the cumulative result of education, specialized training in a wide range of disciplines, and experience in reviewing and analyzing hundreds of cases. This cumulative experience, as well as knowledge of current empirical research in multiple disciplines, provides a strong foundation for a sound and reliable interpretation of a violent crime scene. However, the most important component for crime scene assessment, underpinning all the other qualifications, is the analyst's strong investigative background. This experience is absolutely essential to reliably interpreting a crime scene. Without real experience, the analysis becomes primarily an academic effort (O'Toole, 2007).

There are many variables that can account for the etiology and development of a violent offender including the offender's social and family dynamics. However, behavioral analysts confine their interpretations of the crime to behaviors that can be observed at the scene. To opine for example about early family dynamics and their role in the behavior at the crime scene in question would be speculative to some extent and could result in the analysis falling outside the parameters of an investigative tool and possibly creating credibility problems for the assessment itself and its use in the investigation and later on in court.

8.4   The Day of the Shooting

On the morning of March 21, 2005, Jeffrey went to the home of his grandfather, 59-year-old Daryl Lussier, a local law enforcement officer, where he shot and killed Lussier and Lussier's 31-year-old girlfriend as they both lay in bed sleeping. Jeffrey took his grandfather's bullet vest and selected specific guns from his grandfather's gun collection along with ammunition. One of the weapons Weise selected was a shotgun and the other was an automatic pistol. After loading both weapons, Jeffrey drove his grandfather's marked police vehicle to Red Lake High School. He drove up in front of the school and parked the car immediately in front of the main

entrance. Video cameras in the school pick up Weise, dressed in black, getting out of the car, and casually walking into the building. He is carrying the shotgun close to his side with the muzzle pointing toward the ground. Without hesitation, Weise walks through the glass double doors straight toward the magnetometer (metal detector) that is located at the entrance. Two uniformed security officers, a man and a woman, were positioned at the entrance near the magnetometer. Weise nonchalantly shoots and kills the male officer. The female officer realizes what is happening, and runs down a hallway alerting students and faculty (School gunman stole police pistol, vest, 2005).

What was particularly striking about Weise's behavior that day is that he roamed the school's hallways, not in a frenzied, emotional state but rather in a cool, calm, and collected manner. He was not running, or even walking fast. He did not appear distressed or anxious, but seemed at ease. In fact some witnesses reported that he was grinning and waving during the shooting. As people realized what was happening, teachers locked classroom doors and huddled with their students behind bookcases and under desks. Weise did not appear deterred by locked doors or flustered by the chaos going on around him (High school shooting spree leaves 10 dead, 2005).

To gain access to some of the rooms, Weise kicked out the glass from the doors, stepped into the classroom and shot at the students and teachers huddled on the floor and under desks (Huppert, 2010). Weise entered several classrooms at least twice killing and injuring students and faculty both times. The classrooms he entered multiple times contained most of his victims (Red Lake School Shooting Survivor Shares her Story 2010).

Weise appeared to take one preemptive action during his shooting spree that lowered the number of casualties that day. Several of his friends were hiding with their teacher along with other students in one particular classroom. As he walked by, Weise reportedly looked into this room through a window in the door, made what appears to be a gesture with his hand, like a wave, and continued walking. His decision not to attempt to enter that room suggests he was able to think strategically, making a decision to not enter or even attempt to enter the room because he did not want to injure or kill his friends (High school shooting spree leaves 10 dead, 2005).

There is no behavioral indication that Weise's state of mind regarding his actions that day changed. In other words he did not lay down his weapons, retreat from the school, or engage in any other behavior to suggest he changed his mind about killing. He continued shooting until confronted by police officers in a classroom, where he was wounded and then took his own life.

Weise's behavior of returning to the same classroom more than once is something that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold did during the Columbine shooting, as did Seung-Hui Cho at Virginia Tech. Going back to the same room where the shooter knows there are more people he can attack actually makes sense from the offender's perspective, if his intent is to continue to shoot and kill as many people as possible. As a school shooting event like this ones evolves, a mission-oriented shooter is more likely to understand that potential victims are fleeing to safety with the passing

of every minute, and roaming around a building trying to access locked rooms costs them valuable time. Therefore returning to rooms where there are known numbers of potential victims supports a theory of maximum lethality and the intent to continue to kill.

There are other behaviors that support the theory that Weise wanted to kill as many people as possible that day. He selected weapons that were lethal, a shotgun and an automatic pistol. He could have brought only one gun with him or chosen another kind of weapon, for example a knife or a club, which would likely have resulted in fewer fatalities. He went hunting for his victims instead of remaining in a fixed location and waiting for victims to come to him. This enabled him to approach the victims and shoot from relatively close (in the same room), making it more likely his shots would be accurate and cause more damage.

8.5   The Rampage Ends

Red Lake High School is in a remote location a significant distance from municipal and state law enforcement agencies, whose ability to respond quickly that day was greatly diminished. However, a handful of Red Lake Tribal police officers were able to come to the school, and their response was swift and determined. Their decision that morning was to not wait for a tactical team but to make an immediate entry into the building. They realized it was an active shooter situation and quickly surmised that time would make the difference between life and death for many trapped in the building. Once inside the school, the armed officers located and confronted Weise where they shot and injured him. When this happened, Weise held his shotgun to his head and pulled the trigger. His death was immediate.

8.6   Role of the FBI in the Investigation

The lead investigative agency in this case was the FBI because the shooting occurred on United States property. FBI Agents from the Minneapolis, Minnesota, FBI Field Office were immediately dispatched to the school to conduct the investigation. Members of the FBI's Evidence Response Team (ERT) were also dispatched to process the crime scenes for valuable forensic evidence. The ERT agents are highly trained FBI agents and support staff who specialize in processing violent crime scenes. Agents from the FBI's BAU, with extensive backgrounds in school violence and crime scene analysis, also responded to the scene from their offices in Quantico, Virginia, including this author. The role of the BAU agents was to consult with investigators about the behavior at the scene, possible motivations, the warning signs that may have been present before the event, and whether or not others might have been involved in the planning of the shooting.

8.7   FBI's Research on School Violence

Why would a student bring a weapon to school and without any explicable reason open fire on fellow students and teachers? Are school shooters angry? Are they crazy? Is their motive revenge? Hatred for the victims? A hunger for attention?

In May, 1998, the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC), the BAU, implemented a research initiative to study the recent occurrences of school shootings from a behavioral and threat assessment perspective. The original research was designed to study specific cases of school shootings in order to develop a better understanding of how and why they occurred. The FBI looked at the behavior at the scene, the shooter's background, the school's dynamics, bullying behavior, and other social variables that might have played a role. Eighteen cases of school shootings were ultimately identified and included in the FBI's study (O'Toole, 2000).

The shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in April 1999, shocked the country and gave new urgency to the FBI's research effort. With the support of United States Attorney General Janet M. Reno and FBI Director Louis J. Freeh, the FBI's NCAVC invited 160 educators, administrators, mental health professionals, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors to a symposium on school shootings and threat assessment in July 1999 to augment their research efforts. In attendance were teachers and administrators from all 18 schools involved in the NCAVC study including at least one person from each school who personally knew the shooter, FBI Agents who specialized in threat assessment and CIA, and the law enforcement officers who were involved in the investigation of each of the 18 cases. Also in attendance were experts in specific disciplines including adolescent violence, mental health, suicidology, psychopathy, and bullying behavior (O'Toole, 2000).

Based on the findings of the conference and other research, the FBI published the first law enforcement monograph on threat assessment in schools: *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*. This provides a model for Behavioral Assessment Teams, teachers, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and others to (1) review and assess threats made by a student and (2) assess the student making the threat in order to determine their potential for acting out violently (O'Toole, 2000).

The threat assessment model designed by the FBI is not a "profile" of a school shooter or a checklist of danger signs pointing to the next student who will bring lethal violence into a school. The model designed by the FBI is a *biopsychosocial* model and enables the assessor to evaluate a student when a threat has been made or there are concerns that a student poses a threat of danger, by knowing as much as possible about him or her in four areas: personality; family dynamics; social dynamics; school dynamics (O'Toole, 2000).

8.8   Warning Behaviors: Leakage

School shootings are still statistically infrequent events and therefore traits and characteristics extrapolated from cases cannot be used as predictors to forecast future shootings. For example, Weise's interests in the Goth movement and in Adolf Hitler cannot be used as predictors for future school shooters. There are many students with similar interests who never go on to become school shooters.

Although the risk of an actual shooting incident in any one school is very low, threats of violence are potentially a problem in every school and university. Once a threat is made, having a fair, objective, and standardized method of evaluating and responding is critically important, and part of any threat assessment program should include identifying and assessing *warning behaviors* that precede cases of targeted school violence. The concept of leakage behavior, as identified by the FBI in its original research, played a pivotal role in the post-incident investigation of the Red Lake shootings.

Warning behaviors are behaviors the shooter engages in prior to the incident which suggest he might be considering acting out in a violent way (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). Leakage is a specific warning behavior. "Leakage in the context of threat assessment is the communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target. Third parties are usually other people, but the means of communication vary, and include letters, diaries, journals, blogs, videos on the Internet, emails, voice mails, and other social media forms of transmission. Leakage is a type of warning behavior that typically infers a preoccupation with the target, and may signal the research, planning, and implementation of an attack"(2011). It was learned that Jeffrey had talked about his ideas for a school shooting at the high school, and that this information may have risen to the level of being leakage rather than just joking. Investigators were able to piece together how the plan was designed and implemented, and how much others knew about it. Ultimately, one of Weise's associates was accused of conspiring with Weise to commit the shooting but the charge was reduced to sending threatening communications. Because of his age, he was sentenced as a juvenile and the court records have been sealed (Teen pleads guilty in tribal shootings, 2005).

8.9   Motivation

What was the motivation for Jeffrey Weise to carry out such a horrific act? In as much as Weise committed suicide when confronted by the police, he took critical information with him to the grave. Therefore, his motivation and state of mind must be inferred from his behaviors before and during the shooting.

Understanding the motive in a crime of violence can be very difficult. In this author's experience, most offenders have multiple motives for their actions and their motives can change during the course of the crime because crimes are

dynamic events. In some crimes of violence there are no obvious motives. Some crimes, like a school shooting, are so shocking, most people conclude the shooter must simply be "crazy." However, behavioral analysts make a distinction between motive for the crime and justification for the crime. Justification is what the public wants to know in order to make sense of the crime. They want to be able to say, "Ok, I understand now why someone would go into a school and shoot and kill ten people." There will never be a reasonable justification for what Jeffrey Weise did that day. However, the motive for a crime is entirely different. The motive is the offender's emotional and psychological reasons for committing the crime, which can be either conscious or subconscious. We may not understand these motives, agree with them, or believe them. We most likely will find them to be repulsive or offensive. But the point is that motives are the offender's unique reasons for his or her behavior. It has nothing to do with our ability to be able to reconcile their behavior. If Jeffrey Weise were able to speak to us from the grave and tell us he committed the shootings for attention, to become famous, to impress his friends, for thrill and excitement, to feel powerful, and/or to feel better about himself, most people would shake their head and refuse to accept that someone would resort to such lethal behavior for such seemingly flimsy reasons. But in order to understand the inspiration underpinning a crime like the one that occurred at Red Lake High School, one must analyze the crime through the offender's behavior. The author recognizes that key factors in Weise's life, including his family dynamics, very likely contributed to his evolution into becoming a mass killer. However, as is often the case in crimes of violence, it can be very difficult to discern how specific family dynamics shaped the offender's specific behaviors at the scene. Family dynamics can be suggested and discussed as playing a critical role in development, but can be too theoretical and speculative for a CIA which relies on observable behaviors at the scene to explain how and why the crime occurred.

It is the opinion of this author that there are several likely motives for Weise's behavior that day. He wanted to outdo the shooting at Columbine High School. Weise was quite interested in the Columbine High School Shooting and had indicated he wanted to outdo Klebold and Harris, the Columbine shooters. Weise also appeared to want recognition for his behavior. This desire for recognition is supported by the way Weise carried out the crime, including the following: he did not wear a mask or otherwise try to hide his identify; he pulled a marked police car in front of the school where he was certain to be noticed as soon as he drove up to the entrance; his weapons of choice were a shotgun and automatic pistol, both sinister in appearance and both deadly; he went looking for his victims and as he did so he could be seen and identified by potential witnesses; and his image was also picked up by the school's video cameras.

There are other interesting aspects to Weise's crimes that warrant discussion, one of which is the murder of his grandfather and his grandfather's girlfriend before the actual shooting occurred.

In other cases of school and campus violence, the shooter also committed *pre-incident homicides* before initiating the actual school shooting. Charles Whitman

murdered both his wife and mother before going to the Texas tower on August 1, 1966 (Lavergne, 1997). Luke Woodham, the shooter at Pearl High School in Mississippi on October 1, 1997, murdered his mother before initiating his school shooting. Seung-Hui Cho, the Virginia Tech shooter, killed two students in a university dormitory, prior to moving to Norris Hall where most of the carnage took place (Seung-Hui-Cho, biography, 2012). Kip Kinkel killed both his parents before going to Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, on May 21, 1998, where he killed two students[1] and injured an additional 24 people (Bernstein, 2011).

Such pre-event homicides are interesting in that they are not part of the actual shooting event and are not necessary to completing the school or campus shooting. In fact, it is a high risk for the shooter to commit pre-incident murders because they might get apprehended while committing them, which would prevent them from going forward with the shooting—and if they are mission-oriented shooters, their ultimate goal is to get to the school and start shooting.

Shooters who committed pre-incident murders had little if any formal criminal history, which means they lacked experience committing murder (O'Toole, 2000). Therefore, the possibility of their getting *cold feet* at the last minute has to be considered. It is the opinion of this author that these pre-incident murders could have served as "insurance," committing them to going forward with their plans and making it difficult to turn back. In the case of Jeffrey Weise, his pre-incident murders may have been partly motivated by this. However, additional motives must also be considered. Weise needed guns to carry out his school shooting, and he knew he could get them from his grandfather's gun collection. In order to access those guns as well as his grandfather's police car, Weise would have to make sure his grandfather did not interfere with his plans and therefore needed to eliminate the threat his grandfather posed. It is also likely that his relationship with his grandfather was not a good one and there were problems between them that could have made killing his grandfather easier for Jeffrey. Another possible motive was to create a diversion. If the murders were discovered before or even during the shootings at the high school, law enforcement's focus would be directed—in part—to those crimes giving Weise more time to carry out his murders at the high school.

The murder of Lussier's girl friend was most likely collateral damage. Had she not been there that morning, it is likely she would still be alive.

8.10 Conclusion

Looking at a crime scene from a behavioral perspective means identifying the behavior from the scene and interpreting that behavior. A behavioral interpretation of the crime can assist investigators in understanding how the crime occurred, the offender's motivations, and some of his or her personality traits and characteristics.

---

[1]Teen Guilty in Mississippi School Shooting Rampage (1998).

When Jeffrey Weise walked into Red Lake High School on the last day of his life, his behavior suggests that at least one of his goals was maximum lethality, or to kill as many people as possible, excluding some of his friends. His behavior portrayed a person who was cool, calm, and collected, in control of himself and his actions. Weise was fascinated with the Columbine High School shooting and appeared to want to emulate the actions of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, but on a grander scale. Although these kinds of shootings are rare, they do occur and understanding the personality of these individuals beforehand and their tendency to leak or talk about their plans in advance can be invaluable information to investigators. And finally, first responders have to make quick and precise decisions about how best to respond when they enter one of these scenes. If these first responders can determine the type of shooter and his or her goals for committing the crime, it can make a significant difference to the course of action they decide to take. In the case of a mission-oriented shooter, time is of the essence, and stopping them before the carnage worsens should be the goal.

References

Bernstein, A. (2009). *Bath massacre: America's first school bombing*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Bernstein, M. (2011). Kip Kinkel, convicted in thurston high school shooting, wants to go to state mental hospital. The Opegonian. August 11, 2011.

Cornell, D., Warren, G., Hawk, J., Stafford, E., Oram, G., & Pine, D. (1996). Psychopathy in instrumental and reactive violent offenders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*, 783–790.

FBI report on Charles Joseph Whitman shooting: Freedom of information. November 2009.

Gunderson, D. (2005, March 23). *Who was Jeff Weise? Minnesota Public Radio.* Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/03/22_ap_redlakesuspect

High school shooting spree leaves 10 dead. (2005, March 22). *Fox News*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,151085,00.html

Huppert, B. (2010, May 2). Red Lake school shooting survivor shares her story. *KARE 11 News*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.kare11.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=8492500

Lavergne, G. (1997). *A sniper in the tower*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press.

Meloy, J. R., & O'Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 29*(4), 513–527.

Minnesota killer admired Hitler. (2005, March 22). *BBC News*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4371803.stm

Niehoff, D. (1999). *The biology of violence*. New York: The Free Press.

O'Toole, M. E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Washington, DC: Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

O'Toole, M. E. (2007). Psychopathy as a behavior classification system for violent and serial crime scenes. In H. Herve & J. C. Yuille (Eds.), *The psychopath: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 30l–325). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

School gunman stole police pistol, vest. (2005, March 23). CNN. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://articles.cnn.com/2005-03-22/us/school.shooting_1_jeff-weise-police-officers-worst-school-shooting?_s=PM:US

Seung-Hui Cho. biography. Retrieved October, 3, 2012 from http://www.biography.com/people/seung-huicho-235991.

Shooter obsessed with violence. (2005, March 23). *Fox News*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,151214,00.html

Teen Guilty in Mississippi School Shooting Rampage. (1998, June 12). CNN. Retrieved November 8, 2012 From http://www.cnn.com/us/9806/12/schoolshooting.verdict/

Teen pleads guilty in tribal shootings. (2005, November 30). *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-11-30/news/0511300289_1_jeff-weise-louis-jourdain-tribal

Troubled teen kills nine and himself, at Red Lake. (2005, March 22). *Minnesota Public Radio*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/03/21_gundersond_redlakeshooting

Woodworth, M., & Porter, S. (2002). In cold blood: Characteristics of criminal homicides as a function of psychopathy. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 111*, 436–445.

Chapter 9
Jokela: The Social Roots of a School Shooting Tragedy in Finland

Atte Oksanen, Johanna Nurmi, Miika Vuori, and Pekka Räsänen

School shootings are statistically rare events, but their impact on perceived safety can be dramatic (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). The Columbine school shooting in 1999, for example, became a metaphor of emotions surrounding youth, fear, and risk (Muschert & Peguero, 2010). In Finland, a small Nordic country with 5.3 million people, school shootings were not considered a risk before 2007. The Jokela high school shooting on November 9, 2007, and the Kauhajoki school shooting on September 23, 2008, changed the safety scenario of Finnish educational institutions. Before the Jokela case, Finnish schools had gained an international reputation for their outstanding results in the OECD's PISA studies (Programme for International Student Assessment) in the 2000s (Sahlberg, 2010). Since the school shootings, there have been changes in school safety instructions and various plans have created to prepare for potential future cases.

The Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings are the most lethal mass murder cases in the criminal history of Finland. Eighteen-year-old Pekka-Eric Auvinen and 22-year-old Matti Saari each entered his own educational institution and started a violent rampage using similar .22 caliber semi-automatic pistols bought at the same gun store in Jokela. Both not only shot fellow students dead, but also tried to burn down the school. Auvinen murdered five male students aged 16–18, one 25-year-old female student, the female principal, and the school nurse at the Jokela upper secondary school before committing suicide. Saari, a student of hospitality management, murdered a teacher and nine fellow students in a classroom before turning the gun on himself at the Kauhajoki unit of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. Saari followed the same

A. Oksanen (✉)
University of Turku & Finnish Youth Research Society,
Asemapäällikönkatu 1, 00520 Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: atte.oksanen@nuorisotutkimus.fi; atte.oksanen@utu.fi

J. Nurmi • M. Vuori • P. Räsänen
Department of Social Research, University of Turku,
Turku, Finland

pattern as Auvinen only 10 months before. Both created a media strategy and uploaded videos, pictures, and other material on the internet before committing the shooting. The guns used were similar and both burned parts of their schools.

Studies investigating school shootings often concentrate on the psychological state of the perpetrator. Despite the benefits of such understanding, the school shootings have a much broader social, psychological, and sociological impact that is important to take into account. First of all, shootings occur in specific social contexts that often involve social psychological factors, such as social exclusion of the shooter and failure in preventive strategies (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011a; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000; Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein, 2000). Secondly, school shootings involve cultural aspects that have become increasingly important as information about previous shootings is disseminated online by school shooting fan groups (Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2010; Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). Thirdly, school shootings impact local communities that have to face the consequences of the tragedy (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011; Hawdon, Ryan, & Agnich, 2010; Nurmi, 2012; Nurmi, Räsänen, & Oksanen, 2012; Ryan & Hawdon, 2008). Fourthly, school shootings may have nationwide impacts, such as change in firearms policies and safety instructions (Addington, 2009; Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Lawrence & Birkland, 2004; Lindström, Räsänen, Oksanen, & Nurmi, 2011). In a small country such as Finland, school shootings have had an impact on social and welfare policies (Oksanen, Räsänen, & Nurmi, 2012; Oksanen, Räsänen, Nurmi, & Lindström, 2010).

This chapter focuses on the Jokela case that initiated a new era of safety risks related to schools in Finland. The Jokela school shooting tragedy has also become an important reference point internationally since the shooter formulated a media strategy and supplied a great deal of online material for those who glorify school shootings. Our case analysis will use various empirical data sources including the pre-trial investigation report by the Finnish police, material uploaded to the internet by the shooter, and quantitative and qualitative local community data collected in Jokela after the shooting. We examine what happened both *before* and *after* the tragedy: (1) What were the main causes leading to the attack? And (2) what were the social consequences of school shooting in the local community of Jokela? The analysis will expand our knowledge on social psychology and sociology of school shooting phenomena.

9.1 Severe Violence in Finnish Schools and Public Places Before the Jokela Shooting

School shootings are often portrayed as unexpected catastrophes. In Finland the Jokela case was interpreted as an isolated incident, which had international, mainly American roots (Oksanen et al., 2010). Yet, the Jokela school shooting was not the first homicide in a Finnish school. It is therefore important to understand that extreme cases such as the Jokela or Kauhajoki school shootings

represent only the most visible form of school violence in Finland. School shootings should be understood in their broader cultural and social context (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b).

In the 1980s there were three fatal incidents in Finnish schools. In 1981, an 18-year-old student killed his teacher with a spade. Three years later, in 1984, a 14-year-old student killed his teacher with a knife. Knives were also used as weapons in fights between students in Finnish schools in the 1990s and 2000s, though none of these incidents were fatal. Most of the information about severe school violence was collected only after the Jokela school shooting. Detailed and exact information about severe but nonfatal cases is scarce, which means that there may be many more serious cases in Finland that have remained outside the public eye. Sometimes schools have downplayed violent incidents to avoid damage to their reputations.

The most severe case before Jokela occurred in the town of Raumanmeri in 1989. A 14-year-old student had a grudge against three of his fellow students. He borrowed Parabellum and Mauser pistols from his father and shot two people dead in his school classroom before a student intervened to stop him. He fled the scene and was later arrested by the police. According to the police pre-trial report (Rauma Police Department 1989), the shooter claimed revenge as a motive, because he thought he was a victim of bullying. Based on the police interview records included in the report, it seems that he had been involved in a rather longlasting conflict with one of the boys and verbal and possibly physical conflicts with two others. According to some witnesses the perpetrator was not the underdog in these fights. Only one student told the police that the shooter had been bullied. Some students and adults knew, however, that there had been some kind of feud between the boys. The teachers were unaware of any problems.

The Raumanmeri case illustrates how a shooter may justify their actions in terms of a sensation of having been bullied. Although the shooter gave bullying as a motive, its severity remains unclear. Other factors might explain why the shooter sought a violent solution to his conflict with the other boys. One teacher and some fellow students portrayed the shooter as withdrawn and introverted. His fascination with guns and hand grenades was mentioned in several witness statements. The act was carefully planned. The perpetrator said that he had been contemplating the idea for a year. In the police interview, he said: "I understand the deed. I tried to eliminate two nasty persons. I failed to eliminate the third nasty person [name deleted]" (Rauma Police Department, 1989, p. 26). The shooter committed the act only 1 month before turning 15. Since the age of criminal responsibility is 15 in Finland, he did not face any criminal punishment. The case was soon forgotten for almost two decades.

There are some indications that guns returned to schools in Finland in the early 2000s. Although gun ownership is common in Finland (per capita the third highest in the world), it is unusual to carry a gun. In January 2002, a 14-year-old girl shot a boy in the head with an air pistol at school in the town of Riihimäki, southern Finland. In the same month, a 14-year-old boy brought a handgun to school in the town of Raahe, northern Finland. In May 2002, a loaded handgun was found on a 16-year-old student in the town of Jyväskylä, central Finland. In October 2003, a 16-year-old boy barricaded himself on the school roof with a 0.22-caliber pistol in the town of Hamina,

southern Finland. All these events were reported in the Finnish media, including in the biggest daily *Helsingin Sanomat* (Pihlaja, 2003; Saavalainen, 2003).

This phenomenon of bringing guns to school might indicate rising influence of the widely publicized Columbine school shooting. Earlier research on school shootings has underlined the importance of the Columbine shooting in making school shootings an international phenomenon (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a; Larkin, 2009). In Sweden, a close neighbor of Finland, there was a school killing with a knife in the town of Sundsvall in 2001 (Böckler et al., 2010, p. 228). Earlier in the same year a 16-year-old student was shot dead over a drug debt in school in Stockholm (Helsingin Sanomat, 2001). School shootings in Germany have also been followed closely by the Finnish media. Germany has witnessed several fatal cases over the years as well as several serious attempts (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011a; Hoffmann, Roshdi, & Robertz, 2009).

The most serious case of violence before the Jokela school shooting occurred in the Helsinki metropolitan area in October 2002, when a 19-year-old man detonated a home-made bomb at the Myyrmanni shopping center. Seven people died, including the bomb-builder, and almost 200 were injured in the explosion. The Myyrmanni case is important, because—as we will see—the Jokela shooter saw it as an example. The Myyrmanni bomb attack and the Jokela and Kauhajoki school killings have several features in common. They all resemble terrorist attacks and were carried out at locations that were central to the perpetrators' lives. They could all have been motivated by international examples, such as Timothy McVeigh, the Unabomber, and Columbine. In Finland they represented something totally new and unusual, since Finland has not traditionally been accustomed to dealing with terrorist violence (Oksanen et al., 2010).

9.2   Well-Being of Young People in Finland

Systematic studies investigating the conditions for school shootings show that in at least some respects psychological disorders, such as symptoms of depression, narcissistic personality traits, and lack of empathy, play a role in school shootings (Bannenberg, 2010; Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2011; Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011a, 2011b; Newman et al., 2004; Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2010). Shooters often faced problems in their peer group and felt excluded or rejected (Böckler et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2004; Verlinden et al., 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2000). The combination of psychological and social problems, especially, is crucial to understanding aggressive behavior. Studies on aggression and violence indicate that a combination of social rejection and narcissism predicts violent behavior (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Cultural aspects are especially important for the prevention of such behavior. To what extent, for example, are bullying, ostracism, loneliness, or psychological problems ignored or taken seriously?

The Myyrmanni case is an example of culture-specific problems. In a book about his son, the perpetrator's father, Petri Gerdt, wrote how he regretted that he never

asked how his son was doing in school. It was enough that he had good grades. He relates how his son had no friends coming to visit after the age of 12. The father did not want to blame anyone, but said it was astonishing that the school did not consider his son's ostracism as a problem at any point (Gerdt, 2004). In the Myyrmanni case both the school and the family failed to socially integrate the perpetrator. The Myyrmanni case is an extreme example, but there are other indications that schools in Finland might be failing to promote psychological and social well-being of the children. Satisfaction with school, for example, is lower than international averages in all age groups in Finland (Currie et al., 2008).

Some studies indicate that there might be problems related to social cohesion and close social relationships in Finland. Traditionally, Finnish culture has favored individualism at the expense of social cooperation. The flip side of individualism shows in the lack of social cohesion and social interaction. In a survey of 21 countries, relationships between Finns were found to be the weakest (Kääriäinen & Lehtonen, 2006). In a study of the well-being of children in 21 OECD countries, Finland ranks well in material well-being (3d), health and safety (3d), education (4th), but much lower in subjective well-being (11th) and especially in family and peer relationships (17th) (UNICEF 2007). A comparison of 41 countries found that Finns aged 11–15 had fewer close friends than average (Currie et al., 2008, pp. 29–31).

In international comparison, Finnish children report less bullying than average (Currie et al., 2008; UNICEF 2007). In spite of this, national studies suggest that there may be problems in the social atmosphere of Finnish schools (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b). A report based on the National School Health Survey found that loneliness, bullying, and psychosocial problems are common among children (Välimaa et al., 2008). Half of surveyed 15- to 16-year-olds (49%) reported that they had sometimes bullied other children (National School Health Survey, 2009). Thirty-nine percent of 15-year-old boys and 29% of girls reported that they had been assaulted or threatened with assault within the last year according to the 2008 National Child Victim Survey. Young people face more violence than adults. The most significant arenas of violence are school and home (Kääriäinen, 2008).

Longitudinal studies conducted in Finland show that young people are at risk of bullying and exposure to violence. According to the Finnish 10-year "From a Boy to a Man" follow-up study, those who were victims of bullying at the age of 8 were more likely to suffer anxiety disorders 10–15 years later (Sourander et al., 2007). Another study of 16,000 young people aged 14–16, based on the National School Health Survey, reports that bullies and the victims of bullying showed more symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts than other children (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpelä, & Rantanen, 1999). Weak social cohesion and lack of social interaction may contribute to these problems, while strong social ties enable successful coping with such experiences. For young people especially, meaningful relationships with peers (in and out of school) are powerful resources of well-being.

A relatively small proportion of young Finns suffer from severe psychological problems. Depression is relatively common among Finnish young people: according to the National School Health Survey, approximately 10% of Finnish young people suffer from moderate or severe depression. There has, however, been no increase in

depression in the last 10 years (THL, 2010), nor any increase in suicides by young people. Suicides by males aged 15–24 have decreased over the past 20 years (Lahti, Räsänen, Riala, Keränen, & Kakko, 2011). However, Finnish young people still have remarkably high youth suicide rates in international comparison. The Finnish 15–24-year-old male suicide rate is 33.1/100,000 (the fifth highest in the world), the female rate 9.7/100,000 (the second highest in the world) (Uusitalo, 2007). Finnish young people are twice as likely to commit suicide as young people in the United States and three times as likely as young people in Germany (WHO, 2006).

We conclude that a small proportion of Finnish young people suffers from severe psychological problems. Compared to many other affluent Western countries, youth in Finland experience considerable problems and risks related to well-being. Studies consistently show that Finnish people have weaker intimate bonds and experience problems related to social interaction both at school and at home. One of the problems lies in the individualism that is highly valued in Finland. In the worst case, ostracism and bullying may lead to the formation of violent forms of individualism. Depression and suicide among young people are equally important factors, since school shooters often commit suicide at the end of their attack (Newman et al., 2004). We now turn to a detailed description of the Jokela shooting tragedy and its aftermath in Finland.

9.3 Jokela Data

The data used in this chapter was collected in a research project entitled "Everyday Life and Insecurity: Social Relationships After the Jokela and Kauhajoki School Shootings in Finland" led by Atte Oksanen and Pekka Räsänen (2008–2012). This sociological project investigates local and national reactions to school shootings in Finland and includes a social psychological subtheme seeking to identify the key factors that caused the school shootings. The researchers collected systematic data from local communities in Jokela and Kauhajoki and other relevant data. The following data are utilized in this contribution.

Jokela case data:

1. Internet data including the media package produced by Pekka-Eric Auvinen (videos, IRC-Galleria social networking profile and manifesto) and other material accessed directly after the Jokela shooting in November 2007.
2. The 572-page pre-trial investigation report by the Finnish police (National Bureau of Investigation [NBI], 2008) containing descriptions of the events, previous behavior by the offender that can be linked to the shooting, and transcribed interviews with eyewitnesses and other people involved, including the mother of the perpetrator. The report includes additional details on technical investigation (38 pages) and 46 videos made by Auvinen that were found on his computer. Some of them were part of his media package and YouTube profile (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a).

3. The report by the Investigation Commission of the Jokela School Shooting (ICJ, 2009) gives general information about the case and the perpetrator.
4. Interview with the parents of Pekka-Eric Auvinen broadcast in 2008 by MTV3 on Finnish television. After the Kauhajoki school shooting, the parents of Pekka-Eric Auvinen contacted MTV3 and proposed an interview. This 17-min interview contains some information not included in the pre-trial investigation and research committee reports.

Jokela local community data:

1. Mail surveys of the Finnish-speaking adult population conducted in Jokela 6 and 18 months after the incident (May–June 2008 and May–June 2009). The surveys used simple random sampling and yielded response rates of 47% (2008, $n = 330$) and 40% (2009, $n = 278$). Although response rates remained below 50%, the samples represent the research population relatively well (see Hawdon, Räsänen, Oksanen, & Ryan, 2012; Oksanen et al., 2010). The survey questions focused on local residents' well-being, social resources, subjective perceptions of the shooting, and experiences of social solidarity in the neighborhood.
2. Focused interviews conducted in January–March 2009 with six interviewees who had participated in the crisis work or aftercare (expert interviews 1–6). The main focus was on interviewees' experiences of local residents' reactions to the shooting and their grieving strategies. The interviews were from 60 min to almost 120 min long.
3. Seventeen interviews involving 19 interviewees were conducted in October 2009, 23 months after the shooting (local people interviews 1–17). Interview themes related to coping with the tragedy, social relations in the local communities, descriptions of the local communities, the participant's personal experience of the school shooting, and the consequences of the shooting for personal and community life. The duration of the interviews varied from 20 min to over 3 h, although most lasted between 60 and 90 min.
4. The parents of Pekka-Eric Auvinen were interviewed twice, in January 2010 and in June 2011 (parents' interviews 1–2). The father of Pekka-Eric Auvinen contacted Atte Oksanen in January 2010 and offered to participate in the research. The interview themes were the same as in the other interviews with local people. The parents were aware that their interview was so different from other interviews that it could not be treated in the same anonymous way in the analysis. The first interview lasted over 3 h and the second 2 h and 45 min.

Our qualitative analysis of the Jokela case data and interviews begins by describing what happened before the shooting, including information about the shooter and his social relationships in the small community: (1) how he is described as a person; (2) what kind of social relationships he had within the community; (3) key life events prior to the shooting; (4) identity development prior to the shooting; and (5) prior events or incidents that motivated him to plan the shooting.

Our second theme is how local people reacted to the shooting. Since the shooter was a local resident and many of his problems were known, this theme is closely

connected to the first. Qualitative analysis of the in-depth qualitative interview data from local residents is used to elicit detailed descriptions of the social and psychological difficulties that the school shooting caused to local witnesses. Quantitative analysis based on descriptive analysis and explanatory analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM) supplies a general overview of how local residents coped with the shooting. We seek to identify how well social support and other related factors can predict fear of violence among Jokela residents. Technically, analysis focuses on the relationships between social support, social solidarity, institutional trust, generalized trust, and fear of school shootings and terrorist attacks.

9.4 Difficulties of Growing up in a Small Community

Studies on school shootings note that such acts often occur in rural communities and suburbs rather than in big cities, which are culturally and socially complex and do not impose a single norm for behavior (Fast, 2008, p. 17; Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002, p. 175; Newman et al., 2004, pp. 52, 112). One reason may be that social pressures accumulate more in small communities where a school bully is likely to live in close proximity. Jokela is such a small community. Although it belongs to the larger municipal district of Tuusula and is close to the Helsinki metropolitan area, it was portrayed by experts and local people as a small village-like community. It was considered a good and peaceful place to raise children. Despite its image as a quiet suburban neighborhood, it was widely known before the shooting that there were problems with young people in Jokela, such as persistent school bullying and drug use.

The Auvinen family moved to Jokela from Helsinki before Pekka-Eric started school at the age of 7. His mother said in the first interview that they wanted to provide a stable environment for their son. She described social relationships in Jokela after the move as casual. Later in the interview, however, she stated that she had always felt an outsider in Jokela and that people did not cooperate much. Overall, the interview gave an impression that Jokela was a provincial place and not necessarily receptive to new ideas or people standing out from the others. Most of her close friendships were in the Helsinki area or northern Finland. She had no close relationships in Jokela and most of her social activities were related to work or children. She also stated that there were ideological differences with other local people, despite their social, educational, and financial similarities. Before the shooting, however, social relationships with other people in the community were formally in order (Parents' Interview 1).

The parents criticized Jokela for offering boys only competitive and tough team sports (soccer and ice hockey) as hobbies. Since the family did not have a car, finding alternatives in neighboring areas and towns was difficult. The mother stated that this led Pekka-Eric to grow up as a "soft boy" (Parents' Interview 1). This contrasts with male role models in Finnish society in general, especially a small place such as Jokela. According to the parents, this caused Pekka-Eric to lack "the physical

and verbal toughness that seems to be demanded nowadays" (Parents' Interview 1). Previous research suggests that school shooters often faced harassment for inadequate gender performance (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; see also Newman et al., 2004; Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

Systematic comparison of school shooting cases shows that the offenders were not socially successful (Newman et al., 2004, p. 235). The Jokela case confirms these findings. Auvinen's problems with his peers began at the age of 10 when he was in the 4th grade in comprehensive school. He was bullied verbally and physically (NBI, 2008, p. 554), and the problem worsened over the following years. When he was 11, he reported in the School Health Survey that bullying troubled him (ICJ, 2009, p. 49). His father stated in the television interview that Auvinen was shot with an airsoft gun on his way to school and sometimes laser pointers were directed at his eyes (MTV3, 2008). The bullying continued at the upper level of comprehensive school (7th–9th grade) and was noted by the school nurse and doctor (ICJ, 2009, pp. 49–50).

The parents contacted the school several times when their son was 10–12 years old because they thought that the school was too lax regarding bad manners, swearing, and bullying. The school considered that Auvinen did not behave and dress like a typical boy. He wore a formal shirt and trousers, which were untypical for young people of his age (ICJ, 2009, p. 49; NBI, 2008, p. 554). According to his mother, this was because the family was critical towards the media and her son did not want to use clothing marketed to young people in commercials (2008, p. 554). The school, however, expected Auvinen to fit in with the norms of the small community. In the interview, the mother stated that the school failed to organize any kind of meeting to address the problems between Pekka-Eric and the other boys (Parents' Interview 1). The Investigation Commission report confirms the unresponsiveness of the school and notes that the parents

> made contact with the parents of other students, telling them their children behaved badly. The other parents found this annoying, and some told their children to avoid his [Auvinen's] company (ICJ, 2009, pp. 49–50).

The most direct consequence of the bullying was loneliness. Auvinen's parents stated that their son suffered from loneliness. He did not fit in with boys who were tougher and more physical. Bullying cut off his friendships (Parents' Interview 1). A friend from the early period said that Auvinen's parents perhaps over-reacted, contacting the parents of his peers over seemingly small incidents, which caused him the loss of friends (NBI, 2008, pp. 431–432). A similar statement is found in an interview with a local adult. The parents' (understandable) concern about boys' physical games might have unintentionally exacerbated their son's social exclusion.

According to his mother, Auvinen lost his last remaining friend when he started to take an interest in politics. His friend belonged to a local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, who did not accept involvement in politics (Parents' Interview 1). She stated that the last years in comprehensive school (aged 13–15) were tough because her son had no friends:

> He kept asking during summer holidays and weekends: "Mother why don't I have any friends?" We were thinking really hard where to find friends for him. (…) We tried to suggest all kinds of things, but Pekka was not interested in the things kids in his age usually are. In that sense he was special (MTV3, 2008).

Auvinen would perhaps have fitted in better in some other type of school environment. He was psychologically vulnerable and unable to socialize with other boys. His interests and reactions were already unusual in his primary school years. His mother described how he was affected by strong media images after the attack on the World Trade Center:

> When the Twin Towers burned, he was 12 and it was a shock to him, because he profoundly admired the USA and New York. At this time, he was still playing with Lego bricks and it became part of his play. For several weeks, he built the twin towers again and again (Parents' Interview 1).

The terrorist attacks seemingly shocked the 12-year-old Auvinen, who was perhaps unable to cope psychologically. Psychological vulnerability plays a role in identity development, and is regarded as important in the research literature on school shootings, especially when combined with other factors such as school bullying, ostracism, and violent fantasies (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011a, 2011b).

Auvinen started to take a serious interest in politics at the age of 12. A fellow student said that he had already held strong opinions in primary school, at the time admiring America and capitalism (NBI, 2008, p. 220). Until the shooting his mother was an active member of the local Green Party, stating in the interview that she represented "the dark green" side of the party and was on the margins even inside her own party (Parents' Interview 1). She stated that Pekka-Eric Auvinen was really stubborn in his political ideas and made his own decisions (MTV3, 2008). During his last years in comprehensive school Auvinen moved gradually from the political mainstream to more marginal parties such as the Communist Party. In upper secondary school (age 16–18) he became absorbed in totalitarian regimes, including North Korea and the German Third Reich. This was worrying for the family and his mother tried to discuss these issues with him (NBI, 2008, pp. 554, 557).

The mother complained in one interview that the Finnish school system concentrated too much on mathematical skills and provided insufficient grounding in social and philosophical questions. She said that her son stood out from the other students as a person who held excessively strong opinions, but had no-one to oppose him intellectually (Parents' Interview 1). According to the police pretrial report, Auvinen had discussions with teachers on political radicalism and made presentations, for example about North Korea. According to one teacher, all of his teachers knew about his radical ideological preferences (NBI, 2008, 130). However, not all of them wanted to engage in argument with him (ibid., 136) Statements by teachers and students confirm that politically radical views did not help Auvinen to socialize with other young people who did not sympathize with radical left- or right-wing thinking. It is possible that Auvinen was interested in totalitarian regimes as a way to reflect on control and manipulation.

Loneliness and bullying may have contributed to Auvinen's mental health problems (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b). He also suffered from blushing and insecurity. In 2006, at the age of 16, a school doctor prescribed him an SSRI for panic disorder and social phobia, despite the fact the SSRIs are not recommended for minors in Finland. Less than 1 year later his parents tried to get him psychiatric help (ICJ, 2009, pp. 50–51; NBI, 2008, p. 555). According to his mother, the doctor said that they should just increase the dosage (MTV3, 2008). The parents were also told that Auvinen's symptoms would need to be much more serious for a referral to the Adolescent Psychiatry Outpatient Clinic. In 2007, Auvinen was granted a 3-year deferment of compulsory military service because of issues related to his mental health. He did not report any symptoms of depression or suicidal tendencies (ICJ, 2009, pp. 50–51).

9.5 Constructing a Violent Identity

School shootings are not impulsive and spontaneous acts, but involve long developmental processes during which the shooters move from violent fantasies to the detailed planning of attacks (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011b). Shooters generally suffered psychological and social problems and perceived themselves as isolated or marginal (Newman et al., 2004). Sometimes this is due to bullying, but sometimes they voluntarily isolate themselves from others. Before the attacks they often suffered major losses (Vossekuil et al., 2000). During the final pre-attack phase shooters used materials about previous school shootings, including films and music (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). Shooters reveal some aspects of their plans to others, usually their friends. Adults are less likely to recognize the severity of the situation (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011b; Newman et al., 2004).

The Jokela case is comparable to other school shootings and shares many of their characteristics. Auvinen's behavior changed during the last year of his life. He was 17 years old and the family had already tried to get him psychiatric help. His mother said that he became more radical ideologically and showed increasing interest in terrorist attacks and school shootings. She said that she was worried about her son and hoped that situation would not end up like the Myyrmanni bombing. She was, however, relieved that he at least talked to her and hoped that nothing bad would happen (NBI, 2008, pp. 554–555). In the last months there was a loss in the family when Auvinen's maternal grandmother died. She had been close to Auvinen and had lived within the family in the early part of his childhood (Parents' Interview 1).

According to teachers and fellow students interviewed by the Finnish police (NBI, 2008), Auvinen was not totally isolated during his upper secondary school years. It is unlikely that he was bullied at this point, but he did have radical political ideas that may have irritated other students. Auvinen also had a small group of friends who gradually became worried about him. They tried to oppose his enthusiasm

for school shootings and similar acts (ibid., pp. 433, 487, 491). One said that they were "trying to keep his feet on the ground and reminded him that innocent bystanders were killed in the incidents" (ibid., 433, translated). They also said that he became more reluctant to participate in activities they suggested (ibid., 432). It seems that during this period Auvinen's psychological problems worsened and he started to seriously plan a shooting.

The first diary entries on the "Main Strike" are from March 4, 2007, 8 months before the shooting. On March 7, he writes: "I'll kill as many bastards I can. (…) The one man war against everyone and everything can start sometime next fall on a doomsday dawn" (NBI, 2008, p. 9, translated). Auvinen gained inspiration from the Virginia Tech shooting of April 16, 2007. He wrote that day:

> Hahhahhaa! A historic day, Cho Seung-Hui has just killed 33 people in a university in Virginia. The new record in so-called educational institution shootings. There's not much more to write at this point, I think I'm going to do a massacre in Hitman [videogame] (NBI, 2008, p. 9, translated).

Only 4 days later, on April 20, 2007, he made his first comment in the "Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold" group in the IRC-Galleria social network (ibid., p. 15). It was the anniversary of the Columbine shooting.

The Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings motivated Auvinen. While his school friends disapproved of his enthusiasm for school shootings, he found an online audience that was more willing to understand his radical views (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b). He participated in Finnish and international networks and made videos that he uploaded, especially to YouTube. The Finnish police were able to interview his Finnish connections. Many of them seemed to be fascinated by school shootings and similar acts (such as the Myyrmanni bombing) and discussed the possibility of a Finnish school shooting. They made positive comments on Auvinen's thoughts and videos on IRC-Galleria and YouTube (NBI, 2008).

Auvinen became the first real online-era shooter. None before him had been so active and so consistent in constructing a Web profile. During the last year, his interest started to be based on finding an online identity to enable the school shooting. His preferences came from previous school shooters, especially Harris and Klebold. His mother said, for example, that his music preferences changed (NBI, 2008, 558). Her statement refers to the industrial music commonly listened to by school shooters (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). Other late interests included first-person shooting games (*Battlefield 2* and *Hitman*) and certain films prioritized by previous shooters (e.g. *Natural Born Killers*). Auvinen, who was described as a well-behaved and shy young man, adopted an aggressive male role online. Auvinen got deep into the mythology of the Columbine shooting and even identified with the sexual fantasies of Eric Harris (2011a, pp. 263–264). Online forums enabled Auvinen to live out possibly preexisting narcissistic traits.

Although the police found only 46 videos by Auvinen on his computer, he claimed he had made at least 140 (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). Auvinen first used the user name NaturalSelector89 on YouTube in March 2007. According to

one online friend, he got into an argument with an American named AmazingAtheist, who criticized YouTube users glorifying violence. As a result the NaturalSelector89 account was closed (NBI, 2008, pp. 366–367). A few weeks before the shooting Auvinen returned with his Sturmgeist89 account. Students at Auvinen's school in Jokela already knew about his online activity in spring 2007, and there were rumors that he was planning a bomb explosion (2008, p. 449). In fall 2007, 2 months before the shooting, friends told a teacher of their concerns about his fascination with the Columbine school shooting (2008, p. 447).

Auvinen's *Natural Selector's Manifesto* was part of the media package uploaded just before the shooting, but parts of it were ready long before. The manifesto was influenced by Theodore Kaczynski's *Industrial Society and Its Future* (the "Unabomber manifesto," 1995), which Auvinen downloaded from the internet in January 2007 (and his mother borrowed the Finnish translation from the library for him) (NBI, 2008, pp. 15, 555). On May 8, 2007, he created a computer file for his own manifesto (ibid., p. 14), parts of which he used in his videos (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). At some point in spring 2007 one teacher heard about the manifesto from students (NBI, 2008, p. 137). Another recalled that in spring 2007 Auvinen had written a school essay aiming to justify why some individuals are allowed to determine the destiny of others. The same teacher added that 3 weeks before the attack he wrote another essay discussing school shootings and terrorist attacks by individuals (ibid., p. 170).

Auvinen's final manifesto was influenced not only by the Unabomber's manifesto, but also by the writings of the Finnish radical ecophilosopher Pentti Linkola, works by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and Plato's *Republic*. Auvinen's reading of the classics of philosophy was unsophisticated and his text uses jargon and aggressive language. He was opposed to "mass humans," which he classified as 94% of the human race. The remaining 6% he called individualistic or manipulative. Auvinen considered himself to be an individual liberator, and "god-like" compared to others. It is notable that both online and offline Auvinen often behaved as if he were superior to other people in general (NBI, 2008). In the manifesto, he writes:

> The majority of people in society are weak-minded and ignorant retardos, masses that act like programmed robots and accept voluntarily slavery. But not me! I am self-aware and realize what is going on in society! I have a free mind! And I choose to be free rather than live like a robot or slave. You can say I have a "god complex", sure… then you have a "group complex"! Compared to you retarded masses, I am actually godlike (*Natural Selector's Manifesto* by Pekka-Eric Auvinen, author's archive).

Auvinen saw his act as political violence. He made comments about political violence both offline and online. In his diary, he remarked upon Timothy McVeigh's Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine school shooting, and the Myyrmanni bombing (NBI, 2008, p. 9). When worried students asked directly whether he was planning a school shooting, he said he would go on a rampage in the Finnish parliament (2008, p. 487). In an online discussion with a 12-year-old female school shooting enthusiast, he said there were many places where he might commit a mass killing, such as a shopping mall, but thought that an attack on a school would create

the most publicity (2008, 402). He expressed similar justifications in a profile that was part of his media package:

> Attack Type: Mass murder, political terrorism (although I chose the school as a target, my motives for the attack are political and much, much deeper and therefore I don't want this to be called only a "school shooting") (Attack information, from the media package of Pekka-Eric Auvinen, author's archive).

Auvinen idolized various Western terrorists and radical right- and left-wing violence fascinated him. His mother said in the police interview that she believed her son refused to feel empathy for others and that he was more concerned with ideological motives (NBI, 2008, p. 555). Terrorism provided an ideological background for a young man who was disappointed with traditional politics. Videos he made include references to various serial and spree killers. He dedicated tribute videos to the Columbine shooters and to Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). The video *Mass of Murders* shows pictures of famous school shooters, mail bombers, mass murderers, and terrorists (see Table 9.1). Each picture is accompanied by a caption stating who they were and what methods they used.

The data confirms that dozens of people were aware of Auvinen's problems. They heard Auvinen talk about shootings. They saw him drawing pictures of school shootings, terrorist attacks, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York (NBI, 2008, p. 355). Concern mounted when he got permission to own a gun, on which he commented in a forum: "Weird country, to give a gun to a maniac like me" (2008, p. 19, translated). A fellow student asked jokingly: "You have bought a gun. You are not going to shoot anyone?" "Probably sub-humans", he replied. The same student added that "sub-human" could mean anyone to Auvinen, because he considered himself superior. Auvinen later told the same student that he was going to go down in history (NBI, 2008, pp. 212–213). Like many shooters before him he sought fame through the shooting (Fast, 2008, p. 19; Larkin, 2009, pp. 193–195; Lee, 2009, pp. 337–353).

Even after Myyrmanni, an attack in a public place like a school was not considered plausible in Finland before Jokela (Oksanen et al., 2010). Perhaps this explains why so many warning signs were ignored. The parents were well aware of their son's radical thoughts and knew he had started to practice shooting (NBI, 2008, p. 555). Students in school knew about the gun and had expressed their concerns about him to teachers. In addition, students had also told the local youth worker that Auvinen had talked about a revolution which would kill them all. The youth worker informed the school principal, who did not consider Auvinen to be a problem (Kiilakoski, 2009, p. 53).

Auvinen entered his school with a gun on the morning of November 7, 2007, after uploading his media package. He wanted to become a rebel revolutionary, and commit an individual and heroic act. In the suicide note for his parents, Auvinen wished that in future individuals would be given better chances (MTV3, 2008). During the shooting, his behavior was described as uncontrolled and haphazard. Some of his victims were random, but some may have been premeditated. It was reported that he had despised single mothers and homosexuals, which may have motivated some of his murders (NBI, 2008, p. 433). Auvinen adopted a violent and misogynistic masculine identity (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a; see also Kimmel &

Table 9.1 People mentioned in the *Mass of murders* video by Pekka-Eric Auvinen (in order of appearance)

Theodore Kaczynski (Unabomber)	American mail bomber active in 1978–1995, killed 3 and injured 23
Eric Robert Rudolf	American anti-abortion and anti-gay activist responsible for multiple bombings in 1996–1998, killed 3 and wounded over 150 people
Franz Fuchs	Austrian xenophobic terrorist active in 1993–1997, killed 4 and injured 15
Jeff Weise	American school shooter who killed 9 and wounded 5 at the Red Lake Senior High School in Minnesota in 2005
Eric Harris & Dylan Klebold	The Columbine school shooters killed 13 and injured 24 in Colorado in 1999
Robert Steinhäuser	German school shooter, who entered his school in Erfurt, killed 16 and wounded 1 in 2002
Charles Whitman	Former Marine who killed 16 and wounded 32 at the University of Austin in Texas in 1966
James Oliver Huberty	American security guard who killed 21 and wounded 19 in a McDonald's Restaurant in San Diego in 1984
Seung-Hui Cho	A student of Virginia Tech who killed 32 and wounded 25 at the university in April 2007
Martin Bryant	Australian spree killer killed 35 and wounded 21 in a rampage shooting in Port Arthur in Australia in 1996
Jack Graham	American mass murderer whose bomb caused the crash of an airplane in 1955. 44 people died
Andrew Kehoe	American suicide bomber and mass murderer whose bombs killed 45 people and wounded 58 in a single day in 1927 in Michigan
Woo Bum-kon	South Korean police officer who killed 56 and wounded 35 in a spree shooting in Uiryeong Count in South Korea in 1982
Timothy McVeigh	American Gulf War Veteran and Guard who exploded a bomb killing 168 and wounding over 800 people in Oklahoma City in 1994

Mahler, 2003). He also killed a female nurse who had been worried about him. The principal, with whom Auvinen had had an argument beforehand, became his last victim. After this he entered a school classroom shouting "this is revolution" and ordered 14-year-old children to smash things up. This was the revenge of young man who had failed the expectations of masculinity. Auvinen later committed suicide in the school toilet.

9.6   A Vulnerable Community in Crisis

The Jokela school shooting raised many questions. Why did Auvinen commit his dreadful acts, and what were his motives. Locally and nationally the shooting was incomprehensible: Auvinen was a native Finn and in many respects a normal citizen

who had gone through Finnish schooling. In the local community the shooting was even more troubling, since Auvinen had lived most of his life there. He had also faced problems there during his life, including earlier experiences with school bullying. Such an attack directed against the attacker's own community makes the case psychologically difficult to cope with.

Most interviewees reported that the shooting affected everyone in the community in some way. In addition to people who were directly harmed or disrupted, the shooting was said to have affected the daily lives of nearly every member of the community. Roads near the school and the perpetrator's house were closed, some businesses and municipal services were closed, and people interrupted their daily activities to gather near the school or follow the events on TV or online news. Police, crisis counseling groups, and national and international media entered the town and stayed for days. Many were shocked by the events, and the shock was aggravated by the fact that in this small community many personally knew at least one of the victims, the perpetrator, or their families.

In the survey questionnaire, over one third of respondents (34%) said they knew someone who had died in the shooting. The shooting was experienced as a crisis of the whole community. In the interviews, the town was constructed as a collective subject and the entire community considered the victim of the incident. Families with school-age children were in a particularly vulnerable position. Almost half (48%) of parents with school-age children said that they knew someone who died in the shooting. Parents of preschool and school-age children, especially, reported feelings of panic and shock during the shooting:

> I called my son and he whispered on the phone: "We're here in the classroom." Meaning they were on the floor of the classroom and had to be quiet. I was wondering if someone was pointing a gun at his head or what. Because we didn't know what the situation was and we heard that the shooter hadn't been captured, of course the terror just grew bigger (Woman, Local people interview 2).

The fear felt by parents was altruistic: they were concerned about the well-being of their children during the shooting, but for many the anxiety persisted after the incident because it devastated the image of Jokela as a quiet community and a safe place to raise children, at least temporarily. The stunned local people repeated that this kind of tragedy was beyond comprehension; something like that could not take place in Jokela (see also Oksanen et al., 2010).

Social interaction, cooperation, and solidarity were reported to have increased after the shooting (see also Nurmi et al., 2012). Social support among friends and family members, increased face-to-face interaction with other members of the community, and informal gatherings were among the concrete forms of solidarity. However, symbolic solidarity in the form of public displays of sorrow was more common. This included lighting candles around the pond next to the school, sending condolences to the victims' families, and attending memorial services. Most respondents thought that the shared grief strengthened the sense of community. A rather strong collective narrative that emphasized unity and emotional solidarity emerged from the accounts of the interviewed residents (Nurmi, 2012). Professional and

voluntary crisis workers reported that social interaction and cooperation remained at a high level at least during the following days, and the sense of community even longer.

According to the interviewed professionals, one consequence of the shooting incident was that different groups formed based on age, experience of the shooting, and opinion. The most radical was the division between young people and adults. This can be partly explained by the fact that young people and adults went to different locations for help and counseling after the shooting. Although there were exceptions, parents and other adults mostly visited the crisis center in the church complex, whereas the young people gathered in the local youth facilities. As a result of this division of the community, some of the young people formed extremely tight peer groups, completely excluding adults. Adults might have been able to represent a psychological resource for young people coping with such traumatic incident.

Residents talked about conflict and contradiction concerning attitudes toward the family of the perpetrator. The community divided into those who directly or indirectly blamed the parents for the shooting and those who did not. The situation of the perpetrator's family in the local community was quite problematic after the shooting. The parents of the perpetrator said that while many community members offered their sympathy and condolences, some people, including neighbors, social workers, and members of the school staff, started to suggest that the family should move away from Jokela. The mother of the perpetrator said that the public discussion blaming and stigmatizing their family "was nothing compared with the attempts to freeze us out of Jokela" (Parents' Interview 1).

Crisis workers especially mentioned factors that made the collective processing of the incident difficult: collective guilt and shame related to the stigmatization of the community. In everyday language, Jokela became a synonym for school shootings, at least until another school shooting took place in Kauhajoki. Residents said that Jokela's association with school shootings damaged the image of the community. This was relevant, for example, in situations where a resident had to tell someone outside their own community that they came from Jokela. In such situations some residents preferred not to mention their town of residence in order to avoid questions about the shooting.

Crisis workers also mentioned the collective guilt felt by the residents. This related to the question of why the tragedy happened. One interviewed crisis worker said that "when something terrible like this happens, people want to find out whose fault it is. So, [there is] a shared feeling of guilt" (Expert interview, 4). Some interviewed local residents discussed the failure to prevent the shooting, referring especially to the school and inadequate mental health services. However, most were reluctant to discuss this matter, because some of the main actors in the school were killed in the shooting. Interviewed experts, however, reported that the young blamed the adults and school staff for not taking their warnings seriously. Still, many of the young were left with a feeling that they, too, should have done something to prevent the shooting.

9.7   Coping in the Community: Social Support and Solidarity

Earlier studies indicate that social cooperation and solidarity can enhance the possibilities for successful coping with mass tragedies such as school shootings. Social solidarity, for example, has an effect on the psychological well-being of local people after a school shooting (Hawdon et al., 2012; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Social support and meaningful relationships may be the key issues for successful recovery, because shocking events tend to increase everyday anxieties and worries about violent crime. School shootings receive obvious prominence in the media. They create public and policy concerns for good reason (Lee & Farrall, 2009, p. 4). As we have seen, school shootings are particularly difficult to cope with. The crisis of a shooting tragedy might foster fears of yet another shooting and thus endanger successful coping.

Following these ideas, we first hypothesize that stronger social support has an independent effect on increased social solidarity and both institutional and generalized trust. Second, we expect that social support is mediated through heightened trust and reduces the intensity of fear of severe targeted violence. Third, social solidarity and institutional trust may facilitate the stronger generalized trust that might help people to cope with stressful events, and furthermore reduce the fear of severe targeted violence. They may have an independent effect on the fear of violence as well. We used quantitative community data collected 6 and 18 months after the tragedy to test these hypotheses. Instead of presenting descriptive statistics for community measures, we present a model explaining how different positive and negative experiences were linked to each other. This procedure helps us to understand how social resources may contribute to healthier recovery after tragic incidents.

The following analysis is based on SEM and focuses on the relationships between three latent constructs: social support, social solidarity, and institutional trust. In addition, we seek to predict how these three constructs contribute to the level of generalized trust and the fear of severe targeted violence. The basic principle of SEM is to identify relationships between variables and create a diagram. A two-step modeling method included separate assessment of the measurement model and the structural model (Byrne, 2010). The primary concern was to evaluate the measurement of each latent variable used in the study. All the study variables were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5 (see Table 9.2). This technique allowed us to explore the path between the correlated and latent items.

Technically, the model fitted our theoretical assumptions adequately.[1] Contrary to our general hypotheses, our model indicated that social support did not have an effect on generalized trust. Nor did social solidarity and institutional trust have a direct relationship with increased concern about severe violence. The final structural model,

---

[1] Standardized factor loadings were at least moderate (>0.50) and all loadings were statistically significant at a 99% confidence level in both data sets. No indications of multicollinearity were discovered. Chi-square statistics, the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to determine the structural model fit. Also, the path coefficients were assessed for statistical significance.

Table 9.2 Variables used in structural equation modeling (SEM)

Concepts	Questions and assessment scale
Social support	1 = does not represent me at all—5 = represents me extremely well
	People have time to listen how I am doing
	I can openly express my concerns and feelings about the tragedy
	I can get help when needed
Social solidarity	1 = do not agree at all—5 = I agree completely
	I trust my neighbors
	People in my community share the same values
	My neighborhood is a good place to live in
	People cooperate in my neighborhood
Institutional trust	1 = cannot be trusted at all—5 = can be trusted completely
	Teachers and teaching staff
	Social authorities
	Municipal officials
General trust	1 = cannot be trusted at all—5 = can be trusted completely
	People in general
Fear of severe targeted violence	1 = I do not worry at all—5 = I am extremely worried
	How worried are you that such incidents as Jokela school shootings or Myyrmanni bomb detonation will happen again
	1 = not at all—5 = very much
	To what extent do you think that terrorism is a significant risk factor in Finnish society

path coefficients, and proportions of variance accounted for are presented in Fig. 9.1, which includes information on both waves (second wave data in parentheses).

It appears that social support has a strong relationship with social solidarity. Where social support is greater, social solidarity is likewise greater both 6 and 18 months after the tragedy. Social support alone explained a considerable share (25%) of the variation of social solidarity in the first wave and even more (40%) in the second. Social support also had a weak impact on institutional trust. As noted earlier, social support did not have an impact on generalized trust and fear of severe targeted violence, but is mediated via solidarity and institutional trust. Stronger social solidarity is connected to both increased institutional trust and generalized trust. In our model these two factors are mediated through generalized trust on fear of severe targeted violence. Taken together, social support and social solidarity explain 26% of the variation in institutional trust (36% in the second wave). Social solidarity and institutional trust explain 23% of the variation in generalized trust (38% in the second wave). Figure 9.1 also shows that generalized trust is connected to concern about severe violence. This is to say that people who do not trust others worry more about severe violence than those who generally trust other people.
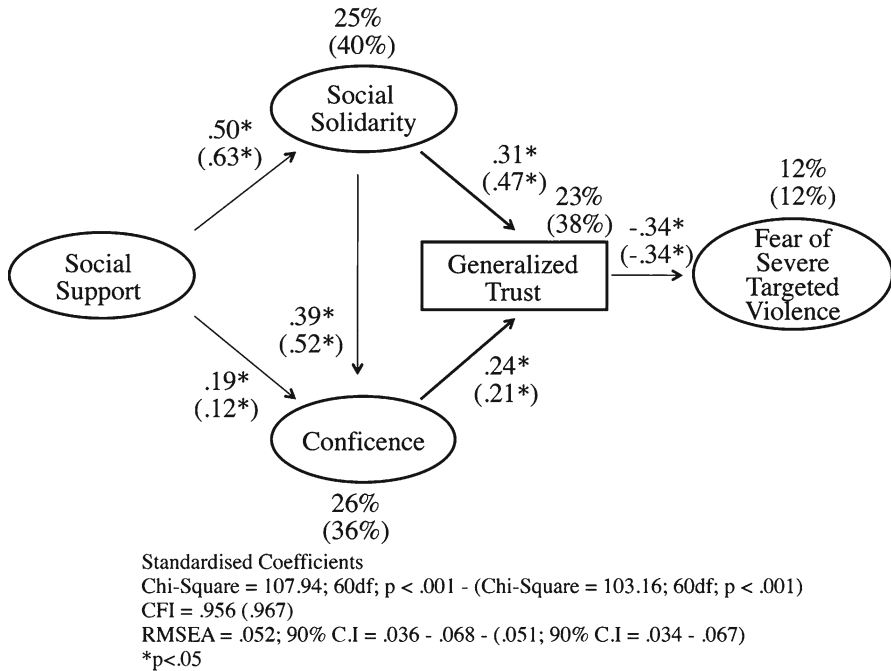
Fig. 9.1 Path diagram of the SEM model. Standardized estimates, 2008 values and 2009 values in parentheses

Our explanatory analysis demonstrates how social relationships build social solidarity and connectedness to the local community. Although the explained variance of fear of severe targeted violence remained rather modest, the results insights into the social processes of everyday worry that shocking events may produce. These findings are important, since school shooters and terrorists often purposely set out to cause fear. The results show that social support and social solidarity play a role in protecting against fear after violent tragedies. There is no prior research to serve as a point of comparison, and we have to bear in mind that the domain of the study is specific.

According to our results, for people who create stronger social bonds, these resources help to cope with even severe targeted violence in the community. At the same time, however, we need to be cautious when drawing conclusions from a set of correlations measuring the subjective perceptions of social support, solidarity, the fear of violence, and trust. Prior research shows that socio-demographic background is strongly connected with different types of risk experience and fear of violence. According to studies conducted in the United States and Europe, people with lower levels of education and income, women, and younger age groups generally report greater concern regarding mass violence, crime, and other sources of risk (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011; Oksanen et al., 2010; Savage, 1993). It thus follows that the relationships between social support and fear of violence are also likely to vary across population groups.

9.8   The Social and Cultural Consequences of the Jokela School Shooting

School shootings in Finland have caused a political discussion about psychological services for young people. Immediately after the shooting, the community of Jokela received a considerable amount of money for aftercare (Oksanen et al., 2010, 2012). There was much less discussion about prevention of future tragedies, and little was done before the Kauhajoki shooting (which took place only 10 months after Jokela). For example, amendments to gun laws had not progressed much (Lindström et al., 2011). In Kauhajoki, a depressed young man who had been unable to complete his military service for psychological reasons was legally able to purchase a gun. Before the shooting he was interviewed by the local police for uploading threatening videos on the internet. The officer concerned found no legal cause to arrest him or confiscate his gun. He attacked his school soon afterwards. The police officer was later charged with dereliction of duty, but was found not guilty (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b). Although the availability of guns is only one factor, much of the public attention was directed to the gun laws.

The political motives of school shootings and the Myyrmanni bombing have not been taken into consideration in the Finnish public discussion. The Finnish Security Intelligence Service stressed that these incidents were not terrorism (Malkki, 2011). In fact, they underline there is very little (if any) terrorist activity in Finland—meaning that organized Islamist or other radical groups are not active in Finland (Kullberg, 2011). Despite this, all three Finnish cases resemble terrorist attacks, and resulted in 27 deaths and almost 200 injuries. There is irrefutable evidence that the Jokela shooting in particular was politically motivated. Pekka-Eric Auvinen subscribed to an extremist ideology and was disappointed with the political system in Finland. In general, his writings resemble the texts of Theodore Kaczynski and Anders Behring Breivik, the man behind the attacks in Norway in July 2011.

The shootings have had direct consequences for school safety school: The Jokela shooting changed school safety instructions and more generally the safety scenario for schools (Partanen & Nikula, 2010). Anti-bullying programs such as KiVa were introduced and promoted (Kärnä et al., 2011). Now there was awareness that terrible tragedies such as targeted shootings could happen in schools. The possibility of new shootings has been taken seriously, especially after the Kauhajoki shooting. Five years on, the memory of the Jokela shooting remains alive. After Kauhajoki there have been no new cases. However, in Alahärmä, western Finland, in January 2012 an 18-year-old male student attacked a student who had bullied him with a knife before committing suicide (Harju & Markkanen, 2012). The victim survived. In February 2012, in Imatra, eastern Finland, a 16-year-old-boy attacked a peer with a knife in class (Harju, 2012). Furthermore, a disturbed man attacked the school in Orivesi with the intention of taking revenge on his ex-girlfriend. Luckily, this case caused no casualties, because of the quick reaction of both school and police.

After Jokela various schools have been threatened with similar attacks or other types of severe violence. During the 3 months following the Jokela shooting, there were 70 threats in 64 schools in 40 municipalities in different parts of Finland. Most of the offenders were boys aged 14–15, but some were girls or older boys. Most of the threats were described as an ill-considered action, a whim (Puustinen, 2008). By October 2011, 4 years after Jokela 580 threats had been reported according to the Finnish police, of which 57 have gone to court (STT, 2011). There are also dozens of cases that were thought serious enough for the adolescent perpetrator to be sent for psychiatric examination. One study reports 77 such cases in the period 2007–2009 (Lindberg, Sailas, & Kaltiala-Heino, 2012).

Besides the immediate political and social consequences for Finnish society, the Jokela shooting left its mark on online cultures. Auvinen was connected online to individuals and groups in Finland and other countries (Semenov, Veijalainen, & Kyppö, 2010). He had devoted time and energy to building himself an image as a school shooter and left a lot of material behind. Auvinen notably cultivated images of martyrdom and political revolt against oppressors (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). Such romanticized images may make them rebels in the eyes of young people troubled by experiences of bullying at school and psychological problems which magnify the seriousness of these experiences.

9.9 Discussion

The Jokela school shooting was considered an unexpected tragedy in Finland. There are, however, several indications that Jokela was only the tip of the iceberg. Before Jokela there were several homicides in Finnish schools, and already during the 1990s and the early 2000s there had been severe stabbings. Guns were also brought to school after the Columbine tragedy, which became a media spectacle in Finland as in many other Western countries. Another important background factor is the relatively high rates of adolescent suicide in Finland. Young people in Finland are twice as likely to commit suicide as young Americans.

Our qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Jokela case confirms many of the general characteristics described in earlier studies (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011a; Newman et al., 2004; Vossekuil et al., 2000). Auvinen was bullied and ostracized. Parents and teachers in the small community failed to prevent his social exclusion. It is possible that these negative experiences exacerbated his poorly handled psychological problems. Auvinen was interested in politics from early on and moved gradually to more radical thoughts. He did not hide his extremism. He found support for his ideology in online communities that glorified school shootings. The last few months before the shooting were crucial. His school peers worried about him and expressed their concerns to teachers, and to a youth worker who informed the school principal.

The Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings are striking examples of failure of violence prevention. Both shooters expressed their sympathies for school shootings

and similar attacks, and had peers who were worried about them. They were able to purchase guns and progress with their plans (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b). In Jokela, it was not one aspect of prevention that failed. First of all, there was a community which condoned the ostracism. Secondly, the school system failed repeatedly to socially integrate Auvinen. Thirdly, the health care system failed to provide psychological treatment. Fourthly, teachers and the school principal failed to take the warnings seriously.

The shooting had many tragic consequences of for the local community. Many people lost friends and many knew people who died in the incidents. Children in the school were the immediate victims. Half of the female students and one third of the male students were suffering from posttraumatic distress 4 months after the shooting (Suomalainen, Haravuori, Berg, Kiviruusu, & Marttunen, 2010). Besides the students, families with school-age children were in a vulnerable position. Our interview data shows that the shooter having lived most of his life in the community made the shooting especially difficult to cope with. Many people felt guilt and even shame for living in Jokela. Some of the social conflicts have lasted years and it will probably be a long time before all have dealt with the trauma caused by the shooting.

Our quantitative analysis shows that social support and solidarity are connected to both institutional trust and trust in people in general. Having trust in other people provides a sense of security that may help people to cope with such tragedies. Social solidarity especially has a positive impact on psychological well-being (Hawdon et al., 2012). It is crucial for people to use their social networks and resources to cope with such traumatic incidents. Different socio-demographic groups have different ways of reacting to such tragedies (Oksanen et al., 2010). Coping is not only a matter of psychological or social well-being. It is important to understand that successful coping with traumatic violence opens the door to the successful prevention of future tragedies.

The Jokela school shooting reveals important sociological factors relating to social integration and moral regulation. Emil Durkheim touches on this issue in his seminal work on suicide, building his model of different suicide types on these factors (Durkheim 1897/2007). The Jokela shooting reveals both a lack of social integration and a lack of moral regulation. The perpetrator did not fit into the small community of Jokela and even his mother felt she was an outsider. The community failed to socially integrate the shooter. There was also a lack of moral regulation. Auvinen's radical views were not seriously condemned or even criticized by the adults. The perpetrator was able to express his sympathy for totalitarian regimes in school for years. He wrote essays referring to school shootings and terrorist violence. Some of the teachers even admit that they were reluctant to oppose him. It was mostly his offline school friends who reacted against such thoughts.

Although the high number of school threats recorded after the Jokela shooting may be due in part to a zero-tolerance approach by Finnish police, they reveal real problems, especially since many were claimed to be jokes. Not even mass murders are taken seriously. This is perhaps the most disturbing observation. School bullying, ostracism, and psychological problems can be resolved and treated. It is much more difficult to prevent certain cultural models or scripts from becoming attractive

to young people. Violent ideas and ideologies are disseminated globally via the Internet. School shooters have become icons of rebellion against bullies and oppressors (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a). Resistance to such glorification of violence would mean putting more emphasis on the tragic and traumatic consequences of violence caused by disturbed individuals who kill innocent people.

References

Addington, L. A. (2009). Cops and cameras: Public school security as a policy response to Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1426–1446.

Bannenberg, B. (2010). *Amok: Ursachen erkennen—Warnsignale verstehen—Katastrophen verhindern*. Munich: Random House.

Birkland, T. A., & Lawrence, R. G. (2009). Media framing and policy change after Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1405–1425.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim: Juventa.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2011). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2011a). *Amoklauf und School Shooting: Bedeutung, Hintergründe und Prävention*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2011b). Explaining and preventing school shootings: Chances and difficulties of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 295–314). New York: Springer.

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 27–37.

Byrne, B. M. (2010). *Structural equation modeling with AMOS: Basic concepts, applications, and programming*. London: Routledge.

Currie, C., Gabhainn, S. N., Godeau, E., Roberts, C., Smith, R., Currie, D., & Barnekow, V. (Eds.). (2008). *Inequalities in young people's health: HBSC international report from the 2005/2006 survey*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Durkheim, Émile. (2007). *Le suicide: étude de sociologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. (Original work published 1897).

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. Woodstock: Overlook.

Gerdt, A. (2004). *Petrin matka Myyrmanniin*. Helsinki: Gummerus.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. D. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies. *Sociological Methods & Research, 31*(2), 174–217.

Harju, J. (2012, February 15). Koko luokka näki puukotuksen. *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Harju, J., & Markkanen, K. (2012, January 10). Koulupuukottaja kuoli kolarissa. *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Hawdon, J., & Ryan, J. (2011). Social relations that generate and sustain solidarity after a mass tragedy. *Social Forces, 89*(4), 1363–1384.

Hawdon, J., Ryan, J., & Agnich, L. (2010). Crime as a source of solidarity: A research note testing Durkheim's assertion. *Deviant Behavior, 31*(8), 679–703.

Hawdon, J., Räsänen, P., Oksanen, A., & Ryan, J. (2012). Social solidarity and wellbeing after critical incidents: Three cases of mass shootings. *Journal of Critical Incident Analysis 2* (in press).

Helsingin Sanomat. (2001, April 5). Tukholman kouluampujalle yhdeksän vuoden tuomio. *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Hoffmann, J., Roshdi, K., & Robertz, F. (2009). Zielgerichtete schwere Gewalt und Amok an Schulen: Eine empirische Studie zur Prävention schwerer Gewalttaten. *Kriminalistik, 25*(4), 196–204.

Investigation Commission of the Jokela School Shooting [ICJ]. (2009). *Jokela School Shooting on 7 November 2007: Report of the Investigation Commission (Publication 1:2009)*. Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.

Kääriäinen, J. (2008). Väkivalta rikoksena. In N. Ellonen, J. Kääriäinen, V. Salmi, & H. Sariola (Eds.), *Lasten ja nuorten väkivaltakokemukset* (pp. 41–51). Tampere and Helsinki: Police College of Finland and National Research Institute of Legal Policy.

Kääriäinen, J., & Lehtonen, H. (2006). The variety of social capital in welfare state regimes—A comparative study of 21 countries. *European Societies, 8*(1), 27–57.

Kaczynski, T. (1995, September 22). Industrial society and its future. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/unabomber/manifesto.text.htm.

Kaltiala-Heino, R., Rimpela, M., Marttunen, M., Rimpelä, A., & Rantanen, P. (1999). Bullying, depression, and suicidal ideation in Finnish adolescents: School survey. *British Medical Journal, 319*, 348–351.

Kärnä, A., Voeten, M., Little, T. D., Poskiparta, E., Kaljonen, A., & Salmivalli, C. (2011). A large-scale evaluation of the KiVa antibullying program: Grades 4–6. *Child Development, 82*(1), 311–330.

Kiilakoski, T. (2009). *Viiltoja: Analyysi kouluväkivallasta Jokelassa*. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Network. Retrieved from http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/julkaisuja/viiltoja.pdf.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011a). Soundtrack of the school shootings: Cultural script, music and male rage. *Young, 19*(3), 247–269.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011b). Cultural and peer influences on homicidal violence: A Finnish Perspective. *New Directions for Youth Development, 33*(129), 31–42.

Kimmel, M. S., & Mahler, M. (2003). Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence. Random school shootings, 1982–2001. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*(10), 1439–1458.

Kullberg, A. (2011). Terrorismi ja Suomi. In A. Kullberg (Ed.), *Suomi, terrorismi, Supo* (pp. 10–44). Helsinki: WSOY.

Lahti, A., Räsänen, P., Riala, K., Keränen, S., & Kakko, H. (2011). Youth suicide trends in Finland, 1969–2008. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 52*(9), 984–991.

Larkin, R. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Lawrence, R. A., & Birkland, T. A. (2004). Guns, Hollywood and criminal justice: Defining the school shootings problem across public arenas. *Social Science Quarterly, 85*(5), 1193–1207.

Lee, J. (2009). *Celebrity, pedophilia, and ideology in American culture*. Amherst, NY: Cambria.

Lee, M., & Farrall, S. (2009). *Fear of crime: Critical voices in an age of anxiety*. Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish.

Lindberg, N., Sailas, E., & Kaltiala-Heino, R. (2012). The copycat phenomenon after two Finnish school shootings: An adolescent psychiatric perspective. BMC Psychiatry, *12*(1), 91 [Epub ahead of print] doi:10.1186/1471-244X-12-91.

Lindström, K., Räsänen, P., Oksanen, A., & Nurmi, J. (2011). Politiikkaprosessi ja aselainsäädännön uudistaminen Jokelan ja Kauhajoen koulusurmien jälkeen. In J. Saari & M. Niemelä (Eds.), *Politiikan polut ja hyvinvointiyhteiskunnan muutos* (pp. 254–271). Helsinki: Kela.

Malkki, L. (2011). Suomessa ei ole terrorismia, koska "Suomessa ei ole terrorismia"? 2000-luvun väkivallanteot ja tulkintojen merkitys. In A. Kullberg (Ed.), *Suomi, terrorismi, Supo* (pp. 204–224). Helsinki: WSOY.

MTV3. (2008). *45 Minuuttia*, November 5, 2008. Interview with the parents of Pekka-Eric Auvinen. Retrieved from http://www.katsomo.fi/?progId=3650&itemId=1052.

Muschert, G., & Peguero, A. A. (2010). Columbine effect and school anti-violence policy. *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, 17*, 117–148.

National Bureau of Investigation [NBI]. (2008). *Esitutkintapöytäkirja 2400/R/488/07*. Vantaa: Finnish Police.

National School Health Survey. (2009). *Koulukiusaaminen*. Retrieved from http://info.stakes.fi/kouluterveyskysely/FI/tulokset/taulukot2009/kiusaaminen2009.htm.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

Nurmi, J. (2012). Making sense of school shootings: Comparing local narratives of solidarity and conflict in Finland. *Traumatology*. doi:10.1177/1534765611426787.

Nurmi, J., Räsänen, P., & Oksanen, A. (2012). The norm of solidarity: Experiencing negative aspects of community life after a school shooting tragedy. *Journal of Social Work, 12*(3), 300–319.

Oksanen, A., Räsänen, P., Nurmi, J., & Lindström, K. (2010). "This can't happen here!" Community reactions to school shootings in Finland. *Research on Finnish Society, 3*, 19–27.

Oksanen, A., Räsänen, P., & Nurmi, J. (2012). Jokela and Kauhajoki: Experiencing school shootings in a Nordic welfare society. In R. Schwester (Ed.), *Handbook of critical incident analysis* (pp. 252–264). New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Partanen, P., & Nikula, A. (2010). *Oppilaitosten turvallisuus: Työryhmän raportti (publication 40/2009)*. Helsinki: Ministry of the Interior.

Pihlaja, J. (2003, August 26). Lukiolaispoika linnoittautui koulun katolle Haminassa. *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Puustinen, M. (2008). 70 uhkausta kouluihin. *Opettaja, 103*(7), 8–12.

Rauma Police Department. (1989). *Esitutkintapöytäkirja 3603/RP/R/146/89*. Rauma: Finnish Police.

Robertz, F., & Wickenhäuser, R. (2010). *Der Riss in der Tafel: Amoklauf und schwere Gewalt in der Schule* (2dth ed.). Berlin & Heidelberg: Springer.

Ryan, J., & Hawdon, J. (2008). From individual to community: The "framing" of 4–16 and the display of social solidarity. *Traumatology, 14*(1), 43–51.

Saavalainen, H. (2003, August 26). Aseistuminen harvinaista Suomen kouluissa. *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Sahlberg, P. (2010). Educational change in Finland. In A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan, & D. Hopkins (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational change, part 1* (pp. 323–348). New York: Springer.

Savage, I. (1993). Demographic influences on risk perceptions. *Risk Analysis, 13*(4), 413–420.

Semenov, A., Veijalainen, J., & Kyppö, J. (2010). Analyzing the presence of school-shooting related communities at social media sites. *International Journal of Multimedia Intelligence and Security, 1*(3), 232–268.

Sourander, A., Jensen, P., Rönning, J. A., Niemelä, S., Helenius, H., Sillanmäki, L., & Almqvist, F. (2007). What is the early adulthood outcome of boys who bully or are bullied in childhood? The Finnish "From a Boy to a Man" study. *Pediatrics, 120*, 397–404.

STT. (2011, October 19). Koulu-uhkausten määrä laskussa. *Helsingin Sanomat* . Retrieved from http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/Koulu-uhkausten+m%C3%A4%C3%A4r%C3%A4+laskussa/a1305547480463.

Suomalainen, L., Haravuori, H., Berg, N., Kiviruusu, O., & Marttunen, M. (2010). A controlled follow-up study of adolescents exposed to a school shooting—Psychological consequences after four months. *European Psychiatry, 26*(8), 490–497.

THL. (2010). Peruskoulun yläluokkalaisten ja lukiolaisten hyvinvointi 2000/2001–2008/2009: Kouluterveyskysely 2009. Retrieved from http://info.stakes.fi/NR/rdonlyres/DC2944EE-0D93-49AB-BA6E-EB07CECB21AF/0/kokomaa_yhdistetty_2009.pdf.

Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2003). Isn't it fun to get the respect that we're going to deserve? Narcissism, social rejection, and aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*(2), 261–272.

UNICEF. (2007). Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries. Florence: Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 7.

Uusitalo, T. (2007). *Nuorten itsemurhat Suomessa*. Helsinki: Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Finland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Välimaa, R., Kannas, L., Lahtinen, E., Peltonen, H., Tynjälä, J., & Villberg, J. (2008). Finland: Innovative health education curriculum and other investments for promoting mental health and social cohesion among children and young people. In: *Social cohesion for mental well-being among adolescents*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*(1), 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Reddy, M., & Fein, R. (2000). *Safe school initiative: An interim report on the prevention of targeted violence in schools*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center.

WHO. (2006). Country reports and charts on suicides. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/country_reports/en/index.html.

Chapter 10
A Catastrophic Solution: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on a Samurai School Attack in South Africa

Duncan Cartwright

The psychoanalytic perspective focuses on exploring the unconscious and preconscious dynamics of the violent offender's personality, including environmental influences, object relations, beliefs, motives, defenses, and fantasies. Although psychoanalysis is often associated with a solipsistic understanding of the individual, contemporary approaches see the individual as inextricably linked to his or her social surrounds and impingements. From this perspective the social context profoundly influences how we construct conscious and unconscious representations that make up complex internal worlds.

The case I explore here occurred at Nic Diederichs Technical High School, South Africa, in 2008. A masked young man wearing a mask attacked four individuals with a samurai sword, killing one student. Morné Harmse's motive was a diffuse kind of revenge, targeting students, and a need to make a "statement." Although this was not a school shooting per se, it shares many characteristics typical of rampage attacks. From a psychoanalytic perspective it sheds light on a number of factors related to this kind of violence. The organizing function of violent omnipotent fantasy, the obsessive nature of fantasy, trauma, the role of shame, and the "willful" marshalling of alternate self-states related to violent acting out are of particular interest. Deterioration in the capacity to mentalize and the dominance of pseudo-mentalizing capacities also appear significant in this case.

D. Cartwright (✉)
Centre for Applied Psychology, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal,
Durban, South Africa
e-mail: Cartwrightd@ukzn.ac.za

10.1 Psychoanalytic Understandings of School Violence

There has been relatively little commentary on school violence from a psychoanalytic perspective, perhaps reinforcing the perception that psychoanalysis largely ignores social issues (exceptions are Puget, 1988; Sandler & Alpert, 2000; Spiegel & Alpert, 2000; Twemlow, 2000, 2003). The most comprehensive psychoanalytic account of school violence and school shootings is found in the work of Twemlow, Fonagy, and colleagues. As well as focusing on the broader social context, including family background and parenting, their social systems psychodynamic perspective also draws on the day-to-day subjective accounts and experiences of children at school (Fonagy, Twemlow, Vernberg, Sacco, & Little, 2005; Twemlow, 2003; Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004, 2005; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, & Vernberg 2002; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco,Vernberg, & Malcom, 2011). From this perspective, schools as social systems function as an attachment system that either reproduces or counteracts attachment pathology originating in the family (Fonagy, Target, Steele, & Steele, 2000). It follows then that if schools reinforce dehumanizing environments, the risk of outbreaks of school violence is greater (Twemlow, 2003).

Twemlow, Fonagy, and colleagues explore violence in schools from a bully-victim-bystander perspective. The heart of their argument is the enactment of unmitigated power dynamics in the school context, where victims are subject to repeated incidents of humiliation, with bystanders identifying with either the bully or the victim. In this way, bystanders become passive members of a pathological system. In addition to individuals having easy access to weaponry and potentially dangerous information, the school's response to "fixed patterns of teasing, ostracism, and bullying…especially by popular groups such as athletes and economic elites" (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002b, p. 475) creates higher risk for school attacks. Clearly many other risk factors are important too (O'Toole, 2000; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000), but the core instigating factor, from this perspective, is a sustained, unchecked, attack on the individual's self-integrity.

The idea that violence serves as a last-ditch attempt to preserve some sense of self-integrity has been explored from a psychoanalytic perspective (Cartwright, 2002; Gilligan, 2000; Glasser, 1998; Hyatt-Williams, 1998; Meloy, 1992). Violent acts may vary in their sadistic or defensive qualities, as well as the extent to which the threat is real or perceived. But they all have in common the need for the offender to rid him- or herself of unbearable feeling states, or aspects of the self, that threaten the very existence of the self. From an Object Relations perspective we call this projective identification. Here, some semblance of integrity is maintained by the unconscious fantasy of locating vulnerable, victimized, or defective aspects of the self in others where they can be attacked. This process has behavioral, cognitive, and emotional correlates that are constantly mobilized by the violent offender to maintain rigid beliefs that others are bad, hostile, pathetic, vulnerable, or simply insignificant. Particular features of projective identification appear to be evident in

the case histories of school shooters (Sandler & Alpert, 2000; Twemlow, 2003; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, 2002; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002). It is well established that there is no single "linchpin" factor that might explain rampage school attacks or why the pathological process described above would lead to such generalized attacks. It is worth exploring, however, whether specific features of this pathological process are salient in school attacks or in the perpetrator. Aside from the school environment, what can be said about the quality of parenting and attachment relationships within the families of school shooters? What is the role of shame in the pathological process? How does one understand, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the role of fantasy and the building compulsion to commit the crime? What role does "leakage" play? How should we understand the "mental narrowing" that often occurs in the build-up to the attack?

10.1.1 Attachment and Emotional Ties

A significant body of literature draws on attachment theory to explain vulnerability to many different forms of violent behavior (Bond & Bond, 2004; Bowlby, 1984; Fonagy, 1999; Johns & Guetzloe, 2003; Laub & Lauritsen, 1998; Levy & Orlans, 2000; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999; Meloy, 1992; Twemlow, et al., 2011). Disorganized and dismissing disorders of attachment appear to generate a developmental vulnerability for violent acting out (Fonagy et al., 2000; Hesse and Main, 2000; Lyons-Ruth, Dutra, Schuder, & Bianchi, 2006; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002). Disorganized attachments are, in part, a product of frightening and frightened caregivers that manage their infant's needs reactively and through coercive means. This has the effect of escalating, rather than easing, emotional discomfort. It leads to a subjective sense of "fright without solution" and predisposes the child to a chronic hyper-aroused attachment system (Main & Hesse, 1990). In turn, children internalize a chaotic and disorientating dominant relational pattern where the experience of intimacy is frightening. Due to insufficient attunement and mirroring, dissociation is used to regulate affect (Lyons-Ruth et al., 2006; Putnam, 1992). In dismissing and disorganized attachment patterns the infant learns to dismiss meaningful somatic and emotional states, leaving them dissociated from conscious thought. High levels of dissociation deprive the individual of future opportunities for experiencing the relief and psychic growth afforded when affect is regulated as part of a trusting relational experience. A further consequence of attachment insecurity is a compromised ability to internalize a stable representational process. Put another way, too much hypervigilance and internal disorganization compromises the ability to make use of predictable ways of knowing, trusting, and thinking about the self (and others).

Although some contend that many school shooters come from relatively intact families (Ferguson, Coulson, & Barnett, 2011); Langman, 2009; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, et al. (2002) argue that underneath this apparent intactness lies a pattern of superficiality, with parents often being afraid of their children and unable

to set reasonable boundaries. Communication styles are often reactive, or cease as a means of avoiding further disorganization. Parents sometimes tolerate extreme behaviors in their children, large parts of whose lives are left unsupervised or dismissed. As a result, it is often evident that parents of school shooters have very little knowledge of their child's habits and activities (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, et., 2002). There is growing evidence that family relationships are indeed problematic (Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2010; Fast, 2008; Newman, 2004; O'Toole, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). It is likely that the kind of family dynamics described here produce over-controlling behaviors that mask a deep unfulfilled desire for emotional recognition (Böckler et al., 2010).

All these manifestations are symptomatic of attachment insecurity where emotional life seems to be a chaotic, frightening, and sometimes hopeless pursuit. There appears to be no safe means of communicating distress, which further compromises belief and trust in human relationships. It is likely that this sets up an implicit search for objects and experiences that appear to yield stability and a sense of self-worth. In disorganized attachments this is often achieved through coercive means where the adolescent "identifies with the aggressor" (Ferenczi, Dupont, Balint, & Jackson, 1995) to deny feelings of helplessness. While this may occur through identification with actual traumatizing figures, it also occurs when the adolescent identifies with imagined idealized destructive objects that control and destroy perceived weakness while generating a sense of power, grandiosity, and entitlement (Fonagy, 1999; Twemlow, 2003). At times this kind of profile gives an appearance of a hyper-mature and hypermasculine state (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002).

Clearly, attachment insecurity alone cannot explain the various forms of violence. It is well known that most individuals with disorganized or dismissive attachment histories do not commit violent acts. It is also important to distinguish between insecurely attached individuals who commit impulsive, self-preserving acts of violence, typical of impoverished school environments, and those who are capable of planned, calculated attacks (Twemlow, 2003; Twemlow et al., 2011). Clearly other aspects of the social context and personality require consideration.

10.1.2   The Role of Shame

Langman (2009) notes that despite varying degrees of trauma, psychosis, or psychopathy present in school shooters, underlying feelings of shame, and an unwavering sense of feeling inherently defective are prominent in most perpetrators. He finds that psychotic shooters often experience shame about psychotic symptoms and feelings of being "different." For trauma survivors, the shame emerges from being rendered defective and damaged, while those who present with psychopathic traits experience defective aspects of the self as narcissistic injury.

The majority of school shooters have some history of chronic or acute rejection (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003). Often they have been teased or ostracized and feel very much like an outsider, creating a great deal of shame, worthlessness,

and self-hate. Clearly, many adolescents endure teasing and bullying. Are there other factors that might explain why shame and rejection would lead to school violence? We have already discussed the idea of a disorganized attachment system increasing vulnerability. A history of trauma and the presence of psychopathology also appear to make shame affects more unbearable. In addition, feelings of envy are often found in the narratives of school shooters where the "shamed" defective self attacks the "ideal" lives of others (Langman, 2009). Often, especially given adolescent identity concerns, shame is strongly tied to issues related to a fragile "masculine" identity and a deeply felt "failure of manhood" (Newman, 2004, p. 6).

These unbearable feelings of shame are central to understanding violence from a psychoanalytic perspective (Cartwright, 2002; Gilligan, 2000; Lansky, 2005; Spiegel & Alpert, 2000). Shame affects are intimately tied to the very existence of the self as a coherent psychological entity. From a psychoanalytic point of view, how shame is incorporated into the defensive profile of the personality can help us better understand the use of violence. For example, James Gilligan's seminal work (1996) demonstrates the toxic effects of internalized shame on men who have been incarcerated for antisocial violent acts. Elsewhere (Cartwright, 2002), I have explored how deep feelings of shame set up a particular kind of defensive profile that leaves some men vulnerable to committing rage-type acts of violence.

Although it appears that some inchoate versions of shame may exist very early in life, it emerges prominently with budding awareness of the self at about 12–18 months of age. Mahler termed this the "practicing" subphase typified by hyper-stimulated states, grandiosity, and explorative behavior (Schore, 1991). Shame is thought to be activated when the caregiver is not adequately attuned to explorative achievements or interrupts such attempts with expressions of disdain, anger, or irritation. Repeated internalizations of these kinds of interaction leaves the individual feeling defective, permanently damaged, unlovable, and sometimes subhuman. Importantly, shame is not only linked to severe experiences of trauma, but can also be embedded in more ordinary verbal interaction. As aptly puts it: "Words alone can shame and reject, insult and humiliate, dishonour and disgrace, tear down self-esteem, and murder the soul" (p. 49).

From a psychoanalytic point of view, there is an important difference between experiences of shame affects, on the one hand, and internalized shame dynamics, on the other. The experience of shame simply refers to a range of experiences where a person feels exposed, embarrassed, humiliated, and mortified. The internalization of shame, on the other hand, instigates a process dominated by splitting defenses in order to avoid further anticipated humiliation. Shame is associated with split-off toxic aspects of the self that remain hidden and therefore cannot be modified or regulated by ongoing new experiences (Lansky, 2005, 2007; Morrison, 1985). These internalized object relations usually manifest in deep disdain for the self and sometimes lead to envy of others. This is exacerbated by constant comparisons with internalized values, ideals, and standards (the ego ideal) and the threat of rejection and ostracism (Lansky, 2005). Because internalized shame often contaminates the whole personality, any anticipated shaming event is experienced as repeating a total rejection of the self and the absence of love.

Shame is a core affect linked to the very existence of the self. For this reason, shame-prone individuals experience perceived rejections and defects as almost life-threatening. Awareness of these hypersensitivities can often help us understand individuals who are prone to impulsive actions like self-harm, defensive or rage-type violence, excessive and restrictive eating, and substance abuse; all serve to ward off painful life-threatening shame affects (Bromberg, 2006; Cartwright, 2002; Lansky, 2005, 2007).

It seems to me, however, that something more sinister occurs in the pathological process implicated in planned violent attacks like school shootings. Here, it appears that identification with "victimhood" arouses persistent and omnipotent thoughts of revenge in the potential attacker. The "victim" experience becomes fused with powerful, triumphant, feeling states. By "fetishizing" the shame experience, thoughts of difference, rejection, and defect are used to fuel thoughts of vengeance and violence which, in turn, are fused with omnipotence and power. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this may explain why school shooters are often described as being "injustice collectors" (O'Toole, 2000): every perceived slight, every action against the self, shores up a conscious resolve for vengeance. At a more unconscious level, it seems, ironically, to be related to a desperate need for recognition and for hidden shamed parts of the self to be heeded. I was struck by this when a young man who had committed an act of violence at school and was intent on continuing told me: "They're all insignificant fuckers, the teachers and the kids. I'm going show them what a bigger, better, insignificant fucker can do!" This illustrates the connection between "insignificant" shame states and the emergence of an omnipotent, idealized, self-state still associated with "insignificance" and linked to thoughts of violence and sadomasochistic intent. While defensive violence seeks to keep shame at bay, if this continues, the pathological state becomes more sadistic as it becomes entrenched in the personality along with greater dissociation (Glasser, 1998).

If high levels of dissociation occur, affective states cannot be identified or regulated, often leading to a chronic sense of deadness or numbness. This is a very real subjective experience for those who have been deeply shamed. As Gilligan puts it: "To speak of these men as 'the living dead' is not a metaphor I have invented, but rather the most direct and literal, least distorted way to summarize what these men have told me when describing their subject experience of themselves" (Gilligan, 1996, p. 33).

Some have described similar states in school shooters (Langman, 2009; Twemlow, 2003; Weisbrot, 2008). In their build-up to the crime they are often described as being in "robotic" or "zombie-like" states. Twemlow (2003) understands this as the manifestation of a very primitive form of "autistic" defensiveness, where attentiveness to sensation (as a means of self-preservation) overrides more mature psychological defenses.

10.1.3   Fantasy

Fantasies linked to rampage attacks often feature prominently in the build-up. Can particular features of these fantasies help us understand the crime and build-up to

the attack? Fantasying is an important and creative aspect of normal psychic functioning. Fantasying involves vague, conscious experiences stemming from our attempts to process internal and external emotional occurrences while integrating personal needs, values, and desires. The content of our fantasies is often open to modification as we integrate new information or emotional experience. In this way fantasy has an integrative function that helps build a coherent sense of self and regulate affect. This is not the case with school shooters, where violent fantasies often give rise to unbearable levels of affect. Importantly, their fantasy life seems to follow a particular course, eventually dominating the personality and leading to unrelenting pressure to eventually act out an internal scene (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002). From this point of view we could see the progressive building of destructive fantasy as a "crime in progress" (Depue & Depue, 1999, p. 66).

Can we isolate particular internal or external factors that help us understand why these fantasies build in intensity? As we shall see below, it seems that obsessive fantasy is linked to agentive qualities of the self drawn from identifying with destructive images. My sense is that these fantasies have an addictive quality that, along with diminished reality-testing and a deteriorating capacity to mentalize, put the subject at greater risk for acting out fantasy.

According to Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, et al. (2002), risk of violence is imminent when fantasy "pressure" is accompanied by the adoption of a fixed role, usually as the "avenging victim" (usually the victim, bully, and bystander roles are relatively fluid). This often involves acting out or rehearsing scenes that embody this role, and is accompanied by changes in the individual's appearance. Twemlow (2003) shows how Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris began to adopt fixed roles about a year before the Columbine killings. They strongly identified with the role of "avenging victim" in the rehearsing of violent scenes. Both started to dress in trench coats and journaled more frequently about violent acts being justifications for repeated humiliations.

This fixed identification has significant impacts on the individual's internal world. Many authors have noted the narrowing of perspective that occurs in the minds of school shooters in reaction to real or perceived dehumanizing environments. This is not something that can be managed internally, and directly effects the external environment. It leads to a sense of having "no identity other than that of avenging victim, and [therefore] no perceived path towards growth and development other than lethal retaliation" (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Vernberg, 2002, p. 226). Put another way, the enactment of fantasy is a desperate attempt to preserve some sense of self-integrity that they feel has been denied.

Still referring to Columbine, Twemlow explains how the rigid adoption of "avenging" roles sets in motion self-perpetuating group dynamics:

> A child in a dehumanizing environment may well react by narrowing his or her cognitive and emotional focus in a desperate attempt to preserve self-integrity. The world of such a child becomes more and more restricted by a narrow and obsessive focus, perhaps inclusive of a retaliatory wish. . . . The need for retaliation and its justification are reminiscent of Erikson's pseudo-speciation (Erikson, 1985, 1996), since these boys developed a pathological social group with narrowly defined, self-maintaining, grandiose cognitions, which although destructive, helped to maintain the integrity of the self (2003, p. 671).

Consistent with bully-victim dynamics, the content of the shooter's fantasy is made up of images of triumphant violent "heroes" who annihilate vulnerability, freedom, or anything associated with those who have created, or been blind to, "injustice."

Fantasy is often stimulated by drawing on ideas expressed in Satanism, music, and violent video games. There is little conclusive evidence that these elements actually instigate school attacks or can be clearly linked to chronic aggressive behavior (Ferguson, 2007; Szabo, 2008). In the case to be discussed, I will explore how music, masks, and swords were used as "dissociative devices" to enhance fantasy and further confuse the line between reality and imagination.

10.1.4 Defensive Organization

Simply put, "defensive organization" refers to the rigid and systemic use of defenses and object relations to prevent development of the personality. Are their particular defensive organizations evident in school rampage offenders? As mentioned earlier, dissociation and splitting, along with projective identification, may be important defenses. Shooters seem drawn to events that mirror past occasions that caused unbearable emotions. Often, "hurtful" situations are exaggerated in their minds in order to extract maximum justification for violent fantasies.

In many cases there is little evidence of a "final straw" that breaks through the defensive system. This is more typical of reactive or defensive forms of violence (Cartwright, 2002). Rather, the defensive organization feeds on perceived injustices, gradually leading to a build-up towards the compulsion to commit the attack. In the Harmse school attack, it appears that the adoption of a "false-self" organization is important in understanding the perpetrator's personality profile and the instigation of violence.

The fact that school shootings and similar attacks never occur without warning of some kind appears to be an important area of research (Depue and Depue 1999; Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). "Leakage" usually occurs with peers but is often also evident in school essays handed in to teachers. Are these acts attempts at warning, indirect cries for help, forms of intimidation, or the expression of a need for excitement? What does this imply about the defensive organization of the offender? In my understanding of the case at hand, it appears linked to a need for acceptance by peers and is a desperate source of narcissistic gratification.

Finally, in terms of defensive organization, it appears important that these attacks are mostly nonspecific and played out in the school context. The idea that school members are incorporated into a diffuse victim identity is prominent here. Usually bystanders are also targeted, but the singling out of specific targets does not feature in this form of violence. Rather, all individuals become part of what might be called "a shaming scene" in which the offender feels compelled to enact a catastrophic "solution," feeling this to be the only solution that will eventually impact the hearts and minds of the world. Indeed, we might say these tragic events succeed on this level in terms of the "discourse of fear" that is disseminated by the media after such attacks (Altheide, 2009).

10.1.5   *Mentalizing Capacities*

The decision to kill on the scale envisaged by the rampage offender is often embedded in contrived, pathetic, sometimes desperate, attempts to mean something in the minds of others, and to themselves. What does this mean about their ability to reason, empathize, and think?

"Mentalizing" refers to the capacity to accurately track, intuit, and interpret the mental states of self and others. Deficits in mentalizing and the ability to reflect on experience have been found to be prominent in violent offenders (Cartwright, 2002; Fonagy, 2003). Mentalizing capacities go hand in hand with the ability to empathize with others. It appears that shooters lose, or shut down, their capacity to mentalize in order to be able to kill. There is an exception here, however, when the offender fits a psychopathic profile. In these cases, mentalizing skills are misused in order to gain some satisfaction from manipulating the victim's mind and seeing him or her suffer (Baron-Cohen, 2005).

In either case, however, the healthy capacity to track and use mental states to build a coherent, realistic sense of self appears to be markedly impaired. In its place, offenders tend to make use of concrete thinking and somatic experiences to generate a sense of cohesion and regulate painful affect. This is a very broad formulation that we return to in considering the specific case, so as to examine some of the peculiarities that may be typical of individuals capable of aberrant acts of school violence.

10.2   Samurai Sword Killing at Nic Diederichs Technical High School, South Africa

At 7:10 a.m. on the morning of Monday, August 18, 2008, just before school assembly, Morné Harmse attacked and killed Jacques Pretorious (age 16) with an ornamental samurai sword he had brought from home.[1] He was wearing a bizarre homemade mask, gloves, knee and elbow pads, and had painted his face with black paint. Just before the attack he shouted to the group of students he was with: "Want to see something cool?" Harmse swung at Jacques Pretorious, slashing the back of his neck as he walked by with a group of students. Harmse then walked a few steps down the passage and attacked another student, Stephan Bouwer, slashing him in the back of the head and ear. Two groundsmen working at the school, Joseph Kodiseng and Simon Manamela, came to Bouwer's aid and were stabbed in the face and back when they tried to stop the attacker. At this point Harmse halted his attack and moved into a courtyard area where he sat down and plunged his sword into the ground. Shortly after the attack he was approached by a teacher who asked him to remove his mask and took him to the school principal's office. He reportedly said "Now what sir?" when he arrived. Harmse had not known Jacques Pretorious or Stephan Bouwer before the incident.

---

[1] Unless otherwise specified all details of the case were obtained from the public records of the South-Gauteng High Court, case number JPV 08/0216.

10.2.1 Details of the Attack

There had been regular talk between Harmse and approximately six friends about "doing something impressive" at the school so the other students would take notice of them. Conversations about creating a bloodbath at school appeared to be led by Harmse. Three months before the crime, he began making masks that resembled those worn by members of the heavy metal band Slipknot. Some of his friends also made masks and on at least two occasions Harmse and friends experimented with wearing the "Slipknot" masks at school (du Plessis, 2008a).

Harmse describes returning on the Friday before the attack to the discussion about "doing something impressive" at school (Ndaba & Foss, 2009). The discussion intensified and the group started formulating plans about what they would bring to school on Monday. One friend, Marco, said he would bring a bomb and two BB guns. There was also talk of another friend bringing a "rolling bomb." Harmse said he would bring masks and swords and Max, another friend, said he would use one of Harmse's swords and a mask. During the weekend Harmse messaged Marco to find out if he had made the bomb.

On the day of the attack, Harmse and his brother arrived at school together. Harmse was carrying a bag containing three masks and holding a number of swords in his hands. He met Marco, who said he had made the bomb but had not brought the guns. They walked in the direction of the boys' change room. At the change room Harmse started asking his friends who was going to join him. He grabbed one of the swords and said: "Come on, join me and we'll all be part of it. Now we go on with the masquerade" (Serrao & Foss, 2008a, b). In his testimony, Max confirmed Harmse said he wanted a bloodbath: "Today is the day, I want to start the day with a masquerade. . . . today is the day that you get the side back that has done bad to you." Harmse appeared determined to continue his chosen path. He smeared black paint on his face and put on a mask that he claimed resembled the mask of Slipknot's lead singer, Corey Taylor. He put on gloves as well as elbow and knee guards. He then put two swords into his belt and held a 60-cm Samurai sword in one hand and the homemade bomb (which turned out to be fake) in the other. Harmse is reported to have said he would blow everybody up when they were all together. He continued to try to persuade Max to join him. Max testified to feeling very threatened by Harmse and thought he would be attacked if he did not put on a mask and take a sword. Max reportedly tried to call others and shortly afterwards took his clown mask off, put the sword down, and said to Harmse, "you won't do it." Having heard that Harmse was "losing it," more of his friends arrived to try to stop him. They laughed at him as he was acting strangely and "talking in a different voice." One of his friends said: "the whole time Morné was speaking with a weird voice, almost like the Joker's voice in [The Dark Knight] Batman [film]" (du Plessis, 2008b). He seemed euphoric as he said: "Look at my sword, want to see how it works? Want to see something cool?" He then turned on the group of boys that happened to be walking by. After the crime, laughing, he said to his friend, "I killed three people, didn't I?" (Serrao & Foss, 2008a, b).

After the rampage his parents reported that their son had claimed that he could not stop the compulsion to commit the crime. In his words: "When I put on the mask, everything went dead quiet and my body started moving. I wanted to stop, but I couldn't" (du Plessis, 2008c).

Following the crime there were many news reports that Harmse had been involved in Satanism and the occult. The heavy metal band Slipknot was also blamed for lyrics that insight violence and anger. It was known that Harmse had smoked cannabis approximately twice a week since age 17, but he tested negative for drugs at the time of the attack.

In a public statement, Harmse's parents said:

> Harmse was very small and skinny for his age group. Until Monday morning, we never thought he would be able to do something like this. . . . we raised our children strictly but with a lot of love. Because of his build Morné was regularly bullied during his formative years. Where we could, we stood up for him and on occasion spoke to the bullies, but also accepted it as a part of life . . . we had never realised the real impact of the physical and emotional abuse on Morné. He explained to us that he felt so powerless and worthless that he wanted to make a statement (du Plessis, 2008c).

His parents went on to encourage other parents to make sure they have "a proper conversation" with their children so as to better understand the difficulties and personality changes that children go through (du Plessis, 2008c).

10.2.2 Background

Morné Harmse lived at home with his mother, father, and younger brother, who was 15 years old at the time of the attack. His father worked for a security company and his mother was a housewife. In terms of early development, his mother described a very difficult first year with her son. She struggled to feed him and he cried day and night. She reported observing some stereotypical behaviors in early childhood where Harmse would spin the wheel on his pram or toy motorbike for long periods of time. In 1994, when he was 4 years old, his mother was hospitalized for depression. Her depression appeared to be associated with ongoing marital conflict and domestic violence.

The social worker's and psychologist's reports describe a family situation where Harmse did not actively receive support and love. Coercive aggression and force were often used during his childhood and adolescence. When this escalated, his mother and her two sons would move out of the family home. Harmse was often terrified of his father, who was described as aggressive and short-tempered. It was reported that Harmse would sometimes receive "extreme beatings" from his father. He felt his parents saw him and his brother as "just stupid kids" who needed to comply without any opposition or expression. During his psychological evaluation he expressed difficulty in thinking about the abuse at home, but added that he just wanted to escape it somehow. Harmse reported having fantasies of attacking his father but never acted on them because his father was "stronger and bigger" than him.

In Grade 5 his parents were concerned about Harmse's lack of growth and took him to a "growth clinic." It appears that he had started to become self-conscious about his size from an early age. His parents described him as an isolated, passive, apathetic young child who preferred his own company. When friends came to play they would often end up playing with Harmse's brother while he isolated himself in his room, playing computer games.

Harmse's home environment was restrictive and he experienced childhood as extremely lonely, living with a sense that he never got what he desired. He felt he could not approach his parents for advice, opinions, or direction. The social worker was of the opinion that, as a young man, his pain and sadness were more easily expressed aggressively. Interpersonally, Harmse was described as "extremely intro-verted and very uncomfortable around others." He felt lonely even in company, dis-trustful of others, sensitive, easily embarrassed, and felt that others thought he was stupid. It appears that his passive, introverted appearance gave others the impression of a shy child who never caused problems (Serrao and & Foss, 2008a, b).

In primary school Harmse participated in sports and his parents were not aware of any negative behaviors. At high school he felt he could never fit in and grew more insecure about his size. It worried him that he could not play rugby, the main sport in his school. There are reports of him participating in school debating (it is not clear for how long) but felt teased because it was not "manly enough." Interestingly, his parents described him as being afraid of school because he felt confused and disorientated by what he experienced as a lack of order and rules. He felt that stu-dents were left to their own devices. Academically, he was an average student.

From an early age Harmse took a keen interest in martial arts and idealized heroes associated with this world. Approximately 5 years before the crime his father bought him a set of samurai swords which were displayed in his room. Later, he bought himself another set of swords. Harmse fantasized about being a soldier and spent a great deal of time researching topics related to bombs and guns. He wanted to be a soldier, he said, and thought his research would be to his advantage when he joined the army. His friends described his room as relatively empty, with his swords neatly displayed on the wall. Harmse also spent time making other swords as well as various ninja paraphernalia. He also developed an interest in mind-reading and related subjects and collected books to satisfy his interest. The social worker reports that his parents bought him books about palm-reading and tarot cards in an attempt to satisfy his curiosity. It appears that Harmse later became curious about the occult and in Grade 7 expressed an interest in being a Satanist. Although his parents disap-proved, it appears they never actively intervened. Harmse reported that he also developed an interest in researching topics linked to schizophrenia and psychopathy after watching a movie about "brainwashing." He said he was motivated by a sense of feeling "different."

Although initially denying observing any antisocial behavior, his mother later described a number of worrying observations that were never attended to. She reported that Harmse had once drawn detailed plans of his school and other houses. When questioned, he admitted wanting to break into the school's chemistry labora-tories to obtain bomb-making chemicals. It appears that he had experimented with

making bombs, and this was a subject that often occupied his mind. He said he would sometimes imagine that school children were terrorists and fantasize about blowing up the "stupid" children. In his mind he appeared to separate "stupid" children from "smart" teachers.

Harmse and his brother were also involved in a break-in in the neighborhood. When the social worker asked about this, Harmse did not appear troubled by his behavior, because he felt "someone might do the same to him one day."

The assessing psychologist noted that his affect was usually blunted or inappropriate during the evaluation and he would often smile when discussing serious matters. Throughout the assessment Harmse also found it very difficult to name feeling states. The psychologist described him as relating in a strangely inappropriate or "empty" manner, similar to a schizoid/schizotypal presentation. Although displaying some breakthrough affects related to regret about the crime, the psychologist felt he generally displayed a lack of remorse and found much of his presentation to be consistent with Antisocial Personality Disorder. Psychological testing (MMPI, MCMI, Rorschach) confirmed paranoid thinking and a sense that other people could influence his mind and "had it in for him." He was not diagnosed with an Axis 1 disorder and was found to be apsychotic.

After interviewing all parties and considering background details and reports, the social worker made some astute observations about Harmse's personality and upbringing in her presentencing report. She reported that his parents demonstrated little love or physical contact and as a result felt absent to him. "He belonged nowhere as a child," she writes, and carried a sense of emptiness inside him. The social worker describes his expression of a "huge desire for love, attention, and caring" and mentions a hypersensitivity to rejections and a tendency to "look for answers in abstraction" where he could feel safe and harness some degree of control. In this way an escape into a dreamworld of mystical figures and fantasy became a pivotal aspect of his world view. The social worker felt Harmse's frequent use of "figurative" or "abstract" language had an eccentric and childlike quality and was accompanied by a need to "shock." He would often make use of war imagery, dragons, mythological figures, and so forth, to describe his situation. His friends described him as obsessed with war and the thought of becoming a ninja. It appears he spent much of his time after school rehearsing and playing out these fantasies, climbing walls and roofs enacting ninja scenes (Serrao & Foss, 2008a, b). Accessing this world seems to have given him some relief from a sense of inadequacy. As the social worker indicates, "in this fantasy world he feels more accepted by friends and his father."

10.2.3 Build-up to the Attack

In the year of the attack, Harmse and his friends developed an interest in the heavy metal band Slipknot. One of his friends reported that he noticed that the music appeared to "change him" (du Plessis, 2008a). Approximately 3 weeks before the

attack they made masks similar to the ones worn by the band members. In another press report, one of his friends described each of the masks as embodying themes like "rape, murder, or child abuse" (Serrao & Foss, 2008a, b). It appears that Harmse made a number of these masks and had, at some point, played around with trying to scare his father by wearing one. It seems that this quickly grew into an obsession and he started to photograph himself wearing the masks.

Was anything done about Harmse's deteriorating state? His parents did not mention noticing any escalation of odd behavior, change in mood, or similar. Some of his teachers, however, reported noticing that he had become "withdrawn" over a period of 5 months. The week before the attack his class had had a discussion about their futures where his teacher noted his inappropriate affect and "silly answers" and observed that he appeared to have no sense of a future (Serrao & Foss, 2008a, b). His teachers worried about his "end-of-the-world philosophies" (Weisbrot, 2008, p. 50), which is a common feature linked to the mental crisis that school shooters often encounter. On the Friday before the killing, the day his group of friends firmed up their plans, his teachers had talked about trying to help.

As mentioned earlier, Harmse's parents were deeply saddened by the realization that they had never noticed the "real impact of the physical and emotional abuse" (du Plessis, 2008c). After the crime Harmse was able to put into words feeling so "powerless and worthless that he wanted to make a statement" (du Plessis). Even with all the facts we have (he was bullied, witnessed violence, had access to weapons, displayed some antisocial tendencies, and so forth), it remains difficult to comprehend how his "statement" became so contrived, violent, faceless, but school-focused.

10.3   Discussion: A Catastrophic Solution

A number of elements of the tragic events at Nic Diederichs Technical High School offer useful insights into rampage attacks of this nature. The crime certainly fits many common characteristics of the school shooter (Muschert, 2007; O'Toole, 2000). From a broad psychoanalytic perspective, I am primarily interested in what the case suggests about attachment relationships, the qualities of object relations, the function of fantasy, and the nature of defensive organization. This includes both intrapsychic and external factors that appear to have set Harmse on a path towards a particular kind of violent action.

10.3.1   Disorganized Attachment and the False Self

A number of aspects of the case point to a prominent disorganized attachment dynamic:

- The prominence of violence in his background
- Hostility often experienced from his father

- A tendency to withdraw from relationships
- Some evidence of stereotypical behaviors in early childhood
- An apathetic, arrested predisposition
- A tendency to appear "empty" or vacant;
- Contradictory feelings towards attachment figures
- A need for rules and structure to down-regulate affects in order to feel organized

As already mentioned, individuals who experience disorganized attachment dynamics usually perceive attachment figures as either frightening or frightened (Main & Hesse, 1990). They feel caught and confused by their need to seek safety in a relationship with an attachment figure who is also experienced as frightened or frightening. Here, dissociation emerges as a key defensive maneuver that offers "an escape when there is no escape" (Putnam, 1992, p. 173). It involves a disintegration of the personality in an effort to separate unbearable and chaotic "bad" psychic states from other ego states. Sometimes defensive splitting is also expressed through dissociative or altered states where the individual enters a trance-like or withdrawn self-state in order to avoid being overwhelmed by internalized chaos. This internal state comprises unprocessed concrete images or sensations produced by frightening or frightened encounters that, in turn, lead to a sense of feeling caught in polarized thoughts of either being frightening or frightened, victim or persecutor.

Although the first-line response to disorganized attachment is further disorganization and submission (to stifle or obscure the "pain" of reality), individuals also tend to reverse roles as a way of attempting to "dominate" and control perceived threats to the self (Hesse & Main, 2000; Main & Hesse, 1990). They do so either by adopting an "adult role" to take care of their attachment figure, or appropriating aggressive, powerful roles to mask a real sense of fragility and confusion. We see the latter manifested in conduct disorders, oppositional disorders, and other antisocial tendencies in children. In Harmse's case, the submission and apathy (the first-line response) is evident as a dominate part of his character. Oppositional aspects seldom occur overtly but exist, nevertheless, in a more clandestine form, symbolized by aggressive figures that are obsessively played out in fantasy or "play." What is important here is how these aggressive and destructive fantasies start to yield a sense of internal organization, identity, and power. We will return to this shortly.

It is reasonably well known that a traumatic upbringing creates high risk for the experience of dissociative states (Herman, 1997; Lyons-Ruth et al. 2006; Lyons-Ruth & Spielman, 2004). The self splits in a desperate attempt to preserve some sense of psychic integrity. Experiences of numbing, dreamlike states, and out-of-body states are all common features of the experience of dissociation in response to trauma. They can, however, also occur with milder forms of ongoing relational trauma through parental misattunement and inattentiveness (Bromberg, 2006; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999; Lyons-Ruth & Spielman, 2004). What is dissociated, in either case, is not usually a coherent split off "bad self" that sets up an internal conflict with good aspects of the self. It is probably more accurate to refer to a splintering of the self (Kilborne, 1999). Here, trauma leaves in its wake experiences that

remain unprocessed, too unbearable to think about. As a result, they exist as ever-present fragments that constantly disrupt the continuity of experience and lead to a chaotic unregulated internal world.

I believe that given his attachment insecurity, Harmse's attempts to manage his internal world are in keeping with a version of what Deutsch (1942) first termed the "as-if" personality and Winnicott (1960) later called the "false-self" personality. The core feature of this kind of personality is a constant sense of apathy and emptiness as the "false-self" is appropriated in an attempt to appease others. Because it is not based on the self's true needs and desires, there is often a sense of awkwardness and inauthenticity reflected in interpersonal relations. Reports of Harmse being normal, good, polite, with little sign of overt conduct problems at school, and of his submissive and compliant character, appear to confirm this. Furthermore, because much of his interaction was based on "false" relatedness, responses from others would have felt equally futile, inauthentic, and empty.

Harmse's view of children being "stupid" and adults "smart" is of interest. It is speculative, but this perspective seems to say something about his "false self" world view where "stupid" children submit to "smart" adults/parents. Harmse certainly felt trapped by his father's strict authoritarianism and found it very difficult to openly oppose authority figures. He felt submission and compliance to be the only option. "If I ever had my own children," Harmse told the social worker, "I would bring them up with choices." Without an outlet to deal with his needs and difficulties *in reality*, it is likely that his sense of difference, frustration about his deficiencies, turned into seething anger towards a world that he felt did not understand him.

The one bullying incident we hear about at school involved a bigger boy taking Harmse's hat and not returning it. The following day his father went to school and angrily confronted the boy. As reported by the social worker, when Harmse recalls the incident he "wishes he had been like his dad." This appears to be a typical example of what called "identification with the aggressor." Harmse's exposure to traumatic experiences certainly made avoiding a sense of powerlessness and helplessness the easier psychic option. However, although this yields some sense of power and control over his world, it also sets up further difficulties related to repetition of early trauma relations: to identify with the very forces that he feels do not hear him, restrict him, damage him. Typically of the paradox evident in disorganized attachment, he desperately wants to emulate, be like, his father. But at the same time, he harbors immense anger towards him.

Thoughts and fantasies of aggression, sadomasochistic impulses, and so forth, have an incisive effect on the disorganized psyche. Here, a sense of power, aggressiveness, and omnipotence leads to a state of feeling more organized and, ironically, safe: rather act against or destroy vulnerability than be its victim. In terms of object relations theory, we could also understand this to be tied to a process of projective identification. The process is set in motion by unconscious fantasies aimed at getting rid of unwanted parts of the self. Projective identification manifests interpersonally when vulnerable disturbing aspects of the self are projected onto external objects and attacked so as to avoid the real pain of thinking about them as being part of the self. This is apparent in Harmse's fantasies seeing students as

"dumb terrorists" or "stupid," where he tries to distance himself from "bad" or "stupid" parts of himself so he can locate and destroy them in others.

Apart from knowing that Harmse was rather passive and withdrawn at school, there is little information about his interactions with others. It would appear plausible, however, that negotiating ordinary adolescent conflicts, jostling for recognition as a young man amongst his peers, must have felt very difficult for him. In this context, ordinary adolescent difficulties, the search for role models, managing intense emotions, and negotiating independence must have felt unbearable. In his attempt to avoid this reality it appears that he imagined scenarios and used fantasy to fulfil his emotional needs. Included in these scenarios were adolescent yearnings for role models and independence. From this he starts to build the "imagined self" he so desperately wanted to be.

10.3.2   Malignant Shame

It is beyond doubt that Harmse was extremely shame-prone. His constant apathy and withdrawal, underlying rage, and contempt are typical defensive strategies for concealing and managing unbearable shame (Lansky, 2005, 2007; Morrison, 1985). But are there particular aspects of his internalized shame dynamics that help us understand more about what might contribute to an attack of this nature? My sense is that Harmse's shame takes on malignant characteristics in that it encapsulates his whole world view, leaving little chance of escape. It becomes a terrible vicious cycle. He feels deeply inadequate, often embarrassed, but finds no relief or comfort in seeking help from others. His shame is split-off and hidden to preserve some sense of integrity, creating further distance between himself and others and exacerbating his sense of feeling "different." Being bullied and feeling like a misfit with poor social skills probably also left Harmse feeling that he was unacceptable to others. All appear to contribute to further shame and the concealment of hurt. Harmse appears to hold out very little hope for a "good" caring object helping him out of this conundrum. As a consequence, none of these difficulties can be worked through *in reality*, depriving him of the opportunity of receiving some kind of realistic compassionate engagement to assist in working through his internal struggles.

It appears that school was a breeding ground for envy and confusion while Harmse tried to hide his shame. His parents claimed he was often teased by other students and felt unaccepted at school. We know that he hated school but he did not openly express this through common oppositional acts. Lansky (2007) describes how shame that is felt to be "unbearable" is split off from reality-orientated parts of the self. In its place, the individual begins to adopt fixed, vengeful states of mind in an attempt to gain some distance from perceived deficiencies and a sense of powerlessness. In keeping with the idea that aggressive fantasies help organize disorganized attachment systems, vengefulness is thought to give rise to an "experience" of power (Lansky, 2005, p. 887) over unacceptable deficient parts of the self.

Was it the constant strain and humiliation at school that sowed the seeds of revenge and retaliation? Notwithstanding the complexity of risk factors linked to school rampage attacks, it certainly appears that Harmse's sense of being defective, unworthy, and unseen by others was significant. Because the consequences of internalized shame are hidden it is easily overlooked, as appears to be the case here. The sense of being invisible to others is tantamount to annihilation of the self. When this is felt to be unbearable, violence may be seen as the only solution. As Gilligan observes in his work with antisocial men, if the situation is extreme, one would rather kill than feel or face up to shame.

Twemlow aptly explains how revenge against the school may appear to be the only option once passive bystanders are also viewed as being "against" the victim:

> The victim is susceptible to the contempt of the group, reinforcing the fantasy that nothing good if left in him or her and that there is there is no help and no hope. Thus, the bystander audience helps create a mindset in the victim for which there seems no endpoint, as in a Faustian hell where one gets used to the pain. If the humiliation will never stop and if there is no worth in the victim, then there is nothing for the victim to live for but revenge (Twemlow, 2003, p. 677).

Apart from the school environment, many other background factors, already touched upon above, may have added to a deep sense of feeling defective. Harmse witnessed ongoing traumatic and violent incidents at home. He grew up in what appears to have been a very restrictive, harsh family environment. He also clearly had great difficulty relating to others and felt socially inadequate, preferring to isolate himself from quite an early age. But Harmse was not entirely isolated; he clearly had friends at school. It appears, however, that friendship was very difficult for him and the only way he could relate was through drawing on an imaginary world of mystical figures, through "war talk" and imagined ninja scenarios that served to override his feelings of vulnerability and give him a sense of power. When he talks about or identifies with these images, he told the social worker, he feels more accepted by his father and his friends. It is plausible that Harmse started to feel noticed, recognized after telling his friends about making bombs, his swords, and attack scenarios. He started to draw on the sense of identity and belonging that this brought in an attempt to redress an underlying "failure of manhood" (Newman, 2004).

There is one other very important factor that led to a terrible sense of deficiency in Harmse: his size. Langman (2009) notes that many shooters felt ashamed or self-conscious about their physical appearance, particularly their size and height. Others felt their appearance was defective in different ways. For instance, Eric Harris felt very self-conscious about his sunken chest. Attributions related to size are often present in shame-prone individuals, a sense of feeling small, diminished in comparison to others (Kilborne, 1995). In addition to being prone to shame experiences, Harmse was also faced with the reality that he was much smaller than his peers. It seems to me that when shame becomes tied to real physical ability and appearance, the sense of futility is greatly increased. His parents were vaguely aware of how debilitating this felt to him. It felt like a lifelong sentence about which he could do nothing. In his mind, his size deprived him of fitting in, doing "manly" things, and overcoming his powerless vis-a-vis his father.

10.3.3 Dissociative Devices

In the build-up to a school attack, perpetrators often make use of what might be called "dissociative devices" to strengthen their resolve. As discussed earlier, dissociation and splitting are well-established defensive features in Harmse's psychological makeup, used to avoid psychic pain and further shame. But to kill another human being takes more than cutting off one's own feeling states, it also means shutting down to the emotions and humanity of others. Eric Harris' journal clearly illustrates "willful" aspects of this process:

> I have a goal to destroy as much as possible so I must not be sidetracked by my feelings of sympathy, mercy, or any of that, so I will force myself to believe that everyone is just another monster. . . . So it's either me or them. I have to turn off my feelings (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, 1998, Columbine Documents, p. 26).

The "self-induced" devices that serve to enhance the dissociative process are important here. Perpetrators search for "props" that resonate with their own sense of internal destructiveness to build up their own self-made "identity." These "props" include immersion in "destructive" literature, satanic ritual, video games, as well as the acquisition of objects and weaponry associated with destructive iconic images with which they can identify.

The role of rehearsal and repetition is also a significant feature aiding a process of dissociation. It starts out as a willful, practiced, induced self-state that fuels a sense of destructive omnipotence and grandiosity. It also has the effect of anesthetizing "healthier" aspects of the personality that still hold the capacity to empathize with others.

My sense is that Slipknot's music consolidated Harmse's identification with the "avenging victim," validating experiences he felt no one could understand. It makes little sense to discuss Slipknot's music as actually inciting the murder, in the same way as we cannot assume that violent video games cause murderous rage (Ferguson, 2007). Instead, they act as a device to shore up a preexisting vengeful state. It is useful to understand how Harmse would have heard and internalized the music of Slipknot as a dissociative device. Here are some of their lyrics (Elyrics, 2012):

> I want to slit your throat and fuck the wound/I want to push my face in and feel the swoon/I wanna dig inside find a little bit of me … I'm not supposed to be here … All I have is dead, so I'll take you with me/Feel like I'm erased, so kill me just in case (Disasterpiece)
>
> Life is just a killing field/It's all that's left, nothing's real/Throw away your disposable past/And fall apart like a cigarette ash/We are the fatal and vital ones of the world/And we will burn your cities down (Gemtria [The Killing Name])
>
> In light of my ability to undermine/I walk away from apathy – I'm feeling fine/The Agony of Cynicism beckons me/It's Everywhere/It's Everyone/It's Everything/Let's pretend – we're not at the end/Pretend – that we have nothing left/All hope is gone (Vendetta)

The very disturbing images in these lyrics evoke nihilism, sadism, and violence. Although most would understand the lyrics as evocative thoughts expressing the voice of the disaffected, for Harmse, I suspect they would be appropriated in a more concrete way as a call to action. Perhaps for the first time, he finds what

he perceives as "real" validation for his deeply held aggrieved view of the world. It strengthens his identification with the "warrior soldier" that he fantasizes of becoming and triggers new belief in the possibility of destructive fantasy becoming a reality.

This is a very primitive form of identification that involves mimicry (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, O'Toole, et al., 2002). In ordinary attempts at identification we engage in a struggle that involves recognizing what attributes we want to emulate, while realistically comparing them to our own differences, intentions, or limitations. This is illustrated by a friend of Harmse's comment on the influence of Slipknot: "I was interested in Slipknot. The drummer is amazing; I would like to play like him one day." Here, the attribute identified can be used for thinking about a realistic objective. In more primitive forms of identification, however, the object is incorporated into the psyche and imitated as a way of avoiding pain or reality. I suspect these lyrics would have been internalized in this way as a rigid road map of how to be and what to do (a substitute parental voice perhaps).

The wearing of masks was part of this primitive identification with Slipknot. It was central to the way Harmse chose to commit his crime and appeared to be a crucial dissociative device. As Harmse put it: "When I put on the mask, everything went dead quiet and my body started moving. I wanted to stop, but I couldn't" (du Plessis, 2008c). His description appears to clearly describe a dissociative state which I have no reason to doubt. Reports of apparent disorientation and a change in appearance and voice also corroborate this. It is important not to misunderstand the implications of this dissociative state for his violent action. It is not that he is unaware of what he is doing as he enacts his own trauma. But he experiences it as a hypnoid state where he gets caught up in a much-rehearsed fantasy world that, aided by the mask, trumps reality.

He and his friends played with masks in the lead-up to the crime, and he used the masks to scare his father. Perhaps these masks had a playful quality for his friends and father. But for Harmse, they had taken on a more concrete meaning driving a wedge between his unthinkable deficiencies and his "built-up" warrior-like self. Put differently, the masks embodied his vengeance, while at the same time hiding his real shame-filled self. Harmse used the word "masquerade" in his euphoric and hypomanic state at the time of the attack. Perhaps "masquerade" was a reference to the "festival" qualities he envisioned his bloodbath adopting. One wonders how aware Harmse was of the mask as "pretence" (the other meaning of "masquerade"). Although the mask represents a vengeful "warrior" solution, it ironically perpetuates the shame and pretence: the continued need to hide his true self.

10.3.4　Compulsive Fantasy Process

Harmse spent much of his time preoccupied with imagined scenarios and mythical figures. Although there was no particular precipitating factor, this preoccupation

appeared to intensify at the beginning of his last year of school. His parents believed the stress of his final year was affecting him. A deep immersion in fantasy is a common feature in school shooters (Weisbrot, 2008). But it is the building pressure associated with fantasy and its compulsive qualities that appear important for understanding why such catastrophic actions are taken. As mentioned above, fantasy ordinarily alerts us to our needs and dreams and acts as a creative commentary on how we think about things. In school shooters destructive fantasies become obsessive and are linked to growing internal pressure. The more attention is paid to these images, the more the intensity grows to act them out (Depue & Depue, 1999). What are the possible dynamics behind building pressure and an obsessive engagement with fantasy?

We know that at an early age Harmse started playing out fantasies related to war, dragons, swords, and mythical figures. His friends reported that his preoccupations had an obsessive quality and his parents unwittingly encouraged various aspects of this fantasy process by buying swords and books about martial arts, magic, and tarot. It has often been found that activities related to aggressiveness and fantasy immersion go unsupervised in the histories of school shooters (Langman, 2009; O'Toole, 2000).

Within the context of a disorganized attachment organization, such fantasies would take on organizing qualities for Harmse. Given the fragility of his sense of self, his imaginings about symbolic figures would have had an intoxicating and riveting quality. In his mind's eye, this gloved, masked figure was an omnipotent and "impressive" warrior that created a perverted sense of purpose and agency. His enfeebled capacity to process emotional experience meant that this figure was very real to him.

It appears that Harmse's growing obsession with fantasy gives rise to a new-found sense of agency. His fantasies become a narcissistic source for building a self image that has little to do with reality. Because this sense of self has no real basis, the ruminating qualities evident in fantasy serve to shore up belief in the self-image. Harmse's sense of feeling deeply inadequate and invisible to others makes identifying with powerful destructive figures an addictive experience and starts to present an apparent solution to inner turmoil.

In most school rampage attacks, problems begin to escalate when perpetrators start to adopt a fixed role. This is often linked to a growing internal pressure to act on destructive plans. Fantasies begin to take on greater meaning and intensity as they are rehearsed or acted out with greater frequency. With this, the perpetrator searches for renewed justification for his need to act. Incidents related to perceived injustices are important. But so too are the reactions of others, which are easily taken to be supportive of this destructive and omnipotent view of the self. In short, when the omnipotent and grandiose content of fantasies escalates, so too does the pressure to validate them in real relationships, particularly with peers. In the Harmse case, the group discussions about planning an attack would have been fertile ground for this process. Although others joined these discussions, they did not share the same level of intent or belief. One of his friends played along and made a fake bomb. It is important to see these actions in the context of the complexities of normal adolescent conflicts and exaggerated expressions of emotion relating to bravado and jostling for attention. While this was the case for his friends, Harmse interpreted these discussions as validation for destruc-

tive fantasies and a much yearned-for sense of recognition and belonging. Thus he did not see his friends as bystanders. Although they may have thought about informing an adult and felt conflicted about peer betrayal (Twemlow et al., 2004), I believe they simply found it all difficult to believe and dismissed his antics as fantasy or some kind of game.

The concept of "leakage" takes on particular meaning in this case. It is linked to Harmse's desperate need to receive some kind of validation. Although Harmse had turned away from trusting relationships from an early age, the need for recognition and acceptance of his new-found self was still paramount. It also appears that building fantasy pressure and its manic qualities made it difficult for him to avoid revealing some sense of his "feel-good" power and omnipotence.

10.3.5 Psychic Equivalence and Pseudo-Mentalizing

Some of the teachers at school noticed that Harmse could not think about his future in any meaningful way. He gave "silly answers" and his affect struck them as inappropriate. This "narrowing of perspective" is often more evident in the build-up to the attack and is worth briefly exploring using elements of mentalization theory (Allen & Fonagy, 2006). Having a sense of past and future is born out of an ability to think about ourselves as relatively coherent psychological entities. This relies on our ability to track, intuit, and interpret the mental states (thoughts, beliefs, motives, etc.) of ourselves and others. If the ability to mentalize is compromised in some way, more concrete—and developmentally more primitive—ways of seeing the world come to the fore. In combination with a loss of trust in the minds of others, a realistic appraisal of how mental states are linked to behaviors becomes difficult. It is replaced by greater reliance on the physical qualities of the object itself. Here, violence, pain, hyperaroused somatic states, physical outcomes, are needed because they can be "believed." Put another way, physical outcomes become the only means of "knowing" that one has an impact on others. Harmse's need to give answers that "shock" so he could *see* his impact on others is a good example of the process we are referring to here.

Deficits in mentalizing also compromise the distinction between internal and external reality. This is called "psychic equivalence" (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006) and is defined by the inability to use the representational qualities of thinking. As a consequence, objects, thoughts, and feelings all appear to blur into one and are difficult to distinguish. It is important to understand the use of the mask from the perspective of psychic equivalence. Firstly, it serves as a very concrete means of hiding or replacing his real appearance. The mask is equated with shutting down the self. Further, whereas one might expect the mask to *represent* a persona ("it is as if I am a destructive powerful being"), for Harmse, putting on the mask was the same as *becoming* the figure it embodied ("I am destructive and powerful"). While Harmse experimented with masks with his friends and "played around" with scaring his father, it is doubtful that others were aware of how real and powerful this experience felt.

There are other examples of psychic equivalence. We have already discussed how the Slipknot lyrics would have been difficult to distinguish from his own "avenging self." His strange logic when asked about the house burglary is also a form of psychic equivalence. He said he did it because "someone might do the same to him one day." Because it is difficult for him to separate his thoughts and beliefs from the intentions of others, it becomes reasonable for him to assume that what he wanted to do is the same as what others do/will do. Harmse's interest in schizophrenia, psychopathy, and brainwashing could also have resulted from his belief that thoughts could be treated like physical objects that could be removed, replaced, and so forth.

Other essential features of psychic equivalence include inflexibility in thinking, causing the individual to rigidly adopt the first idea that comes to mind. Psychic equivalence also makes it very difficult to relate thoughts and feelings to reality. As Bateman and Fonagy (2006) point out, this often "leads to a deep sense of alienation and a feeling of not being understood" (p. 77). Without the ability to track and make use of mental states, more implausible, but seductive explanations for how thoughts work become attractive. This may include interests in mind control, brainwashing, the supernatural, and extrasensory perception. Apart from what has already been mentioned regarding these aspects, perhaps Harmse was drawn to the occult and supernatural powers for this reason. The problem with this, however, as Twemlow (2003) points out, is that it reinforces a preoccupation with grandiose superhuman qualities, particularly for those who have disorganized attachments.

It is interesting how much Harmse appears to make use of a pseudo-mentalizing capacity. Developmentally, this form of mentation is connected to the "pretend mode" (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006). This is a phase where "the child is capable of representational thought as long as no link between that and external reality is made" (p. 73). In this mode we are able to track and reason with mental states only if they have no link with reality. The mentation is self-serving and undermines the subjectivity of the other. Pseudo-mentalizing is often contrived and eccentric, with inappropriate affect, and leads to a sense of boredom or emptiness in others as there is no attempt to connect with their minds. It appears that Harmse, at times, came across in this way during his psychiatric evaluation. Harmse's dreamlike world and his preoccupation with ninjas and soldiers also belonged in this "pretend realm." His thinking seems best described as "destructively inaccurate pseudo-mentalization" (Bateman & Fonagy) where the realities of others are usurped by fantasy. Seeing all school students as doing "bad to him," viewing them as "stupid terrorists," attributes implausible mental states to his potential victims to justify his accusations.

Harmse's use of figurative and abstract language is also a pseudo-mentalizing strategy that could be easily mistaken for an ability to use rich symbolic or metaphorical language in a meaningful way. In Harmse's case, his thinking and use of mythical figures or "war talk" does not symbolize a plausible reality. Nor does his use of metaphor creatively elaborate a realistic need that can be reasonably understood by others. This kind of figurative talk is often used to prevent engagement with anticipated emotional turmoil in shame-prone individuals and closely resembles primitive unconscious fantasies (Schafer, 1997).

10.4   Conclusion

When the social worker asked Harmse about prison, he said that inside and outside prison were no different. To him, he said, both places were absent of choice or any sense of control and both were about leading an apathetic existence. Perhaps this reflects something of the internal prison that so encapsulates Harmse's personality. It might also demonstrate how out of reach choice and a sense of real control were to him (for internal and external reasons). For similar reasons, persons with disorganized attachments often find the simplicity, order, and lack of choice in prison quite containing (Twemlow, 2003).

Just before the attack, one of Harmse's friends took a photograph of the masked figure that he became. It was circulated on social media websites and is still available on the Internet. When I look at the photograph I am reminded of Twemlow's (2003) description of the "pathetic" qualities that such acts embody. He looks unimpressive, not believable as a "mighty warrior." Perhaps this is why he was laughed at by his friends (we have not considered whether the laughing contributed to his actions, although I think not): the gap between his view of himself and ours is vast. The psychoanalytic perspective discussed here has gone some way to explain why such a disparity exists.

I believe that ideographic case studies of rampage attacks are an essential means of gaining deeper insights into the experiences of such offenders. They also usefully balance and add "experiential" substance to quantitative reports. Clearly, as is the case in this report, first-hand interviews are often hard to come by as offenders are either in prison or have fallen prey to their suicidal intentions. Furthermore families, clearly traumatized by such occurrences and often bullied by the media, are also often unwilling to be interviewed directly by academic researchers. These challenges stand in the way of obtaining first-hand research accounts. This makes it even more important to access primary accounts from surviving perpetrators (or family members) to complement and balance secondary information. An interview with Harmse (time and red tape permitting) would certainly have added depth and veracity.

References

Allen, J. G., & Fonagy, P. (2006). *Handbook of mentalization-based treatment*. Chichester: Wiley.

Altheide, D. L. (2009). The Columbine shootings and the discourse of fear. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1354–1370.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2005). The empathizing system. In B. J. Ellis & D. F. Bjorklund (Eds.), *Origins of the social mind: Evolutionary psychology and child development* (pp. 468–492). New York: Guilford.

Bateman, A., & Fonagy, P. (2006). *Mentalization-based treatment for borderline personality disorder: A practical guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2010). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Bond, S. B., & Bond, M. (2004). Attachment styles and violence within couples. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 192*(12), 857–863.

Bowlby, J. (1984). Violence in the family as a disorder of the attachment and caregiving systems. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis, 44*(1), 9–27, 29–31.

Bromberg, P. M. (2006). *Awakening the dreamer: Clinical journeys*. New York: Analytic Press.

Cartwright, D. (2002). *Psychoanalysis, violence and rage-type murder: Murdering minds*. London: Brunner-Routledge.

Depue, R. L., & Depue, J. D. (1999). To dream, perchance to kill. *Security Management, 43*(6), 66–71.

Deutsch, H. (1942). Some forms of emotional disturbance and their relationship to schizophrenia. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 11*, 301–321.

du Plessis, L. (2008a). Schoolboy planned a bloodbath. *News24*. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Schoolboy-planned-a-bloodbath-20080819.

du Plessis, L. (2008b). I planned a massacre. *The Witness*. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=11874.

du Plessis, L. (2008c). Our son was bullied. *News24*. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Our-son-was-bullied-20080821.

Elyrics. (2012). Slipknot lyrics. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from http://www.elyrics.net/song/s/slip-knot-lyrics.html.

Erikson, E. H. (1985). Pseudospeciation in the nuclear age. *Political Psychology, 6*(2), 213–217.

Erikson, K. (1996). On pseudospeciation and social speciation. In C. B. Strozier & M. Flynn (Eds.), *War & human survival* (pp. 51–57). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. New York: Overlook.

Ferenczi, S., Dupont, J., Balint, M., & Jackson, N. Z. (1995). *The clinical diary of Sandor Ferenczi*. New York: Harvard University Press.

Ferguson, C. J. (2007). The good, the bad and the ugly: A meta-analytic review of positive and negative effects of violent video games. *Psychiatric Quarterly, 78*(4), 309–316.

Ferguson, C. J., Coulson, M., & Barnett, J. (2011). Psychological profiles of school shooters: Positive directions and one big wrong turn. *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations, 11*(2), 141–158.

Fonagy, P. (1999). Male perpetrators of violence against women: An attachment theory perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies, 1*(1), 7–27.

Fonagy, P. (2003). Towards a developmental understanding of violence. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, 183*(3), 190–192.

Fonagy, P., Target, M., Steele, M., & Steele, H. (2000). The development of violence as it relates to security of attachment. In J. Osofsky (Ed.), *Children in a violent society* (pp. 150–182). New York: Guilford.

Fonagy, P., Twemlow, S. W., Vernberg, E., Sacco, F. C., & Little, T. D. (2005). Creating a peaceful school learning environment: The impact of an antibullying program on educational attainment in elementary schools. *Medical Science Monitor, 11*(7), 317–325.

Gilligan, J. (2000). *Violence: Reflections on our deadliest epidemic*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Glasser, M. (1998). On violence. A preliminary communication. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 79*(5), 887–902.

Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic.

Hesse, E., & Main, M. (2000). Disorganized infant, child, and adult attachment: Collapse in behavioral and attentional strategies. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 48*(4), 1097–1127.

Hyatt-Williams, A. (1998). *Cruelty, violence, and murder: Understanding the criminal mind*. London: Jason Aronson.

Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. (1998). Columbine Documents, pp. 1–27000.

Johns, B., & Guetzloe, E. (2003). Reducing school violence through school attachment: Expanding positive learning opportunities and results. *The Journal of the International Association of Special Education, 5*(1), 13–18.

Kilborne, B. (1995). Of creatures large and small: Size anxiety, psychic size, shame, and the ana-
   lytic situation. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 64*(4), 672–690.
Kilborne, B. (1999). When trauma strikes the soul: Shame, splitting, and psychic pain. *American
   Journal of Psychoanalysis, 59*(4), 385–402.
Langman, P. (2009). *Why kids kill: Inside the minds of school shooters*. New York: Palgrave
   Macmillan.
Lansky, M. R. (2005). Hidden shame. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 53*(3),
   865–890.
Lansky, M. R. (2007). Unbearable shame, splitting, and forgiveness in the resolution of vengeful-
   ness. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 55*(2), 571–593.
Laub, J. H., & Lauritsen, J. L. (1998). The interdependence of school violence with neighborhood
   and family conditions. In D. S. Elliott, B. A. Hamburg, & K. R. Williams (Eds.), *Violence in
   American schools: A new perspective* (pp. 127–155). New York: Cambridge University Press.
Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence:
   Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*(3), 202–214. doi:10.1002/
   ab.10061.
Levy, T., & Orlans, M. (2000). Attachment disorder as an antecedent to violence and antisocial
   patterns in children. In T. M. Levy (Ed.), *Handbook of attachment interventions* (pp. 1–26).
   New York: Academic.
Lyons-Ruth, K., Dutra, L., Schuder, M. R., & Bianchi, I. (2006). From infant attachment disorga-
   nization to adult dissociation: Relational adaptations or traumatic experiences? *Psychiatric
   Clinics of North America, 29*(1), 63.
Lyons-Ruth, K., & Jacobvitz, D. (1999). Attachment disorganization: Unresolved loss, relational
   violence, and lapses in behavioral and attentional strategies. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.),
   Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications (pp. 520–554). New
   York: Guilford.
Lyons-Ruth, K., & Spielman, E. (2004). Disorganized infant attachment strategies and helpless-
   fearful profiles of parenting: Integrating attachment research with clinical intervention. *Infant
   Mental Health Journal, 25*(4), 318–335. doi:10.1002/imhj.20008.
Main, M., & Hesse, E. (1990). Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences are related to infant
   disorganized attachment status: Is frightened and/or frightening parental behavior the linking
   mechanism? In T. M. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in the
   preschool years: Theory, research, and intervention. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur
   Foundation series on mental health and development* (pp. 161–182). Chicago, IL: University of
   Chicago Press.
Meloy, J. R. (1992). *Violent attachments*. New York: Jason Aronson.
Meloy, J. R., & O'Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. *Behavioral
   Sciences & the Law, 29*(4), 513–527. doi:10.1002/bsl.986.
Morrison, A. P. (1985). Working with shame in psychoanalytic treatment. *Journal of the American
   Psychoanalytic Association, 32*, 479–505.
Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.
Ndaba, B., & Foss, K. (2009). I killed for attention says teenager. *IOL News*. Retrieved April 4, 2012,
   from http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/i-killed-for-attention-says-teenager-1.439992.
Newman, K. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. London: Basic.
O'Toole, M. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: Critical
   Incident Response Group, FBI Academy, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.
Puget, J. (1988). Social violence and psychoanalysis in Argentina: The unthinkable and the
   unthought. *Free Associations, 1*(13), 84–140.
Putnam, F. W. (1992). Discussion: Are altered personalities fragments or figments? *Psychoanalytic
   Inquiry, 12*, 95–111.
Sandler, P., & Alpert, J. L. (2000). Violence and group dynamics in the high school: The Columbine
   school shootings. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, 5*(2), 246–255.

Serrao, A., & Foss, K. (2008a). I Killed three didn't I? *IOL News*. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/i-killed-three-didn-t-i-1.413100.

Serrao, A., & Foss, K. (2008b). School stunned by quiet killer in its bosom. *Safety and Security Directory*. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from http://www.security.co.za/fullStory.asp?NewsId=9628.

Schafer, R. (1997). *Tradition and change in psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac.

Schore, A. N. (1991). Early superego development: The emergence of shame and narcissistic affect regulation in the practicing period. *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought, 14*(2), 187–250.

Spiegel, D., & Alpert, J. (2000). The relationship between shame and rage: Conceptualizing the violence at Columbine High School. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, 5*(2), 237–245.

Szabo, C. P. (2008). Samurais and psychiatry. *African Journal of Psychiatry, 11*(4), 241.

Twemlow, S. W. (2000). The roots of violence: Converging psychoanalytic explanatory models for power struggles and violence in schools. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 69*(4), 741–785.

Twemlow, S. W. (2003). A crucible for murder: The social context of violent children and adolescents. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 72*(3), 659–698.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., & Sacco, F. C. (2004). The role of the bystander in the social architecture of bullying and violence in schools and communities. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1036*, 215–232.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., & Sacco, F. C. (2005). A developmental approach to mentalizing communities: I. A model for social change. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic, 69*(4), 265–281. doi:10.1521/bumc.2005.69.4.265.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., Sacco, F. C., O'Toole, M. E., & Vernberg, E. (2002). Premeditated mass shootings in schools: Threat assessment. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 41*(4), 475–477.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., Sacco, F. C., & Vernberg, E. (2002). Assessing adolescents who threaten homicide in schools. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis, 62*(3), 213–235.

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., Sacco, F. C., Vernberg, E., & Malcom, J. M. (2011). Reducing violence and prejudice in a Jamaican all age school using attachment and mentalization theory. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 28*(4), 497–511. doi: 10.1037/a0023610.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychological Review, 20*(1), 3–56.

Weisbrot, D. M. (2008). Prelude to a school shooting? Assessing threatening behaviors in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 47*(8), 847–852. doi:10.1097/CHI.0b013e3181799fd3.

Winnicott, D. W. (1960). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. London: Karnac.

Chapter 11
Unforgiven and Alone: Brenda Spencer and Secret Shame

Jonathan Fast

> *What appears bad manners, an ill temper or cynicism is always a sign of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen. You do not know what wars are going on down there where the spirit meets the bone.*

<div align="right">Miller Williams</div>

Certain types of crime fascinate people because they are perplexing. *Why would a person do such a thing?* The offenders appear to have nothing to gain, neither money, nor status. They are not acting in rage, or jealousy, settling a score or punishing someone who has humiliated them. Their victims seem to be chosen at random. Often the offender makes little or no effort to avoid capture and incarceration. Asked about their motives, they may shrug, or offer a nonsensical explanation.

The premise of this chapter is that the offender *always* has an understandable motive for committing a violent act. They are never simply evil, callous, or "crazy." Often the apparent meaninglessness of the crime is the result of the impetus being a shameful secret that has been closely kept for a long time. This "theory of secret shame" (Gilligan, 1996; Scheff, 2006; Scheff & Retzinger, 2002) suggests that at a certain point in the offender's life the need for the shame to be revealed becomes overwhelming and erupts in the form of violence. Because the person wants the shame to remain secret, even when exposed to the world, the violent act does not target the bully, the abuser, or the molester, but is instead directed at one or more people who symbolically or physically represent the shamer.

J. Fast (✉)
Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University,
New York, NY, USA
e-mail: fast@yu.edu

11.1 Theory

Shame is a "self-reflective" feeling, meaning that it is the result of contemplating how one believes that others perceive one, or as Cooley famously stated, "I am not what I think I am and I am not what you think I am; I am what I think that you think I am" (1902, p. 27). Wright said that shame "refers to the sudden and painful sense of having failed to live up to one's desired self-image, or conversely, the sense of having become one's undesired or bad self" (1987, p. 239). Charles Darwin, a fine observer of humans and animals, noted that shame was manifested by both groups as a confusion of mind, downcast eyes, slack posture, and lowered head. He was intrigued by the fact that these shame responses were observable in human cultures around the world, both primitive and refined (1872).

Although it does not address shame per se, John Bowlby's attachment theory might be considered as the groundwork for shame theory (Herman, 2007). His work emphasized the centrality of the maternal bond (or what most of us would think of today as the *parental* bond) in the formation of a child's personality, in establishing its capacity for future loving relationships and the ability to experience empathy. Bowlby believed that the infant who was deprived of the bond experienced anger and fear, and enduring damage in social functioning. The likelihood of this deficit leading to a life of crime and violence was a subject he explored in his study of "Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves" (1944). He found that their mothers often held "an intense, though perhaps unadmitted, dislike and rejection of [the child]. . . . A remarkable proportion of the children, for one reason or another, had not lived securely in one home all their lives but had spent long periods away from home" (p. 19).

While Freud avoided the subject of shame, conceivably because acknowledging it would have undermined his construct of the superego and consequently his tripartite model of the mind, Alfred Adler, a contemporary and colleague, described how a child who feels abandoned or rejected will develop an "inferiority complex," which is an idea rooted in shame (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964). Psychoanalytic theorists of the 1940s and 1950s examined the idea of shame from a variety of perspectives, with Horney expounding a system of development involving shame and pride, Lynd (1999), Piers and Singer (1953), and Tomkins (Sedgwick, Frank, & Alexander, 1995) also making important contributions. While they accepted Bowlby's ideas about the maternal bond, they came to believe that in the second year of a child's life, shame eclipsed anger and fear as the emotion that preserved social bonds, and that this precedence continued throughout the life span. In his stage theory of development, Erikson chose the conflict of "autonomy versus shame and doubt" as characteristic of the second year of life (1950) while also acknowledging that it remained a life-long struggle.

Helen B. Lewis is generally credited with bringing shame to the forefront of psychoanalytic thought among a select group. In her work, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (1971), she concludes, after analyzing transcripts of hundreds of hours of therapy sessions, that patients were often in a state of shame and that this condition was "virtually always" unacknowledged. "Lewis's work suggests that shame is a

haunting presence in psychotherapy, a presence that is usually hidden, disguised, or ignored by both patient and therapist" (Scheff & Retzinger, 2002, p. 13). In her own clinical practice, Lewis found that by acknowledging and discharging shame experiences, patients made better progress and had fewer relapses.

The concept of shame as a seminal factor in human behavior has been embraced by sociologists (Cooley, 1902; Durkheim, 1897; Scheff, 1988), psychologists and psychiatrists (Gilligan, 1996; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992), social workers (Brown, 2006; Fast, 2008), educators (Ashley and Burke, 2009; Morrison, 2006) and advocates of restorative justice (Braithwaite, 2000; Zehr, 2002).

To understand this theory, we might imagine that each of us is carrying a shame tank on our back. If we have been reasonably lucky, we may be unaware of our tank until our behavior becomes exceptionally clumsy, inconsiderate, selfish, or aggressive, and we overstep the norms or laws of our community. At such moments, assuming we are not sociopaths, our self-monitoring mechanism dispenses an appropriate dose of shame. If others have been observing our transgression, they might contribute by frowning and whispering among themselves. If our behavior is in defiance of a formal law (parking in a "handicapped space," getting into a fistfight, neglecting to clean up after our dog) a policeman might enter our drama, adding his own king-sized dose of "authority" shame. Suddenly the tank becomes weighty and difficult to support. If we are to return to our normal lives, we must discharge some of that shame. We do so, typically, by processing or confessing the incident with a close friend or loved one; by making a joke out of it; by making amends; by impugning the competence, intelligence, or sanity of those who have shamed us; by going into hiding; or by becoming outraged, or violent, depending on our personalities, the circumstances, those involved and the degree of the shame. While I find the metaphor of the "shame tank" invaluable in evoking the effect of excessive shame, it should be remembered that shame is an emotion, an intangible. The actual mechanics of how emotions are stored, re-evoked, accumulate over time, and are discharged—sometimes in ways ruinous to human life—remains a mystery. Many shaming experiences are healthy because they teach us to obey the rules of the community. For example, being arrested for drunk driving and spending the night in jail may well help us make the decision to stop drinking. However if we have had the misfortune of being born into adverse circumstances, to parents who are alcohol or drug dependent, or whose own shame management systems are not operating properly, we may accumulate a large amount of shame very quickly, simply through knowing that their behavior is wrong, and that we are their children. Other problems such as gender identity issues, learning disabilities, mental illness, or marked deviation from the norm make matters worse. If no one will listen to us, or if we must keep the shame a secret, then it cannot be discharged. The discomfort and alienation become unbearable. Our anger over such circumstances is discharged destructively, through substance abuse, cutting, or suicide when turned inward; through vengeance against the shamer when turned outward. If the shame is secret, the aggression will strike at symbolic targets in order to remain secret. This is, of course, a special case of the defense mechanism called "displacement" which has been discussed at length elsewhere

(Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998; Cramer, 2000; Freud, 1936, etc.). If the focus of the rage is both internal and external, than acts of violence that result in the deaths of other *and* the death of the offender become particularly attractive.

The theory of secret shame does not explain *all* acts of violence. Consider a man who discovers another man having sexual intercourse with his wife and assaults him. His membership in his primary group of affiliation, his family of procreation, has been threatened. His intense discomfort is converted instantly into rage against the one who has caused the rift. The rage is immediately expressed in physical violence. It is still violence as the result of shame, but the shame is overt and obvious. It needs no social scientist to unpack it.

11.2   Method

Examining anything that is secret, be it shame or the workings of the unconscious, presents a considerable challenge. One of the approaches I use is the writing of case studies where acts of suicidal or homicidal violence are the final resting place of the dependent variable, and shame-evoking experiences outweigh other identified risk factors for violence, making them the most likely canditate for independent variable. Thus the technique involves *purposive sampling* as well as *extreme case sampling* (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). School rampage shooters in particular provide an excellent pool from which to investigate the workings of secret shame since the only risk factor they have in common (at least in the most superficial examination) is having been bullied. The major shortcoming of the method is the limited external validity of the results; however with each additional case examined (see, for example, Fast, 2008) the sample size increases and the external validity improves. Or, in plain English, the more examples I provide of people behaving in a certain manner under certain circumstances, the more convincing the argument.

Case studies of historical crimes rely on documentary evidence. Even if the offenders are still alive, they are often unavailable for interviewing, as is the case with Brenda Spencer. The court record of the divorce proceedings was available, as was video coverage of the parole hearing where she first stated that she had been repeatedly molested by her father. My job was made easier by the release of a film by the British documentarian John Dower which contained the first and only interview with Wallace Spencer as well as interviews with Brenda Spencer's mother, her attorney, and relatives of some of the shooting victims. Brenda Spencer's published prison correspondence with Jennifer Furio was helpful in gleaning her thoughts and feelings regarding her crime. Local newspapers such as the now-defunct *San Diego Tribune* provided a real-time account of the shooting and interviews with classmates and bystanders elicited within hours of the shooting. These were all considered sources of good validity. For the general course of events I turned to the *New York Times* archive, generally considered the "newspaper of

record." No item of information was included unless it could be verified by three sources. Conjecture is labeled as such and supported by statistical likelihood as derived from the existing literature on the subject.

11.3   The Case

Brenda's parents, Dorothy Nadine Hobel and Wallace Edward Spencer, were married on December 12, 1954, in Chula Vista, California, a suburb of San Diego, which was developed after World War II to provide homes for returning servicemen. Wallace was 25 and she was 19. Together, they purchased a starter home with a substantial mortgage in a middle-class neighborhood.

During the early days of their marriage, Dorothy finished her bachelor's degree in business at a local college and took another 3 years of courses in accounting. She opened an office in their home and began building a client list that included a local church, the Del Mar Fair, and the Community Bookstore at the University of San Diego. For 6 months of the year, she was the head bookkeeper at the Andy Williams Open Golf Tournament at Torre Pines, part of the PGA Grand Tour. She became well known and well liked in the community. We know less about Wallace's work history. At some point he became an equipment technician at San Diego State University, where he continued to work until the time of the shooting.

In 1956 Dorothy gave birth to a son, Scott Mathew Spencer, and 2 years later a daughter, Theresa Lynn. Brenda Ann was born on September 3, 1962. In January of 1972, when Brenda was 9, Dorothy petitioned for divorce. According to her account (Dower, 2006) he had been seeing other women and wanted to know if he could move out for a year and then return. Discovering that he had already rented an apartment, she had him served with divorce papers. Because this was the height of the sexual revolution, shortly after the popularization of birth control pills, yet before the advent of the AIDS epidemic, his request did not seem quite as bizarre as it might have in a later decade.

At the time of their divorce they had been married 18 years. She asked for custody of Brenda and the two teenagers, modest child support, and alimony. After a private meeting with the Spencer children in chambers, the judge awarded custody to Wallace. In such meetings the judge typically asks the children whom they would prefer living with. If their vote is not unanimous, all are assigned to the same home to keep the family together. Dorothy got conventional visitation rights, although it is not known whether, or for how long, she maintained contact with her children. Wallace agreed to pay her $200 ($1,000 in today's dollars) a month for 2 years, then $1 a year for 3 years. Wallace, who was 43 at the time, had take-home pay of about $9,500 a year, (about $50,000 in today's dollars) and Dorothy, 37, made about $3,700 ($20,000). She drove a 7-year-old Rambler station wagon, he a 12-year-old Ford pickup truck.

Wallace and the children moved to a blue-collar suburb of San Diego. It was convenient in that it was located directly across the street from Cleveland Elementary School, which Brenda attended through 1974. The proximity was such that the entrance of the school was visible through the small windows in the front door of their new house. In documentary footage from 2006 (Dower), the house where Wallace still lives appears ramshackle, the lawn and yard unkempt, brown, and overgrown.

At her 2001 parole hearing, Brenda claimed that she was subjected to "total neglect" after the divorce. Dorothy said that she often visited her daughter, but Brenda recalls going to her mother's house after school, uninvited, and waiting for her on the front steps, often for hours. It is never clear whether her mother was pleased to find her there. Brenda's attorney said that the mother "became like a stone . . . never went out of her way to be with the kids or to have a relationship with Brenda." He described Brenda's father as "a bitter man who hated the world" (Michael McGlinn, in Dower, 2006). Brenda's attorney described how Wallace began drinking heavily. When police entered the house after the shooting they found half-empty liquor bottles everywhere. In the 2006 interview (Dower), Wallace had only seven or eight teeth in his upper jaw and looked far older than his 55 years. His hair and his neatly trimmed mustache were snow white.

Wallace fell into arrears on his alimony in June of 1973, and in May of 1974 asked the court if he could discontinue payment. He was living in near-poverty at the time, he and Brenda sleeping on a single mattress in the living room. Now *he* requested that Dorothy pay him child support of $150 for the three children.

On some nights Wallace would come home drunk, beat Brenda and sexually molest her. At other times, she received positive attention. He bought her pets, and taught her how to shoot a rifle, an activity he himself enjoyed. He gave her a BB gun. They would go together into the hills and practice target shooting. She became an excellent markswoman. "I went into the desert with her last year to go target shooting," a classmate recalled, "and she killed a lot of lizards and squirrels. She almost never missed" (anonymous classmate, in UPI, 1979, p. 8). Another friend said that Brenda dreamed of someday becoming a professional sniper.

Brenda had been, in her mother's words, "always happy, a very good child, well-behaved, never had any problems in school. . . . That's my little girl" (Dorothy Wallace, in Dower, 2006). Now Brenda began to act out. By her own account, she began using heroin at the age of 10, a habit she continued until she was 27, and a variety of other drugs. She also began drinking alcohol, which was readily available at home (Furio, 2001). When she was 11, a neighbor scolded her for shooting at birds with her BB gun. Excessive truancy and other behavioral problems led to a referral to a school for "special" children. Wallace and Dorothy, called in for a parent-teacher conference, responded with disinterest when told that their daughter was suicidal (Dower, 2006). Brenda was arrested for shooting out windows at Cleveland Elementary School during summer vacation in 1978 and again for burglary in the fall. In December of that year, a few weeks prior to Christmas, her probation officer referred her for a psychiatric evaluation for depression. It was recommended that she be hospitalized as a danger to herself and others, but her father refused to comply (Furio, 2001).

Brenda made the most of her new criminal status. She spoke like a sophisticated drug user, boasting about being "stoned on LSD, pot, or pills" in class. While watching TV, she would exclaim "All right!" whenever a cop was shot. She often talked about how she wanted to kill cops, to "blow one away." She referred to them as "pigs" and described herself as a "radical." Again the culture of the times must be taken into consideration. These were common catchphrases in the late 1960s and early 1970s among teens who wished to appear tough and antiestablishment (see, for example, Larkins, 1971). Although the radical political movements of the 1960s had dissipated, the culture of dissidence continued to flourish among young people who were born too late to protest for civil rights or the end of the draft. The dissident subcultures were still visible in middle-class high schools in the mid- to late 1970s (Larkin, 1979). Later in her life, Brenda identified herself as having been gay from birth (as opposed to those who adopt homosexual behavior in prison to ward off isolation) (Furio, 2001). Coming to terms with her homosexuality at a time and place when lesbianism was considered "mannish" behavior may have also contributed to her embracing a violent, substance-abusing identity. Her father, the man with whom she was most intimate, had similar tendencies.

Brenda had some friends, but others were frightened by her and kept their distance. One classmate said: "She was nice but she was really crazy. We were nice to her because we were afraid of her. . . . I didn't like her because she always talked about killing things" (UPI, 1979, p. 8). A student from her history class recalled Brenda frequently wondering aloud how it would feel to shoot people.

Brenda's classroom behavior may have appeared more eccentric and oppositional—and her reasoning further compromised—as a result of an injury to the temporal lobe that was discovered during pretrial psychological testing. It was attributed to a bicycle accident; the beatings to the head she received at the hands of her father were not public knowledge prior to her 2001 probation hearing (Dower, 2006). Such injuries are a common precursor to epilepsy. Epilepsy is two to four times more common among violent offenders than in the general public (Treimen, 1986). The prevalence of epilepsy among convicts has been a subject of interest to criminologists for over a 100 years, and has attracted controversy because of its disingenuous use as a legal defense. Current thinking is that:

> brain damage, not epilepsy, increases the chances of violent behavior. Brain damage, especially in limbic areas, can cause paranoia, and frontal damage can cause disinhibition. Paranoia and disinhibition are significant precipitators of violence, especially when combined with a history of childhood abuse. Limbic and/or frontal damage can also cause seizures, but seizures themselves rarely cause violence. Though the presence of seizures can be indicative of brain damage, it is the brain damage, not the seizures, that disinhibits (Pincus, 2002, pp. 209–210).

Brenda may have suffered from *partial seizures*, which are less extreme than the symptoms generally associated with the term epilepsy. Partial seizures involve odd sensations such as deja-vu, or minor hallucinations involving taste, touch, sound, or sight, sometimes accompanied by feelings of fear, anger, depression, or exultation (Devinsky, Vorkas, Barr, & Hermann, 2007). Slightly more severe cases bring disruptions in consciousness. The sufferer may stare into space for minutes at a time,

failing to respond to others, or exhibit repetitive behaviors or bizarre speech. Impaired judgment is another symptom. "Brenda, are you awake?" was the phrase that came to mind when her high school English teacher was asked to recall Brenda as a student (Dower, 2006).

In a letter from prison that was probably composed around 2000, Brenda writes that she is having frequent *grand mal* seizures, which are only partially responsive to the soporific medication provided by the prison infirmary; she drinks coffee constantly to stay awake (Furio, 2001). *Grand mal* seizures are the most violent form of epilepsy, where the sufferer loses control of their body, falls to the floor, and experiences convulsions and spasms. The possibility that Brenda was suffering from *grand mal* prior to her incarceration, and that it went unreported by teachers and parents, suggests a degree of familial and institutional neglect that is hard to imagine.

The neighbors failed to notice Brenda's progressively more bizarre behavior, or were not overly concerned. One neighbor, interviewed by the press following the shooting, described Brenda as a quiet girl from a nice family who was looking for attention, a bright girl who did not like school. The neighbor's 5-year-old son often visited the Spencer home to play in Wallace's pickup truck or help Brenda care for her pets.

Brenda was not *entirely* unsuccessful in school. Her favorite course was photography. Her teacher described her as introverted and undistinguished except for her better-than-average ability to compose an image and her bright red hair. She won first prize, a color TV, in a Humane Society photo contest in October, 1978, 4 months before the shootings. The winning photograph, reprinted in a local paper, showed a man leading his dog through an obedience trial at a neighborhood dog show. Well-composed and full of vitality, it might have been the work of a professional photojournalist.

For Christmas of 1979, Wallace gave Brenda a 0.22 caliber semiautomatic rifle with a telescopic sight and 700 rounds of ammunition. Brenda wrote in a letter from prison to her correspondent, Jennifer Furio,

> My probation officer almost had a heart attack [when she heard about the rifle and ammunition]. When she calmed down, she asked me how that made me feel. I told her, "like he's telling me to go ahead and do it." Every suicide attempt [by drug overdose] I'd done in '78 had failed. I'd lived through them. I felt like such a loser I couldn't even kill myself. He was telling me to get it right.
>
> On the morning I did my crime, I sat there loaded and drinking. I kept thinking, "Can't even kill yourself right. What a loser." I thought if I ate the barrel of the gun and pulled the trigger I'd probably live, be a quadriplegic and be trapped even worse with dad than I already was. Then I'd be totally at his mercy, I wouldn't even be able to run. Then I thought if I shot in the air toward the school, the cops would show up. A couple more and they would shoot me . . . and they wouldn't miss. It would all be over, my nightmare would end. I'd have peace finally forever (Brenda Spencer in Furio, 2001, pp. 121–122).

Brenda claims that prior to the shooting she wrote a suicide note that her father tore up, and a will that has never come to light.

11.4   The Shooting

On the morning of January 29, 1979, children who had arrived early at Grover Cleveland Elementary School were chasing one another around the playground, while a line of cars crept past the entrance, dropping off children with backpacks. Grover Cleveland was a small school: 319 students, 13 teachers, and six support staff. Brenda, now aged 16, was at home across the street. When the first bell rang at 8:50 a.m., she broke two of the diamond-shaped panes in the front door, and stuck her rifle barrel through the cracked glass. The school driveway, bordered by an ivy-covered fence on the left and a wing of the school building on the right, created a corridor that gave her a clear shot from her front door to the school entrance, a distance of 150 ft.

Burton Wragg, 53, the new school principal was standing in the vestibule, welcoming the children and maintaining order, when he heard two gunshots. He rushed outside. He was hit in the shoulder and then again in the chest, and fell into the ivy-covered fence. Another teacher, Darryl Barnes, ran outside moments later and knelt over Wragg's body trying to assess the damage. "There were children running everywhere," Barnes remembered. "He was badly wounded in the chest. I opened his shirt. He appeared dead." When Barnes stood up, a bullet missed him by a breath. "I guess God's hand was on my shoulder," he said later. He scooped up two children, one under each arm, and ran inside.

Michael Suchar, the school custodian, unaware of or indifferent to the sniper fire, came outside with a blanket to cover Wragg to keep him from going into shock. Barnes, who was watching from the window of the nurse's office, described what happened next. "I saw him lean down over Wragg and almost immediately two bullets hit him, spinning him around and to the ground."

Wanda Carberry, a fourth grade teacher with 23 years in the school system, went outside, blew her whistle, and shouted for the children to come in. "The sniper seemed to pick them off easily as they ran towards the school," she told the press. Other teachers followed her lead, rescuing children without consideration for their own safety.

The first police ambulance arrived minutes later. Two patrolmen, hunkered down and shielded from view by masses of ivy, herded the children to safety. One was struck in the shoulder. Principal Wragg and the other victims were rushed to local hospitals. Custodian Suchar was pronounced dead on arrival and Wragg died on the operating table 35 min after admission.

Gus Stevens, a reporter on the *San Diego Evening Tribune* was assigned the story, and began calling the homes nearest the school for information about the sniper. The first call he placed was, coincidentally, to the Spencer home, and Brenda interrupted her shooting to answer it. Did she know anything about the shootings, Stevens asked.

"Yes," she replied. "I saw the whole thing." She told him that the shooter was a 16-year-old kid who lived at [here she gave her address.]

"Isn't that *your* address?" Stevens asked, puzzled.

"Sure," she said, giggling. "Who do you think did it?" And she hung up.

Stevens called back and asked if she would grant him an interview. Brenda explained that she had told her father that she was sick so she could stay home from school. After that "I just started shooting. That's it. I just did it for the fun of it." She went on: "I just don't like Mondays. Do *you* like Mondays? I did this because it's a way to cheer up the day. Nobody likes Mondays." Later she said, "It just popped into my head. About last Wednesday, I think."

Was she alone in the house?

"You think I'd be doing it if someone was home?"

Stevens described her attitude as calm and matter-of-fact. She claimed that she found nothing odd about shooting at people she did not know, but she did admit to being worried about what her father would say.

"My dad's gonna kill me when he gets home and finds out about this," she told Stevens. "He's going to flip. This will really blow him away."

Stevens pointed out that she may have killed three or four innocent people.

"Is that all?" Brenda responded. "I saw lots of feathers fly."

She talked about splitting open people's "skulls with a cleaver" (almost certainly a fabrication), and admitted to her prior arrests. Before hanging up she said, "I have to go now. I shot a pig, I think, and I want to shoot some more."

While Stevens was on the phone, other staff at the *San Diego Evening Tribune*, alerted to his strange interview, contacted the police. They, in turn, fed questions to Stevens that he relayed to Brenda, yielding information that would later result in her being arrested without additional injuries.

Now that police knew the source of the shooting, they evacuated the children, who had sought shelter in the school gym, out an exit on the opposite side of the building. The children boarded buses and were driven to the auditorium of Pershing High School, three blocks away, where they were reunited with their anxious parents.

A trained hostage negotiator contacted Brenda by telephone around noon. Why had they taken so long to reach her? Brenda asked. The reporter had found her hours ago.

The negotiations were difficult because, unlike other hostage situations, Brenda had everything she needed. There could be no bargaining for food, drink, an escape vehicle, or amnesty. She was, after all, in her own home. The negotiator kept her engaged for the next 3 h, trying to establish a relationship of trust.

An edgy crowd had gathered beyond the barricades that surrounded the house. Onlookers shouted, "Shoot her!" and urged the police to storm the house. "As long as she talks," SWAT team members countered, "we wait."

Brenda's classmates at the high school, many of whom had little brothers and sisters at Cleveland Elementary, were appalled, not by the fact that she had murdered the principal and the custodian, but that she had shot at and wounded little children. As one of them commented, "You don't hurt kids. That's like setting fire to the church. Kids are sacred."

A little after three o'clock, at the prompting of the negotiator, Brenda emerged from the house, placed the 0.22 rifle and a pellet gun on the driveway, and went back

inside. Next he convinced her to give up her ammunition. After she had placed several hundred rounds on the driveway, she was cuffed and led to a police van parked nearby. She was driven to police headquarters and from there to Juvenile Hall, where she was confined. She had fired 36 rounds at the school, killed two middle-aged men, wounded eight children, and terrified the community in a way they would remember for the rest of their lives.

At 8:30 the next morning, Carl M. Cannon, a *San Diego Union* reporter, knocked on the door of Brenda's home, hoping to interview her father. Peering through the window, he could see Wallace Spencer sitting in a straight back chair in the living room, staring into space. He ignored the reporter. Later a sign was taped to the door: Wallace was "in shock and agony over the events of yesterday . . . and would appreciate being left alone."

On October 1, Brenda traded a guilty plea for 25 years to life at the California Institute for Women at Frontera, an adult facility in Chowchilla, five hours north of San Diego. While in juvenile hall awaiting sentencing, Brenda shared a holding cell with a 17-year-old named Shiela McCoy, who had run away from her home in Arizona. Shiela was soon released to a halfway house. She found the rules too oppressive, and sought shelter at the Spencer home where Wallace, now living alone, took her in. Shiela so closely resembled Brenda in appearance that one of the deputies, catching sight of her, called Brenda's attorney to find out why she had been released from prison prematurely. Shiela soon became pregnant with Wallace's child. When Elsa Norbeck, Shiela's probation officer, found out about it she asked the DA's office and the San Diego Police to investigate whether the union might be considered statutory rape, or contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The judge was not pleased. He ordered Shiela to make a choice: she could either marry the baby's father or return to jail. When Wallace learned of the decree, he proposed. They were married on March 26, 1980, in Yuma, Arizona. Shiela's parents indicated their consent by signing the license, as required by Arizona law. Soon after Shiela gave birth, she fled, leaving Wallace alone to raise his new daughter. When interviewed by Dower in 2006, Wallace revealed that the child was still living with him and attending UCLA, majoring in sociology (Associated Press, 1980 p. 2).

11.5   Discussion

To understand cases such as this, it is useful to return to the shame tank metaphor. While all kinds of shaming events may fill the tank, the secret shaming events are the most dangerous. They cannot be discharged because they cannot be spoken about. Shame is discharged through confession and secret shame cannot be confessed. Brenda had experienced a variety of secret shaming events. Her parents had divorced and her brother, sister, and mother had abandoned her to the care of an uncaring father; her father had engaged her in an incestuous relationship and then presented her with what appeared to be a suicide weapon; she was "questioning" her own sexuality and gender preference; and she was suffering from an undiagnosed

disease (some type of epilepsy) with symptoms that mimicked insanity. These were all events that she could not disclose, noless process.

Let us consider the divorce first. While we cannot say with certainty that Brenda experienced shame, we do know that children of divorcing parents typically report strong feelings of anger, which they have difficulty expressing, as well as shame about being different and alienated from their peers (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). Additional shame came in the form of a drop in socioeconomic status following her move to a smaller, more ramshackle home and problems of integration in a new school where most of the other students already knew one another. Teachers may have made an effort to welcome her but children of this age group are likely to bully and ostracize new comers (Craig & Pepler, 1998; Eslea & Rees, 2001). Less attractive boys and girls at the cusp of adolescence find integration into school groups particularly difficult (Cunningham et al., 2010; Pellegrini & Long, 2007).

Brenda's older siblings moved out of the house soon after the divorce, abandoning her to their father. Incest is a statutory crime, usually classified as a felony, involving sexual intercourse between first-degree relations (father and daughter, brother and sister, etc.), and in some places and times second-degree relations (cousins) (Merriam Webster, n.d.). Laws against incest are common to every culture. In the eyes of the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1969) the restriction constitutes the basic social contract. Mead (1972) believed it preserved the social order. All cultures view it with "horror and dread" (Herman & Hirschman, 1977, p. 735). In parts of the United States it is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

In another prison letter, Brenda has this to say about her father's behavior:

> My father had done everything [to me] that a person could do to another person. The beatings, the touching, the emotional abuse, all from the one person I should have been able to trust the most or go to for safety. He was the one doing all the things you are supposed to protect your kid from. I got no help from counselors at school, no help from anyone. So I came to the conclusion that it would never stop. This was life. This was how things would always be (Brenda Spencer, in Furio, 2001, p. 121).

Brenda's attorney, interviewed by Dower, implied that perhaps the incest was not too objectionable because Brenda had been reported to rumple her father's hair, and he would treat her like a "pet" (Dower, 2006). Herman and Hirschman explain how mistaken he was:

> [Father-daughter incest victims] were "daddy's special girls," and often they were special to no one else. Feelings of pity for the fathers were also common, especially where the fathers had lost social status. The daughters not only felt themselves abandoned by their mothers, but seemed to perceive their fathers as likewise deserted, and they felt the same pity for their fathers as they felt for themselves. . . . Most women expressed feelings of fear, disgust, and intense shame about the sexual contact and stated that they endured it because they felt they had no other choice. . . . The victim feels overwhelmed by her father's superior power and unable to resist him; she may feel disgust, loathing, and shame. But at the same time she often feels that this is the only kind of love she can get, and prefers it to no love at all. The daughter is not raped, but seduced (Herman & Hirschman, 1977, p. 748).

What could she do as a 9-year-old to protect herself or extricate herself from the situation? Despite frequent encampments on her doorstep, her mother remained aloof from the situation. Dorothy Spencer told Dower that she suspected that sexual and physical abuse was going on but did not call the police because of the lack of evidence. She did not try to get custody of the children, she claimed, because of the expense of hiring a lawyer (Dower, 2006). One is reminded of Bowlby's 44 young thieves whose mothers often experienced "an intense, though perhaps unadmitted, dislike and rejection of [the child]" (p. 19).

The foremost task of adolescence is the formation of an adult identity (Erikson, 1950). Identity consists of a number of dimensions including finding a domestic partner, adopting an ideology and spiritual beliefs, choosing a vocation, and discovering one's own gender preference. In a letter from prison, Brenda states:

> I have been gay my whole life. Maybe I was born gay or it was because of how my father treated me, I don't know. In prison it's considered a "genetic queer" as opposed to a "generic queer." Genetic queers have been gay their whole lives (Brenda Spencer, in Furio, 2001, p. 121).

Despite tectonic shifts in the way Americans think about homosexuality, in the mainstream it remains a shameful behavior that must be concealed if one is to survive the gauntlet of adolescence without beatings, bullying, and mockery. It is a profound source of secret shame. According to recent statistics, LGBQT teens attempt suicide two to four times as frequently as their heterosexual peers (Centers for Disease Control, 2008; Kitts, 2005) and the true figure is probably far greater since many gay adolescents remain closeted.

If no pro-social identity appears available to a child, then an antisocial identity may be preferable to the ghost-world existence of what Erikson refers to as "identity diffusion" (1950). With each arrest, and the eventual transfer to a special school, identification with the criminal culture became more enticing. The fear that her talk of guns and killing instilled in her classmates was easily misread as respect, while the reputation that she developed among the teachers and administrators may have been a welcome recognition. The popularity of the iconic image of former socialite Patty Hearst participating in a bank robbery only 4 years earlier, wearing the black beret of the Symbionese Liberation Army and wielding an M1 carbine rifle, suggested that an act of disproportionate violence might win the sympathy of the nation for a neglected little girl.

Wallace bought Brenda the rifle and ammunition soon after learning at a school meeting that she was "suicidal." What was she to make of this gesture? Before her parole board in 1999, she said: "I asked for a radio and he bought me a gun. . . . I felt like he wanted me to kill myself. . . . I had failed at every other suicide attempt. I thought if I shot at the cops, they would shoot me." This "suicide by cop" scenario is common among school shooters (Fast, 2008).

Brenda was left with three alternatives: join the gun-loving, society-hating, substance-abusing, predatory culture of her father; end her own abuse by killing her father; or end her own discomfort by committing suicide.

Remarkably, she accomplished all three of these goals, albeit symbolically. She got drunk, shot a gun at a public institution, and swaggered in front of the press; she killed two middle-aged men as probable proxies for her father; and she ended her own life, for all intents and purposes, by getting herself confined to a tiny cell for the rest of her life. She did not kill any of the children, although her shots seemed to be of lethal intent. Because she was a skilled markswoman shooting at close range with a rifle, one must wonder if she unconsciously let her aim drift off target. Did they represent herself, or perhaps her lost childhood? Did she have the same reluctance about ending their lives as she had about her own?

Let us return now to the theory of secret shame, and make its utility explicit in understanding this case. We have reports of deficient parental bonds, maternal and paternal, from the age of 9 on. Bowlby identifies poor maternal bonding in infancy as a predictor of antisocial behavior; we simply do not know about Brenda's early life. We do know that from the age of 9 on, she experienced a sequence of events that resulted in an unusual accumulation of shame of many types: parental divorce, abandonment by mother and siblings, conduct disorder, loss of social status, expulsion from a regular school, undiagnosed epilepsy, violent paternal abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse in the form of touching. She had no pro-social means of discharging her shame. Her father interfered with her psychiatric hospitalization (a situation where she was likely to reveal his intimacey with her). According to one of Brenda's prison letters (Furio, 2001) he often told people that she was a liar and could not be trusted. Even 20 years after the shooting, he badgered her during a prison visit about keeping confidences in her letters and phone calls. While she had many ways of accumulating shame, she had few ways of discharging it, no best friends or confidants, no religious practice that involved confession or atonement, no church youth group advisor or teacher to take her under their wing, no therapists. Her most shameful secret had to be protected at all costs, and one cost was a high degree of social isolation. Abusive men usually become adept at keeping their victims socially isolated.

How then to discharge shame, rage, and self-hatred while keeping it secret? The answer, as we have seen in school shootings and similarly baffling acts of domestic terrorism is the unconscious choice of symbolic targets for the expression of violence. Consequently, the gender, age, and body type of the victim is often significant in understanding this kind of crime.

One might well ask, what difference does all this make? People have been killed—good people, people with families who grieve their loss, people who selflessly served the community. Innocent children have been maimed and traumatized. Surely the killer must be made to pay for the crimes. We might feel the same resentment for cancer, or a deadly virus, but it would not cloud our determination to find out as much as possible about the true nature of the virus, whether it is air-borne or blood-borne, what are the risk factors, how can we prevent its spread, or cure it, or cut it out of the body. We will never really put an end to suicidal or homicidal violence until we fully understand it, and in order to do so we must bring shame into the open, and understand its properties, just as we would any other factor that threatened our children's health.

11.6   Conclusion

Brenda Spencer has now been incarcerated for 30 years at a cost of about three quarters of a million dollars to the American taxpayer, for a crime she committed when she was 16 years old, based on a decision made by a brain that was damaged and less than fully formed, following 7 years of physical and sexual abuse by her father.

I am familiar with two incidents of forgiveness, or at least forays into forgiveness, in the history of American school shootings. The first was that of the writer Gregory Gibson, whose son was killed by Wayne Lo during a school rampage shooting in December of 1992. Gibson and Lo have continued to communicate with one another in an attempt to make sense of the terrible tragedy of Lo's crime (Glaberson, 2000). The second exception occurred in 2006, after students were taken hostage in a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish village of Nickel Mines in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The shooter, a 28-year-old man who drove a milk truck, released the boys but kept the girls, ultimately killing five of them and wounding others before killing himself. They were all younger than 13. Members of the community, including relatives of the slain girls, reached out to the family of the killer with messages of comfort and forgiveness (Herman, 2007).

For centuries America and the United Kingdom have had a tradition of retributive justice. *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. Rather than helping offenders discharge the shame they have accumulated, so they can become reintegrated into society, we heap more shame upon them until they are crippled or crushed by the weight of it. It is no wonder that the United States has more people incarcerated than any other nation on earth (Liptak, 2008), that the building of new prisons is its biggest rural growth industry (Bonds, 2006; Huling, 2002; King, Mauer, & Huling, 2004), that the recidivism rate is so high and success rates with violence reduction so very low (Richard Gilligan interviewed in Jarosewski, 2006).

While the parole board seemed mildly intrigued by Brenda Spencer's account of her parents' divorce, her sexual and physical abuse, the neglectful and indifferent attitude of her parents, and her father's lethal christmas present, their final response was to shrug and send her back to prison for another 10 years. One incident in particular seemed to convince them that she was not sufficiently rehabilitated to join the world outside the walls and barbed wire. After a prison love affair went sour, Brenda tattooed her chest with a red-hot paper clip: "Unforgiven and alone."

References

Ansbacher, H. L., & Ansbacher, R. R. (Eds.). (1964). *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler: A systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. New York City: Harper Perennial.

Ashley, J., & Burke, K. (2009). *Implementing restorative justice in schools*. Chicago, IL: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Baumeister, R. F., Dale, K., & Sommer, K. L. (1998). Freudian defense mechanisms and empirical findings in modern social psychology: Reaction formation, projection, displacement, undoing,

isolation, sublimation, and denial. *Journal of Personality, 66*(6), 1081–1124. doi:10.1111/1467-6494.00043.

Bonds, A. (2006). Profit from punishment? The politics of prisons, poverty and neoliberal restructuring in the rural American Northwest. *Antipode, 38*(1), 174–177.

Bowlby, J. (1944). Forty-four juvenile thieves: Their characters and home-life. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 25*, 19–53.

Braithwaite, V. (2000). Values and restorative justice in schools. In H. Strang & J. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Restorative justice: Philosophy to practice* (pp. 121–135). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Brown, B. (2006). Shame resilience theory: A grounded theory study on women and shame. *Families in Society, 87*(1), 43–52. doi: 10.1606/1044-3894.3483.

Centers for Disease Control. (2008). Youth risk surveillance survey—United States, 2007. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, Surveillance Summaries, *57*(SS-4).

Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. Charleston, SC: Bibliolife.

Craig, W. M., & Pepler, D. J. (1998). Observations of bullying and victimization in the school yard. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 13*(2), 41–59. doi:10.1177/082957359801300205.

Cramer, P. (2000). Defense mechanisms in psychology today: Further processes for adaptation. *American Psychologist, 55*(6), 637–646. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.6.637.

Cunningham, N. J., Taylor, M., Whitten, M. E., Hardesty, P. H., Eder, K., & DeLaney, N. (2010). The relationship between self-perception of physical attractiveness and sexual bullying in early adolescence. *Aggressive Behavior, 36*(5), 271–281. doi:10.1002/ab.20354.

Darwin, C. (1872). *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*. London: John Murray.

Devinsky, O., Vorkas, C., Barr, W. B., & Hermann, B. P. (2007). Personality disorders in epilepsy. In A. B. Ettinger & A. M. Kanner (Eds.), *Psychiatric issues in epilepsy: A practical guide to diagnosis and treatment* (2nd ed., p. 286). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Dower, J. (2006). *I don't like Mondays*. Channel 4 Television Corporation, UK.

Durkheim, E. (1897). *Suicide: A study in sociology*. London: Routledge.

Erikson, E. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Eslea, M., & Rees, J. (2001). At what age are children most likely to be bullied at school? *Aggressive Behavior, 27*(6), 419–429. doi:10.1002/ab.1027.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. New York: Overlook.

Freud, A. (1936). *The ego and the mechanisms of defense: The writings of Anna Freud* (Vol. 2). Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

Furio, J. (2001). *Letters from prison, voices of women murderers* (1st ed.). New York: Algora.

Gilligan, J. (1996). *Violence: Our deadly epidemic and its causes*. New York: G.P. Putnam.

Glaberson, W. (2000, April 12). Man and his son's slayer unite to ask why. *New York Times*, pp. A1, A28.

Herman, J., & Hirschman, L. (1977). Father-daughter incest. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 2*(4), 735–756.

Herman, J. L. (2007, March 10). *Shattered shame states and their repair*. John Bowlby Memorial lecture, Cambridge, MA.

Huling, T. W. (2002). Building a prison economy in rural America. In M. Mauer & M. Chesney-Lind (Eds.), *Invisible punishment: The collateral consequences of mass imprisonment*. New York: New Press.

Jarosewski, L. (2006). Does Putting people in jail cause more crime? An interview with James Gilligan. In A. Nash (Ed.), *Through the Lens of Social Justice*. World Education, Inc.

King, R. S., Mauer, M., & Huling, T. (2004). An analysis of the economics of prison siting in rural communities. *Criminology & Public Policy, 3*(3), 453–480.

Kitts, R. L. (2005). Gay adolescents and suicide: Understanding the association. *Adolescence, 40*(159), 621–628.

Larkin, R. W. (1979). *Suburban youth in cultural crisis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Larkins, G. (1971). Law and order: The policeman is our friend—off the "pig". *Social Education, 35*(5), 503–506.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969). *The elementary structures of kinship: (Les structures élémentaires de la parenté)*. Boston: Beacon.

Lewis, H. B. (1971). *Shame and guilt in neurosis*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

Liptak, A. (2008, April 23). U.S. prison population dwarfs that of other nations. *The New York Times*. Retrieved June 11, 2012 from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/23/world/americas/23iht-23prison.12253738.html?pagewanted=all.

Lynd, H. M. (1999). *On shame and the search for identity*. London: Routledge.

Mead, M. (1972). Incest. In D. L. Sills (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of the social sciences* (pp. 115–122). New York: Macmillan.

Merriam Webster. (n.d.). Incest. *Merriam Webster online dictionary*. Retrieved November 25, 2011, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incest.

Morrison, B. (2006). School bullying and restorative justice: Toward a theoretical understanding of the role of respect, pride, and shame. *Journal of Social Issues, 62*(2), 371–392.

Pellegrini, A. D., & Long, J. D. (2007). An observational study of early heterosexual interaction at middle school dances. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 17*(4), 613–638.

Piers, G., & Singer, M. B. (1953). *Shame and guilt: A psychoanalytic and a cultural study*. New York: Norton.

Pincus, J. H. (2002). *Base instincts: What makes killers kill?* New York: W. W. Norton.

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. R. (2010). *Research methods for social work* (7th ed.). Monterey, CA: Brooks Cole.

Scheff, T. J. (1988). Shame and conformity: The deference-emotion system. *American Sociological Review, 53*(3), 395–406.

Scheff, T. J. (2006). Aggression, hypermasculine emotions and relations: The silence/violence pattern. *Irish Journal of Sociology, 15*(1), 24–39.

Scheff, T. J., & Retzinger, S. M. (2002). *Emotions and violence*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.

Sedgwick, E. K., Frank, A., & Alexander, I. E. (1995). *Shame and its sisters: A Silvan Tomkins reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Tangney, J. P., Wagner, P., Fletcher, C., & Gramzow, R. (1992). Shamed into anger? The relation of shame and guilt to anger and self-reported aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 62*(4), 669–675.

Treimen, D.M. (1986). Epilepsy and violence: medical and legal issues. *Epilepsia*, 27, S77–S104.

UPI. (1979, January 31). Teenager is questioned in schoolyard shooting. *Lodi News Sentinel*, pp. 8, 15.

Wallerstein, J. S., & Kelly, J. B. (1976). The effects of parental divorce experiences of the child in later latency. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 26*, 256–269.

Wright, F. (1987). Man, shame and antisocial behavior: A psychodynamic perspective. *Group, 11*(4), 238–246.

Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.Herman, J. L. (2007, March 10). *Shattered shame states and their repair*. John Bowlby Memorial lecture, Cambridge, MA.

Part III
Media Reporting and Media Effects

Chapter 12
School Shootings as Mediatized Violence

Glenn W. Muschert

Scholars have noticed that school shootings in general, and especially the media dynamics surrounding them, have made a significant mark on social discourse about youth social problems in contemporary society. The perpetrators of these noted attacks seem to act according to a cultural script (Kiilakoski and Oksanen 2011; Muschert and Ragnedda 2010), that features the use of the spectacle of violence (Frymer 2009) as transmitted via mass media. Others have referred to the image of the school shooter as being an example of a trope of violent masculinity (Tonso 2009), as a socioculturally encoded image for how to carry out a school shooting, or of a performative script (Muschert and Ragnedda 2010) which school shooters enact. In both ways of conceiving the cultural development of school shootings, it is clear that early school shootings established a precedent for subsequent attacks (see Larkin 2009 for an exploration).

The general performative script (Muschert and Ragnedda 2010) of the archetypical rampage school shooting involves the use of extreme violence in school settings by young males to exact revenge and/or to convey a message. Victims are typically selected at random or for symbolic reasons, such as being members of high-status groups within the school environment. The attacks take place on a public stage (most frequently media), and often shooters seem to imply that they are undertaking their attacks as a mean of communicating their displeasure with their perceived unjust subordination within the school social hierarchy.

G.W. Muschert (✉)
Department of Sociology and Gerontology, Miami University,
Oxford, OH 45056-1879, USA
e-mail: muschegw@muohio.edu

While the clarification of the performative script (or trope) may help us to understand school shootings more generally, we must look to the media logic of contemporary society to understand aspects of this social problem's international diffusion. Larkin (2009) states that the unfortunate "legacy of Columbine" is that school attacks are not merely revenge for perceived victimization and bullying, but have become a public ritual. Not only have subsequent shooters emulated earlier, famous attacks like Columbine, but as Larkin also points out there have been many averted rampages in which the would-be perpetrators also sought to imitate infamous school shooters. While school shootings are fortunately very rare, the images of the school shooter are widely available and easily imitated. Thus, school shootings are no longer unfamiliar as a part of the cultural repertoire. Sadly, given that they have happened in various countries on multiple continents across the previous 15 years, it is clear that these are somehow connected, undoubtedly via media processes.

This chapter explores the idea that rampage school shootings are highly mediatized phenomena, in that both the events themselves and the public perception of them are intimately tied to media logic. Fortunately, the vast majority of people have no direct exposure to school shootings, nor do they have indirect experience via contact with those with direct exposure. Despite this, most people know something about school shootings, and the ubiquity of the school shooter trope obliquely implies the mediatized nature of contemporary society and its problems.

Of course there have been numerous academic studies of the mediated aspects of school shootings, and these are interesting in themselves. However, they also offer a point of departure for broader academic discussion of the integral ties between mass media processes and crucial aspects of social crisis, whether caused by extreme violence, natural disaster, terrorism, or various forms of accidents.

This chapter offers an overview of the interplay between media and the school shootings phenomenon, situated within the contemporary condition of media saturation.[1] The discussion starts with a description of school shootings as ideal cases for the examination of mediatization, and proceeds in more concrete terms to explore the specific ways in which media logic articulates itself in this case. In particular, the argument examines the content of news media in discussing school rampages,

---

[1] The use of overlapping terms in this field can be confusing. Muschert (2007a) defines school shootings broadly as gun violence against persons taking place at schools, but also defines a number of subtypes: rampage/amok attacks, school invasions/mass murders taking place at schools, targeted attacks, terror attacks, and government attacks. Though targeted attacks where shooters specifically target one or more victims are among the most common, they receive less attention than rampage-type and school invasion-type attacks (which attract great attention). In most cases, the term "school shooting" refers to rampage attacks and mass murders, though there are exceptions. Since both the research and media coverage of school shootings focus on rampage and school invasion attacks, this chapter uses the term "school shootings" to refer to those attacks which appear more dominantly in media and research discourses, namely rampage and school invasions.

ultimately focusing on the frames that are evoked. The highlighting of certain frames necessarily casts others in shadow, thereby suppressing those alternative aspects of discourse. The chapter concludes with some critical reflections on the effects and continued relevancy of understanding school shootings as strongly mediatized events, not only for understanding the rhetorical importance of these high profile events, but also for understanding the concrete, real-world consequences of the media logic which show themselves in behavioral and policy developments.

12.1   Mediatization and School Shootings

Both the ability to make one's actions intelligible and the intelligibility of the actions of others are strongly influenced by media logic in this age of information. This section explores an emerging understanding of mass-mediated social relations and their appearance in the apt example of school shooting events. The concept of mediatization suggests that media forms have become integrated into dominant social institutions, and vice versa. In cases of exceedingly rare catastrophes which capture the collective sociological imagination (often in anxious and/or existential ways), the public relies strongly on media to understand the meanings, details, and effects of such tragedies. School shootings are among the superlative examples of mediatized violence, in which the discourse about the phenomena is dominated by mass media processes.[2]

The term *mediatization* has entered into the academic discourse about new forms of media logic, particularly concerning the intersections between "real world" events and the media representations of such events (Couldry 2008; Hjarvard 2008). Thus, in a heavily mediatized information society, media strongly affect core social relations, including government, family, educational, and legal institutions. Given that school shootings are high-profile events that sit at the juncture of social processes concerning education, community, security, justice, and the socialization of youth, the importance of such tragic events is not surprising. However, what may be less obvious at times is that media processes, as key to the contemporary age, also play crucial roles in school shooting phenomena.

Given the dominance of media in social relations, media processes and institutions emerge as increasingly independent of the social relations which they purport to convey. Thus, the independent media logic exerts its own hegemony in that actors in previously independent institutions (e.g., youth cultures, justice systems, education), must conform their behaviors to the new media logic. Simultaneously, media processes become integrated into the very institutional forms on which they report, and therefore become inseparable from other essential forms of social relations

---

[2] There are, of course, other examples of highly mediatized events, including terror attacks and many acts of war. Similarly, though the destruction may be interpreted less as the effect of malice aforethought, there are similar mediatized qualities to the destruction conveyed in news accounts of large-scale transportation accidents, industrial accidents, and natural disasters.

(Hjarvard 2008). This occurs both as social life increasingly takes place within mass-mediated forms (e.g., social networking, online learning, entertainment media, and electronic communications) and as individuals conform their behaviors to digital logics in order to make their words and actions intelligible to others in the information society (Couldry 2008). In effect, the ability to make sense of others' behaviors and to make one's own behaviors intelligible are in direct proportion to—and dependent upon—their conformity to contemporary modalities of communication.

School shootings are a widely recognized form of violence and victimization, and one almost exclusively conveyed to audiences via media forms (Muschert and Ragnedda 2010). While these incidents are often quite horrific in their effects, they are also exceedingly rare, particularly when compared with more common forms of violence in schools, such as physical bullying and simple assault (Muschert 2007a). Nonetheless, school shootings occupy a strongly leveraged position in the public consciousness and the general understanding of the social problem of youth violence. In some cultural contexts and historical periods, in fact, school rampages may come to dominate the problem awareness of school violence, or even youth violence more broadly. Thus, the school rampage shooters (most commonly outcast youth) often become the unfortunate poster children for school violence, youth violence more generally, or even youth disaffection and social problems as a whole (Muschert 2007b).

So, what social factors contribute to the public conceptions concerning school shootings, given their exceedingly rare actual occurrence, and how have these events (and their participants) come to typify more general categories of youth violence and social problems? Even in countries that have experienced multiple school shootings (Canada, Finland, Germany, and the United States), the overwhelming majority of the population has not witnessed a school shooting directly in their community, and exceedingly few people personally know someone who has directly experienced such a tragedy.[3] The mediatized quality of school shootings becomes clear here, as the vast majority of the population has learned about school shootings via mass media. In the case of school shootings, this mediatized quality may be especially strong, as a number of aspects of these events are mediatized. For example, the shooters often are motivated by a desire to convey one or more messages, or by a desire for self-aggrandizement. In fact, many shooters have been quite media-savvy (Muschert and Ragnedda 2010), and have consciously used media to convey messages (Schildkraut 2012). School shooters are quite certain that they are acting on a public stage, and in fact intend to seize this mediatized stage. While other forms of violence are certainly also heavily mediatized (particularly terror attacks), school shootings stand among the dominant examples of mediatized violence, as nearly all socially recognized aspects

---

[3] School shootings are an extremely rare form of violence and heavily mediated. There are other forms which may also share similarities. For example, serial killings, mass murders, terror attacks, and cannibalism may be similar in their mediatized qualities. Thus, there is a potential "ideal type" of phenomena which are exceedingly rare but also capture intense media attention. This suggests a rich area for potential future scholarly exploration.

of the school shooting problem (and responses to it) have emerged via an interaction between the public and mass media forms.

Of course, media personnel have direct and/or indirect contact with the participants of the events about which they report, and therefore serve the useful role of conveying information to audiences. However, in the case of exceedingly rare and catastrophic events (such as school shootings and airline crashes), the role of the media is particularly significant, because the public has very little experiential basis for processing the veracity of the mass mediated images and characterizations. In cases of more common tragic events (such as natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and droughts) which may be experienced by broad segments of the population of various regions of the world, the public is less reliant on media messages to understand their meaning. Simply stated, they have lived through such events, and therefore have an experiential basis for comparing the media images with those in lived experience, and therefore provide a baseline for understanding that the media may at times offer only a partial view.[4]

This overwhelmingly mass-mediated quality of school shootings makes them an ideal case for the academic exploration of mediatized violence. Therefore, studies of the media dynamics of school shootings are particularly useful in understanding the emergence of school shootings as a social problem, and in informing scholars about how the public understanding of violence and other social phenomena may be intimately affected by contemporary media logic.[5] A more concrete exploration of the last decade's scholarship of the media coverage of school shootings will illustrate this point.

12.2   Scholarship on the Media Aspects of School Rampages

Scholars in a variety of fields have examined school shootings, particularly the rampage/amok type, and their media dynamics. While journalists have studied the ethical and stress factors related to covering such events (Shepard 1999, 2003; Simpson and Coté 2006), scholars in sociology and media studies have primarily examined

---

[4] Of course, natural disasters (e.g., tsunami, earthquakes, floods, etc.) may also be experienced in a mass-mediatized fashion, especially so when they happen somewhere else. For example, people in California clearly have an experiential basis for understanding earthquakes but may not have experienced hurricanes, which typically happen elsewhere. The point here is to convey that the populace is almost entirely dependent upon mass media forms for information about school shootings, but relatively less so for other events which are more broadly experienced.

[5] It is worth point out, however, that the field of communication in crisis situations (as distinct from "crisis communication") is a nascent one which is developing ad hoc in a variety of directions and concerning a variety of topics. Thus, the emergent discussion lacks a unifying theory or conceptual point of view. Studies in this emergent area draw on research related to societies of risk (Giddens 1990; Beck 1997; Bauman 2006; Furedi 2006), networked societies (Castells 2009; Urry 2007; Burgess and Green 2009), and the darker side of modern life with its qualities of mediated performance (Cottle 2009). See also the series "Global Crises and the Media" published by Peter Lang.

media content, both in itself and for its antecedent qualities or effects. The focus on the antecedents to media discourse is useful because media content offers researchers the ability to trace the content backwards, in an exploration of how the content came to take its form. Such an approach affords an indirect glimpse of the moral judgments, professional conventions, and social problem frames applied in the process of production. Alternately, researchers can trace the subsequent effects of the content, by examining the influences media content have on social processes. This post hoc approach affords a glimpse into social dynamics related to the meaning of tragedy, public mourning, and more concrete iterations of enforcement and prevention that ensue. The following subsections discuss the three foci of media studies of school shootings: the content itself, its antecedents, and in the following section, the effects of such content are examined.

12.2.1   Studying Content

Study of media and school shootings necessarily involve more than a descriptive endeavor of examining content, and often such an effort yields a concise accounting of what is contained in the media discourse. Such studies convey in orderly fashion the various images and themes that emerge when school shootings appear in media, typically by describing the thematic coverage in news media outlets, with a noted lack of emphasis among the social sciences on school shootings in traditional forms of entertainment media such as film, novels, and theater. Recently, some scholars have examined school shootings in new media forms, such as internet discussions and videos (Lindgren 2011; Muschert and Sumiala 2012). These studies reveal that the media processes observed in school shootings are reciprocal, in that the shooters (as producers of new media content) often post text and/or videos prior to their attacks. However, shooters (as consumers of new media content) often view and/or participate in blog posts and web videos, often shrines or tribute sites erected to discuss the most infamous school shooters of the past.

Despite the richness of these new areas of study, the overwhelming majority of social science studies have focused on the news media, perhaps due to its ubiquity and dramatic content. Overwhelmingly, studies focus on the most infamous shootings, which are often those with the highest death tolls in a country. Also, studies have tended to focus on the news dynamic within a single country. To date, most of the social science studies of school shootings examined the Columbine and Virginia Tech cases in the United States, with studies of less prominent cases being somewhat rare. As school shootings have increasingly occurred in other nations, we also have seen studies focusing on Canadian cases (Eglin and Hester 2003; Howells 2012), German cases (Müller et al. 2012), and Finnish cases (Sumiala and Tikka 2010, 2011). Although scholarship on media dynamics has developed in various countries, as yet there has been scant comparative international

research examining the media effects in different sociopolitical and cultural contexts. One noted exception is a study by Sumiala and Tikka (2011) which examines YouTube videos associated with famous U.S. and Finnish cases, and concludes that a common culture of horror and tragedy is currently developing among networked social discourses, and indeed transcending national and cultural boundaries. While research is just scratching the surface regarding possible avenues for examining international aspects, scholars have laid a foundation by exploring the emergence of school shootings as a sociological phenomenon (as opposed to isolated events) in national contexts. For example, Muschert (2009), in a study of 683 U.S. national-market daily newspaper and broadcast news articles about the Columbine event, tracked the thematic content of the Columbine story, with particular attention to whether stories focused on local, regional, national, or international frames. Although the findings are perhaps skewed by the selection of national-level sources, one key finding is that the reporting tends to focus more narrowly on the event and community in the days immediately following a shooting, but over time widens in its scope to discuss the relevancy to regional, national, or international levels. Just such a pattern of coverage appeared in the coverage of Columbine, and has been replicated in the coverage of numerous other shootings, although often on a lesser scale.

In the early days following a school shootings (the day of the attack and the next 3 days), the media concentrate on establishing the facts of the case, including the identities of the victims/perpetrators, and describing the attack in detail. In the next week (roughly between 4 and 10 days after the attack), the focus is on continuing responses, specifically on public grieving and trauma, including informal memorials, such as vigils, and formal memorials, including funerals for victims and public gatherings. Public figures, such as celebrities, politicians, and religious leaders often appear at such gatherings.[6] In addition, the continuing police investigation into the crime also emerges as an important theme.

Finally, in the subsequent week (between 7 and 14 days after the shooting) the discussion of specifics related to the case wanes, and the coverage moves to a broader search for meaning, including why such events happen (i.e., the causes), and what might be done to prevent future cases. It is within this broader focus in the later days of coverage that the impact and effects of the shooting for other, distant places and schools are discussed; this final application of the shootings to other locales is important because it tends to make the events relevant broadly, rather than keeping them as unfortunate, isolated events. Past the 2-week point, news coverage of school shootings declines precipitously, as the media tend to pursue new stories, and in a hyper-mediated world, another newer event will always emerge to supersede stale news events.

Compared to the issue-attention cycle of social scientists, the life course of media discussion of school shootings seems rather short; however, in the world of media

---

[6] Given the tragic nature of school shootings and the emotions evoked, such events may present opportunities for public figures. Of course, these figures also use such appearances as opportunities to engage in public relations and/or for personal or political gain.

producers and consumers, a week or two is a rather long arc. Perhaps the most persistent issue examined by news sources, and indeed one of the few that re-emerges in almost every subsequent school shooting story, is the discussion of the causes. Researchers have identified some factors that contribute to school shootings (see Muschert 2007a, 2010 for a detailed discussion), although these are not always the factors implicated in media reporting.

Focusing on the media discourse about causes, a number of causes are suggested nearly every time a school rampage takes place. Most prominent among these factors are gun availability (Lawrence and Birkland 2004); a wider culture of violence (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001); bullying (Klein 2006); and mass media effects, including a copy-cat effect (Sullivan and Guerette 2003) or exposure to increasing media violence (Webber 2003). Lawrence and Birkland's research (2004) suggests that politicians identify the mass media as contributing to the problem via intense coverage that inspires other youth to carry out similar attacks, but Scharrer et al. (2003) found that the news media (in their own discourse) tend to disavow their contribution to this dynamic. Other factors are noted as being missing or understated in media discourse, including gender dynamics (Klein 2005), aspects related to community climate (Larkin 2007), and school-level variables (Fox and Harding 2005).

The dominance of certain factors cited as causal in the news discourse (as well as the absence of others) contrasts with the variety and complexity of causes identified by social scientists. In fact, journalists commonly cite a small number of causes (often just one) as being behind school shootings, while social scientists have shown that school shootings arise out of a complex combination of multiple factors that actors often differ from one case to the next (see Muschert 2007a, pp. 65–71; 2010, pp. 79–82 for reviews). The social science research suggests that each shooting emerges from a perfect storm of factors present at various sociological levels, including individual factors (e.g., mental illness of the shooter, problems in personal relations, family abuse, and accessibility of guns); community contexts (e.g., conflict among youth peer groups, problems in the school, and conflict/intolerance in the community); and macro-level social contexts (e.g., presence of a culture that glorifies violence, certain political contexts, and the existence of cultural crises in education and masculinity). Although there appear to be explanations emerging from a number of levels simultaneously, journalists tend to cite a narrow range of causes, most often at the micro (individual) and macro (cultural levels). Muschert and Ragnedda (2010) point out that this can suppress discourse about and practical responses to meso-level (i.e., community and school-level) variables that may strongly contribute to many school rampages. Clearly, the content of media discourse about school shootings diverges from the academic discourse about the topic, but given a broader social need to search for the meaning of such attacks, one dominant thread in the discourse has been the discussion of culpability.

Given that the causes of school shootings are contested in the discourse, it is not surprising that it is difficult to ascribe blame. School shooters are typically described as being in the emotional state of rage, or suffering from severe mental

duress.[7] Key to the complexity of assigning culpability is that the youthfulness of offenders often serves as a mitigating factor, softening their moral responsibility.[8] Clearly, adolescents who act out horrific attacks are far from innocent children unaware of the consequences of their actions, but at the same time it may be difficult to label the school shooters as natural born killers or super-predators (Spencer and Muschert 2009; Spencer 2011). Indeed, it is not as simple as it to assign blame to youthful offenders, even in the most horrible of cases seems (Spencer 2005). Still, the news media's selection of (in part) individual causal factors in their coverage suggests that their attribution of blame lies at least partially on the individual plane, as opposed to the more abstract, sociological levels.

If the discussion of the moral responsibility of the shooters remains somewhat ambiguous, it is in the coverage of the victims that moral sensibility of journalists (and presumably their audience) is fully expressed. There is a dramatic quality to the coverage of school shootings, and as a theatrical schema would suggest, there is a need to identify a cast of characters.[9] For purposes of the narrative of school shootings, the victims are identified as protagonists and the shooters as antagonists. The virtues of the victims are emphasized, and the contrasting malevolence of the shooters emerges as an underlying motivation for their actions (Muschert 2007b). Although victims are generally underemphasized in the coverage as a whole, discussion of them dominates in the coverage of memorials. Thus, victims become a focal point at funerals, formal memorial services, and impromptu memorials, thereby serving as a focal point for broader portrayals and activities of grieving individual and shared experiences of trauma. It is in such periods of intense emotion that moral sentiments are activated.

---

[7] For example, a May 24, 1998, article in the *New York Times* described the Springfield, Oregon, shooter as having a mixture of psychological troubles and unbridled rage: "Kip Kinkel's parents had worried about his temper since he was a little boy. They sent him to a psychiatrist and taught him at home for a time. In recent months, they thought that their work and concern were making a difference and that Kip, at 15, was turning around. But the teen-ager, who is accused of killing his parents and two of his schoolmates in Springfield, Ore., never made a secret of his angry heart."

[8] However, perhaps in the case of victims the opposite is true. That is, the youthfulness of most victims in school rampages serves as a marker of their innocence, and therefore absolves them from any potential allegations that they may have in some way contributed to the underlying grievances which may have motivated the attack. This is in contrast to the direct statements made by many school shooters that they had been treated unfairly in the past.

[9] School shooters deliberately undertake their attacks on a public stage, with a dramatic schema that requires a cast and setting. The shooters and their victims play the lead roles in the drama, and the setting is the school. As journalists relate the stories of school shootings, they may rely on dramaturgical allusions (Goffman 1956; Harrington et al. 2011). Thus, the suggestion that school shootings carry dramatic overtones is apt in both senses of the word in that dramatic specifies both things which are sudden and striking, but also those things which pertain to theater and performance.

12.2.2   Studying Frames

Another variety of media studies has examined the second-order aspects of media coverage of school shootings, not so much by examining the content of the reporting itself, but rather by more abstractly studying the frames utilized in it. Often applied to media content, framing studies examine interpretive frameworks for understanding, with a long history in sociological research, most notably influenced by Goffman (1974). A media frame is a "central organizing idea for news content that supplies context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (Tankard 2001, pp. 100–101). Such studies reveal the evolution of foci within and between media events. In the case of studies of school shootings, most have also focused overwhelmingly on famous cases, as mentioned earlier.

The examination of the spatial framing has been an important aspect, and such studies tend to look at the problem framing conveyed in the media. By characterizing events as individual, community, regional, national, or international, news media can help to define the scope of a problem, and the members of society for whom such events are a threat (see Chyi and McCombs 2004; Muschert and Carr 2006, for discussions of spatial framing of shootings in the United States). Events limited to local impacts will not cause widespread outcry, because it is possible for people outside the affected locality to disassociate from their risks (Muschert and Peguero 2010; Muschert et al. 2013). However, when a problem is portrayed as either national or international in scope, then it is difficult for people to disavow the relevancy of such events, even if they take place in other regions of their own country, or abroad. Thus, the real impact of the broad, national-level problem framing applied to most school shooting cases is that these mediatized events, although exceedingly rare, have the ability to spark increased fear among broad segments of national populations (Burns and Crawford 1999; Altheide 2002).

When school shooting events began to take place with some frequency, they appeared to be a novel form, and therefore journalists were unable to describe them in terms of previous events. Regina Lawrence, in a study of media and school shootings (2001), examined the role that school shooting events in the late 1990s played in establishing journalistic conventions for how to cover such events. The important point is that the journalists covering the early cases (e.g., Jonesboro, Arkansas; Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; and Springfield, Oregon) established the now-dominant conventions for covering school shootings in news. The result is that journalists now follow a relatively routinized way of conveying the facts and opinions about rampages. While the events themselves are far from the more routine types of violent events which journalists cover, the stories about rampages have nonetheless become more routinized, especially for national-level journalists covering a crime beat.

Aside from the coverage of the events themselves (as described in the previous section), when discourse is examined across multiple school shooting events, it reveals an ongoing discourse about youth social problems. Indeed, the term

Columbine, when evoked in the current context, only obliquely refers to the historical events of 1999, and has instead come to signify a complicated set of sentiments about youth problems in contemporary society (Muschert 2007b). While it seems that anxiety about current cohorts of youth (and the gloomy future they portend) has been a facet of many modern societies, what is new about the present anxiety about potential Columbine-type events is that it has come to typify the issues of youth disaffection more generally.[10]

The discourse of youth violence is not immutable; rather it revolves over time. In *The Paradox of Youth Violence*, J. William Spencer (2011) explores this evolution in the United States from the 1980s to the present. In the 1980s, the problem of youth violence was conceived as an urban problem, which centered mostly around minority youth gangs. In the mid-1990s, this frame evolved into more focused fears about particularly bad cases of urban youth offenders known as super-predators, youth who engaged in violence for its own sake and who had no respect for human life. When a series of school shootings occurred in the late 1990s, the discourse evolved to suggest that the super-predators of primary concern were no longer those in urban areas, but rather those who, heretofore undetected, had been attending high schools across America. In this way, the public concern about youth violence migrated from urban criminal gangs to schools, making the sense of anxiety about youth violence more focused in schools. In particular, the noteworthy school shootings taking place in the last two decades have been crucial for the migration of fear from urban environments to schools in general, and more particularly suburban schools.[11]

Thus, the problem frames surrounding school shootings are strongly situated in related discourses of place (i.e., youth violence as taking place in urban vs. suburban locations), race (i.e., youth violence as associated with minority vs. white youth), and social class (i.e., youth violence as part of the lower class/underclass environment vs. the middle class milieu). The contemporary discourse about school shootings, which is taking place in various nations, is ultimately an

---

[10] The discrepancy between the low probability of school shootings and a comparatively noteworthy fear of such attacks is often discussed (Muschert 2007a). In the North American context, this imbalance has manifested itself in the form of accelerated institution of punitive policies, which at times may be ineffective or inappropriate to the verifiable threats observed in school environments (Muschert et al. 2013; Muschert and Peguero 2010).

[11] The issue of spatial framing discussed at the outset of this subsection is distinct from the problem definition mentioned here. The former (Muschert and Carr 2006) refers to the application of a spatial media frame which focuses the discourse at a certain geographic scope of concern, whether individual, community, regional, national, or international. The latter refers to the problem frame applied, which is a way to understand how the problem may be typically seen. In this case, Spencer (2011) argues that school violence was previously construed as an urban problem, while in the recent decades the problem frame has migrated to the suburbs, regardless of which spatial frame may be applied in news media reportage of specific cases.

extended discussion about youth social problems and how to respond to them.[12] However, the discussion (and social control responses emerging from it) may be misaligned to the problem, in that the original framing of the problem applied to youth offenders living in socially disorganized circumstances which were highly criminogenic. Today's school shooter is hardly a troubled youth struggling to survive on the urban streets, but perhaps more a middle class of "disposable youth" (Giroux 2009) disavowed by the very society in which they were raised.

12.3   The Effects of Mediatization of School Shootings: Framing, Solutions, and the Columbine Effect

While the discursive studies described in the previous section are of inherent interest to interpretive scholars, such approaches might leave more positivistic or policy-minded readers wanting more. Indeed, there is a need to understand the pervasive mediatization of these events, and the role this process plays in determining both ideological and practical responses where communities face the unlikely but real possibility of such attacks. As mentioned earlier, the discrepancy between the empirically verified causes of school shooting incidents and the more commonly held narrow set of causes may lead to confusion, and can therefore skew the suitability of prevention, intervention, and responses. In addition, the emotionality evoked by collective trauma of school attacks can further cloud the issue. Therefore, it is important to explore some concrete effects of mediatization in this case (Muschert 2007a, 2010).

The primary effect of mediatization of school shootings involves the relationship between the framing of the problem and the apparent solutions which emerge, which are often skewed toward the punitive.[13] It is axiomatic in social constructionist sociology that the conception of the problem itself implies solutions, as the framing of the problem specifies not only where the problem lies, but by natural extension also where its solutions must lie. For example, a statement that school shootings represent a failure of society to meet the mental health needs of youth, would imply by extension the need to enhance mental health services for youth. Thus, both the problem domains evoked and the descriptions of problems are rhetorically tied with potential solutions to the problems of school shootings. Unfortunately, the discussion of school shootings tends to identify a narrow set of problems, and in so doing ultimately limits

---

[12] As mentioned earlier, the emergence of cross-national findings related to discourse about school shootings is a relatively untapped area. Most studies have focused on set of shootings within individual countries, notably the U.S. cases (Muschert 2007b, 2009), Canadian cases (Eglin and Hester 2003; Howells 2012), German cases (Müller et al. 2012), and Finnish cases (e.g., Sumiala and Tikka 2011). It is only recently that scholars have begun social scientifically to investigate some international distinctions, although this area of the field is rich for breaking new ground. Much of this international work has involved researchers in Finland and the United States (e.g., see Sumiala and Tikka 2011; Kiilakoski and Oksanen 2011).

[13] Especially in the North American contexts.

the range of solutions which may appear available and appropriate. The heavily mediatized discourse about school shootings thus has very real effects in that it defines the general understanding of the problem itself, and therefore serves to strongly limit the variety measures available for prevention, intervention, and posttragedy response. In the case of school shootings, this dynamic is particularly acute, as little or no knowledge is available about such events, except what is available in mediated sources (Muschert and Peguero 2010; Muschert and Sumiala 2012).

This limiting factor emerging from the mediatized aspect of school shootings operates on a variety of levels. For example, the suppression of potentially valuable aspects of the shooter's intended messages expressing dissatisfaction with the social hierarchy in their schools may focus attention away from community- and school-level factors which might be important in such cases (Muschert and Ragnedda 2010).[14] This potentially exposes schools and those who attend them to risks that could otherwise be mitigated given a broader discourse on sociological aspects within communities and school environments. On a more macro level, Birkland and Lawrence (2009) note that Columbine prompted more discourse than any other school violence episode before it, yet its influence on public policy was comparatively limited. The main effect of the coverage, they argue, was the subsequent increased pace at which existing policies of security and control (primarily punitive in nature) were implemented in schools. This tendency has been described elsewhere as the "Columbine Effect," which describes the tendency for rare but horrible events to drive punitive antiviolence policies in schools (Muschert and Peguero 2010; Muschert et al. 2013).

In a contemporary culture that values emotion and spectacle over reasoned responses, extreme events such as school rampages exert perhaps greater leverage than they should on public conceptions of social problems, but also less influence on policy responses. Thus, these extreme cases seem to drive antiviolence policy to soften the blow of the most severe of cases, while ignoring more common threats, and damaging social capital could act as a protective factor, including quality student–teacher relationships, productive school climate, and primary pedagogical goals in schools.

In *Homeroom Security*, Kupchik (2010) examines trends in school discipline in the United States and the frequently unintended consequences of school security practices. In the name of security, today's youth are increasingly exposed to punitive disciplinary practices, as police, surveillance, and zero-tolerance policies have become more commonplace in schools. Ironically, this has taken place in a wider context of declining rates of violence in schools. In a further ironic turn, punitive security practices seem also to undermine students' recognition of the school's authority, which in a large part relies on their tacit assent that disciplinary regimes are reasonable and appropriate. In school, young people learn about civic participation and develop patterns for lifelong behaviors within their communities, and to the extent that they are disengaged from the governance of their school environment, they are also likely to remain disconnected from civic institutions when they become adults.

---

[14] Note that the community- and school-level factors mentioned here refer to the levels of causes which may contribute to school shootings (see Muschert 2007a; Henry 2000, for discussion), which are distinct from the spatial frames or problem frames which might appear in the discourse (discussed earlier).

The dominance of punitive methods of security may lead to numerous problems, and the application of security measures in schools may undermine the very institutions they intend to secure (Muschert and Peguero 2010). School security practices (particularly in the United States) are inappropriately geared toward prevention of the most horrible eventualities, like school shootings, despite the fact that such attacks are exceedingly rare. The problem framing of school shootings (as discussed in the previous section), has led to the general conception that youth problems are centered in schools, and therefore schools have become the focus of efforts to mitigate youth problems. By focusing security efforts in schools, and via the expansion of a punitive regime of punishment, the underlying sources of youth misbehavior are too easily ignored. Students are increasingly exposed to punitive control practices, such as police and electronic surveillance, and the effect of attending school in airport-like security zones may be that youth are increasingly accustomed to the presence of control measures in their daily lives.[15] An unintended consequence may be the maturation of generations of youth who fail to see the legitimacy of disciplinary procedures within traditional institutions such as schools, but who are compliant to the directives of state security.

12.4   Conclusion

Though perhaps far removed from the concrete discussion of media discourse and framing in earlier sections, the social constructionist sociology of school shootings in media society helps to clarify issues of violence and youth (as well as their convergence) as socially constructed and deriving from the social discourse about these topics, much of it heavily mass mediated. The chapter explored school shootings as ideal cases of mediatization, and then went on to discuss concrete strains of social science knowledge related to the field, including content studies of framing of school shootings, and their possible effects on problem conception and policy responses.

Examining the underlying interplay between school shootings and the contemporary media logic, this chapter has explored not only the content but also the deeper meanings and implications of our heavily mediatized cases. Just as the selection of certain problem domains enables some discourses while suppressing others, the varieties of discourse which appear possible also limit the variety of solutions which seem possible. It is likely on some levels that contemporary youth implicitly understand their tenuous position as they navigate within the contemporary school with its characteristic neoliberal regime of punitive control.

---

[15] One can assume that the security industry benefits financially from the problem framing we observe in the discourse about school violence. Although beyond the scope of this chapter, a rich area for future investigation involves clarifying the relationship between media frames and financial interests. In short, the question is whether media reportage of extreme cases makes for good promotion of security goods and services.

Among the significant effects of the mediatized quality of school shootings, there are some that stand out. For example, we have observed the development and transmission across national and cultural borders or the cultural image of the school shooter, whether conceptualized as a cultural script for performance (Kiilakoski and Oksanen 2011; Muschert and Ragnedda 2010), as violent spectacle (Frymer 2009), or as aggressive masculine trope (Tonso 2009). As Larkin (2009) argues, it is clear that school shootings and the media frenzy they often evoke have an effect in the world, as the image of the school shooter circulates broadly and across cultural boundaries.

The mediatized quality of school rampages means that the media logic is intimately bound up with the recognition of the problem, its discussion, and the types of policies which are instituted to deal with the challenges presented. As suggested by their leveraging of media images, many school shooters have understood that their use of shocking violence will capture a public stage. Although it is unlikely that the messages the school shooters wish to convey fall upon sympathetic ears (see Muschert and Ragnedda 2010, for a discussion), the actions of school shooters have contributed to heavily mediatized rituals of public mourning. Although the events themselves are extremely uncommon, the images of the shooters, victims, and mourners are widely accessible and are cultural resources available to those living in an age of media saturation and serial crisis.

Rampage school shootings are mediatized events, and media processes are involved in the causes and responses. In the end, the discussion of mediatization and school shootings also suggests something of the relationship between media logic and social problems more broadly. Taken together, the various scholarly studies of media and school shootings serve not just as resources to understand the concrete subject of how media operates in relation to school shootings, but more generally contribute to a broader understanding of how media affects how social problems are understood.

References

Altheide, D. L. (2002). *Creating fear: News and the construction of crisis*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Bauman, Z. (2006). *Liquid fear*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U. (1997). *The reinvention of politics: Rethinking modernity in the global social order*. Cambridge: Polity.

Birkland, T. A., & Lawrence, R. G. (2009). Media framing and policy change after Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1405–1425.

Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2009). *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture*. Cambridge: Polity.

Burns, R., & Crawford, C. (1999). School shootings, the media, and public fear: Ingredients for moral panic. *Crime, Law, and Social Change, 32*(2), 147–168.

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chyi, H. I., & McCombs, M. (2004). Media salience and the process of framing: Coverage of the Columbine school shootings. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 81*(1), 22–35.

Cottle, S. (2009). *Global crisis reporting. Journalism in the global age*. New York: Peter Lang.

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media Society, 10*, 373–391.

Eglin, P., & Hester, S. (2003). *The Montreal massacre: A story of membership categorization analysis*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Fox, C., & Harding, D. J. (2005). School shootings as organizational deviance. *Sociology of Education, 78*(1), 69–97.

Frymer, B. (2009). The media spectacle of Columbine: Alienated youth as an object of fear. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1387–1404.

Furedi, F. (2006). *Culture of fear revisited: Risk-taking and the morality of low expectation* (4th ed.). London: Continuum.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giroux, H. (2009). *Youth in a suspect society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Haider-Markel, D. P., & Joslyn, M. R. (2001). Gun policy, opinion, tragedy, and blame attribution: The conditional influence of issue frames. *Journal of Politics, 63*(2), 520–543.

Harrington, C. L., Reece, H., & Muschert, G. W. (2011). Setting, speaking, and framing in the news discourse of elected executions: A play in three acts. *Fast Capitalism, 8*(2). Retrieved November 7, 2012 from http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/8_2/Harrington8_2.html.

Henry, S. (2000). What is school violence? An integrated definition. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 567*, 16–29.

Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordicom Review, 29*(2), 105–134.

Howells, S. (2012). Making headlines: A quarter century of the media's characterization of Canadian school shootings. In G. W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011). Soundtrack of the school shootings: Cultural script, music and male rage. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 19*(3), 247–269.

Klein, J. (2005). Teaching her a lesson: Media misses boy's rage relating to girls in school shootings. *Crime, Media, Culture, 1*(1), 90–97.

Klein, J. (2006). Cultural capital and high school bullies. *Men and Masculinities, 9*(1), 53–75.

Kupchik, A. (2010). *Homeroom security: School discipline in an age of fear*. New York: New York University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Lawrence, R. G. (2001). Defining events: Problem definition in the media arena. In R. P. Hart & B. H. Sparrow (Eds.), *Politics, discourse, and American society: New agendas* (pp. 91–110). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lawrence, R. G., & Birkland, T. A. (2004). Guns, Hollywood, and school safety: Case studies of school shootings. *Social Science Quarterly, 85*(5), 1193–1207.

Lindgren, S. (2011). YouTube gunmen? Mapping participatory media discourse on school shooting videos. *Media, Culture & Society, 33*(1), 123–136.

Müller, M. G., Seizov, O., & Wiencek, F. (2012). Amok visuals: Analyzing visual media coverage of amok school shootings—a novel iconographic approach. In G. W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Muschert, G. W. (2007a). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.

Muschert, G. W. (2007b). The Columbine victims and the myth of the juvenile superpredator. *Youth Violence & Juvenile Justice, 5*(4), 351–366.

Muschert, G. W. (2009). Frame-changing in the media coverage of a school shooting: The rise of Columbine as a national concern. *The Social Science Journal, 46*(1), 164–170.

Muschert, G. W. (2010). School shootings. In M. Herzog-Evans (Ed.), *Transnational criminology manual* (Vol. 2, pp. 73–89). Nijmegen, Netherlands: Wolf Legal.

Muschert, G. W., & Carr, D. (2006). Media salience and frame changing across events: Coverage of nine school shootings, 1997–2001. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 83*(4), 747–766.

Muschert, G. W., Henry, S., Bracy, N., & Peguero, A. A. (Eds). (in press 2013). *The Columbine effect*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Muschert, G. W., & Peguero, A. A. (2010). The Columbine effect and school anti-violence policy. *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, 17*, 117–148.

Muschert, G. W., & Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and control of violence: Communication in school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 345–361). New York: Springer.

Muschert, G. W., & Sumiala, J. (Eds.). (2012). *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Scharrer, E., Wiedman, L. M., & Bissel, K. L. (2003). Pointing the finger of blame: News media coverage of popular-culture culpability. *Journalism & Communication Monographs, 5*(2), 49–98.

Schildkraut, J. (2012). The remote is controlled by the monster: Issues of mediatized violence and school shootings. In G. W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Shepard, A. C. (1999). Covering the big one. *American Journalism Review, 21*(6), 22–29.

Shepard, A. C. (2003). Columbine school shooting: Live television coverage. In T. Rosenthal & A. S. Mitchell (Eds.), *Thinking clearly: Cases in journalistic decision-making* (pp. 57–81). New York: Columbia University Press.

Simpson, R., & Coté, R. (2006). *Covering violence: A guide to ethical reporting about victims and trauma*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Spencer, J. W. (2005). It's not as simple as it seems: Ambiguous culpability and ambivalent affect in media representations of violent youth. *Symbolic Interaction, 28*(1), 47–65.

Spencer, J. W. (2011). *The paradox of youth violence*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Spencer, J. W., & Muschert, G. W. (2009). The contested meaning of the crosses at Columbine. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1371–1386.

Sullivan, M. L., & Guerette, R. T. (2003). The copycat factor: Mental illness, guns, and the shooting incident at Heritage High School, Rockdale County, Georgia. In M. H. Moore, C. V. Petrie, A. A. Braga, & B. L. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Deadly lessons: Understanding* (pp. 25–69). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Sumiala, J., & Tikka, M. (2010). "Web First" to death: The media logic of the school shootings in the era of uncertainty. *Nordicom Review, 31*(2), 17–29.

Sumiala, J., & Tikka, M. (2011). Reality on circulation: School shootings, ritualised communication, and the dark side of the sacred. *ESSACHESS: Journal for Communication Studies, 4*(8), 145–159.

Tankard, J. W., Jr. (2001). The empirical approach to the study of media framing. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy Jr., & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 95–106). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tonso, K. L. (2009). Violent masculinities as tropes for school shooters: The Montréal massacre, the Columbine attack, and rethinking schools. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1266–1285.

Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity.

Webber, J. A. (2003). *Failure to hold: The politics of school violence*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Chapter 13
The Role of Media Content in the Genesis of School Shootings: The Contemporary Discussion

Peter Sitzer

In the broad spectrum of violent behavior at school, school shootings mark an extreme in two respects: they are characterized by exceptional brutality, and they are comparatively rare occurrences. As Böckler, Seeger, Sitzer, and Heitmeyer report in the introduction to this volume, the total number of school shootings registered worldwide up to the end of 2011 was just 120, with an average of 5.8 injuries and 2.5 deaths per incident.[1] Whereas researchers understand school shootings as the outcome of an interaction involving many factors that stand in complex relationships to one another and may vary from case to case, public discussion about the "causes" of school shootings tends to heavily emphasize particular factors (see Muschert in this volume). Media consumption, especially of violent content, is one factor that is believed by many to play a special role.

This literature review provides an overview of scholarly debate on the role of media content in the genesis of school shootings. It begins by showing that the idea that media depictions of violence have a general violence-promoting effect is scientifically contested. Published research is inconclusive on the question whether school shooters represent a risk group with a special susceptibility to negative effects of violent media content, but empirical findings supply clear indications that reporting of school shootings, especially in the mass media and the internet, can disseminate scripts potentially connected with copycat acts. The concept of cultural scripts of hegemonic masculinity explains why school shootings are committed predomi-

---

[1] Other scholars arrive at diverging totals, depending on the investigated period and the definition used, but these remain within the same order of magnitude. For example, Robertz and Wickenhäuser (2010, p. 13f.) tally 124 school shootings up to January 1, 2010.

P. Sitzer (✉)
Faculty of Educational Science/Institute for Interdisciplinary
Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: peter.sitzer@uni-bielefeld.de

nantly by young males and accounts for the importance of a prior interest in violent media content and school shootings. Given the public communicative dimension of these acts and the enormous media attention they attract, there is a case for critical consideration of the way they are treated in the media.

13.1   How Dangerous Is Violent Media Content?

Violent media content has always stood under suspicion of having a harmful influence on its recipients (Kunczik & Zipfel, 2006, p. 27f.). But media violence research experienced an enormous upturn in the 1960s, when registered violent crime in the United States rose dramatically at the same time as the mass dissemination of television (Bushman & Anderson, 2001, p. 478). By the time violent crime rates decreased in the mid-1990s, the discipline was well established and turned its attention to the relatively new research subjects of video games and the internet. Today there are several hundred published studies on the influence of violent media content on aggressive and violent behavior.[2]

13.1.1   Methods of Media Violence Research

Three research designs dominate empirical media violence research: experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal (Huesmann, 2007, p. 8f.). In experimental studies some participants are exposed to violent media content (television, movies, cartoons, television news, music videos, video games) and some are not. Afterwards both groups participate in an activity designed to elicit information about their aggression. For example, the participants from the experimental and control groups might be observed in order to count the number of aggressive acts that occur while they play (Josephson, 1987), or they might be asked to complete ambiguous stories (Bushman & Anderson, 2002), or given the opportunity to subject others to non-painful bursts of white noise (Anderson & Dill, 2000). The advantage of experimental designs is that they allow the direction of causality to be investigated, but at the price of questionable real-world generalizability.

Cross-sectional designs provide a snapshot of the distribution of particular characteristics in a given population. Typically, aggressiveness and use of violent media are surveyed together in the same questionnaire (Baier, Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Rabold, 2006). While this approach is attractive for its ease of creating representative samples, the findings tell us nothing about the direction of causality. Thus, in the

---

[2] Some authors assert that more than one thousand studies have been published (including American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2002; Muscari, 2002). According to Savage and Yancey (2008), these estimates are grossly overstated. However, the 431 studies Bushman and Huesmann (2006) found for their meta-analysis are still a respectable number.

case at hand it remains a mystery whether survey participants are aggressive because of their predilection for violent media content or whether, conversely, they are drawn to violent media content because of their aggressiveness.

Unlike cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies repeat the same empirical study at several points in time and connect the results of individual waves (Möller & Krahé, 2009). Longitudinal studies can therefore provide insights into individual transformation processes and supply information on the direction of causality. However, longitudinal studies are comparatively rare because of their cost and complexity, and where they are conducted the intervals between waves are often relatively short.

Most studies investigate the effects of passive audiovisual media such as television, movies, and music, but recently attention has also turned to the effects of interactive media where the recipient plays a video game. As a rule experimental studies report larger effect sizes than cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006; Paik & Comstock, 1994). However, Bushman and Anderson (2001) find evidence that average effect sizes reported in nonexperimental studies have increased continuously since 1975.

The findings of individual studies vary, with some reporting an aggression-promoting effect (Irwin & Gross, 1995; Josephson, 1987), while others do not (Ferguson, San Miguel, Garza, & Jerabeck, 2012; Unsworth, Devilly, & Ward, 2007), and still others actually finding an aggression-reducing effect (Colwell & Kato, 2003; Grimm, 1999, 2002). In view of the broad spectrum of partly contradictory individual results, it is not easy to say whether violent media content has a harmful effect on recipients. Here, meta-analyses can be useful.

13.1.2   Meta-analyses

Meta-analyses use statistical tools to consolidate the empirical results of primary research on a particular question in a given research field, and thus allow effect sizes to be estimated on the basis of broader data than is the case with individual studies, and with less susceptibility to outliers. Compared to traditional narrative reviews, they have the advantage that the integration of research findings on a particular problem occurs not merely at the linguistic level but at the level of statistical indicators (Bortz & Döring, 2006, p. 672).

Most meta-analyses report small to medium effect sizes for the influence of media violence on aggressive behavior (Anderson, 2004; Anderson et al., 2010; Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006; Hearold, 1986; Hogben, 1998; Huston et al., 1992; National Institute of Mental Health, 1982; Paik & Comstock, 1994; Sherry, 2001; Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972; Wood, Wong, & Chachere, 1991).

The largest meta-analysis to date on the influence of violent media exposure was published by Bushman and Huesmann in 2006. On the basis of 431 studies with a total of 68,463 participants, they calculated mean effect sizes for the influence of violent media exposure on the dependent variables aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts,

angry feelings, physiological arousal, and helping behavior. While the mean effect sizes for angry feelings ($r=0.27$) and physiological arousal ($r=0.26$) were moderate, the effect sizes for helpful behavior ($r=-0.08$) were small. The mean effect sizes for aggressive thoughts and aggressive behavior lay in-between, with $r=0.18$ and $r=0.19$, respectively; the mean effect size of violent media exposure on aggressive behavior calculated by Bushman and Huesmann thus lies in the mid-range of older meta-analyses ($r=0.11$, Hogben, 1998 to $r=0.31$, Paik & Comstock, 1994).

Most meta-analyses bring together all studies investigating the effect of television violence or a media mix. But more recently, meta-analysis has also been conducted on the narrower question of the effect of violent video games (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson et al. 2010; Ferguson, 2007; Sherry, 2001). In their recently published meta-analysis using data from 140 samples with 68,313 participants, Anderson et al. (2010) calculate a mean effect size of $r=0.19$ for the effect of exposure to violent video games on aggressive behavior.

The available meta-analyses indicate that exposure to violent media has a small but measurable effect of aggressive behavior. Although one could object that the identified effect sizes explain no more than 1–10% of individual variation in aggressive behavior, Bushman and Huesmann (2001) point out that they are in the same order of magnitude as other public health risks. As Huesmann puts it (2007, p. 11f.): "The only effect slightly larger than the effect of media violence on aggression is that of cigarette smoking on lung cancer."

13.1.3 Criticism of Media Violence Research

In the end, however, meta-analyses can only be as good as the studies upon which they are based. In a meta-analysis of 25 studies (comprising 27 independent observations) published between 1998 and 2008, Ferguson and Kilburn (2009) investigate the influence on effect size of various quality criteria used in empirical studies. Twelve were cross-sectional studies, ten were laboratory experiments, and five were longitudinal studies. Sixteen had been conducted with children and eleven with adults; fifteen investigated the influence of video games, seven television, and five movies or a media mix. Altogether the meta-analysis comprised 12,436 participants.

On this basis, Ferguson and Kilburn (2009) were able to demonstrate that experimental studies reported larger effects than cross-sectional or longitudinal studies, and that larger effects were found with children than with adults. In comparison to the meta-analyses by Bushman and Huesmann (2006) and Anderson et al. (2010), both the corrected and uncorrected effect sizes are rather small, with $r_+=0.08$ and $r_u=0.14$. Beyond that Ferguson and Kilburn's meta-analysis is notable because it demonstrates that those studies that report the largest effects of media violence on aggression are the ones that will not stand up to methodological scrutiny.[3]

---

[3] Ferguson (2007) identifies the same problem in the violent games literature.

In terms of the reliability of the instruments used to measure the dependent variable, Ferguson and Kilburn (2009) found that standardized instruments for measuring aggressive behavior were used in only 18 of the 27 studies. In other words, in nine studies the share of measurement error in variance was unknown. Separate calculation of effect sizes for the two groups revealed that studies with reliable aggression measures had a corrected effect size of $r_+ = 0.08$ while studies with unreliable instruments arrived at an effect size of $r_+ = 0.24$.

As well as reliability, Ferguson and Kilburn (2009) also assessed the validity of the measurement instruments. Only 11 studies used well-validated instruments that directly recorded physical or verbal aggression or data on violent crime, or clinical instruments whose validity had been empirically verified. The instruments used in the other studies were either unvalidated or known to have poor validity. Comparison of effect sizes revealed that studies using unvalidated aggression measures or those with poor validity reported larger effect sizes ($r_+ = 0.09$) than studies using validated aggression measures ($r_+ = 0.05$).

Another point of criticism relates to the use of proxy measures of aggression, which Ferguson and Kilburn also investigated (2009). Direct aggression against others was the dependent variable in 14 studies, violent crime in three, and indirect measures were used in 10. Here, yet again, it was found that studies using proxy variables rather than direct measures for aggressive behavior or violent crime reported much larger effect sizes ($r_+ = 0.25$) than studies that measured aggressive behavior directly ($r_+ = 0.08$). In fact, the influence of media violence disappears almost completely if violent crime is used in place of aggressive behavior ($r_+ = 0.02$).

But the distinction between aggressive behavior and violent crime is of the utmost importance. Most studies define aggressive behavior as intentional harm to a person or thing. But this definition encompasses many types of behavior, of which only a handful transgresses any law or could by any means be designated as violent crime (Nolting, 2004). So even if generally accepted evidence could be found for the impact of exposure to media violence on aggressive behavior, that would still not prove any effect for extreme acts of violence such as rampage shootings (see also Savage, 2004; Savage & Yancey, 2008).

Moreover, some empirical studies demonstrate that the effect of violent media exposure on aggressive behavior disappears when "third" variables are included. Although Ferguson and Kilburn's meta-analysis (2009) finds little effect for inclusion of "third" variables, in individual studies the effects of media violence on aggressive and violent behavior generally turn out to be small (Hopf, 2004) or disappear altogether (Ferguson et al., 2008; Ferguson, San Miguel, & Hartley, 2009) when other potential risk factors like trait aggression, family violence, or male gender are taken into account.

Although many renowned researchers in the field of media violence studies are convinced that violent media content has a general influence on aggressive behavior, the contradictory findings of individual studies (see above) and meta-analyses give ample grounds for doubt. In particular, a general, direct, and monocausal connection between exposure to violent media content and serious violence is not proven.

13.2 Are School Shooters a High-Risk Group?

In media violence research it has become widely accepted that violent media content does not have the same effect on all individuals, but that certain risk factors give rise to heightened vulnerability to negative effects (Boxer, Huesmann, Bushman, O'Brien, & Moceri, 2008; Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Funk, 2003; Kunczik & Zipfel, 2006; Steiner, 2009). A risk factor is any personal or contextual characteristic that increases the probability of a negative effect (Boxer et al., 2008, p. 418). In particular, individuals who exhibit several risk factors would be assigned to a high-risk group.

Should school shooters, then, be regarded as a high-risk group in the light of the findings of media violence research? To answer that question, we must turn now to studies of perpetrators. Especially in the aftermath of Columbine, attempts were made to identify characteristic features of school shooters on the basis of various data sources (newspaper reports, official investigations, police files, etc.) and events (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004; O'Toole, 1999; Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Unfortunately, our knowledge of the characteristic features of school shooters is still patchy and we can say nothing about the extent to which many of the known risk factors for increased susceptibility for the negative effects of violent media content may apply to them.[4] While further research is necessary, findings at the intersection of the two spheres of research do allow a preliminary cautious assessment of the risk violent media content poses specifically to school shooters.

13.2.1 Personal Risk Factors

It is conspicuous that most school shooters are male. Of the 123 perpetrators since 1925 identified by Böckler, Seeger, Sitzer, and Heitmeyer (in this volume), only four were female. If studies were to demonstrate a greater susceptibility of male recipients for the negative effects of violent media content, school shooters would have to be regarded as risk group under this aspect. However, empirical studies on the significance of gender for the negative effects of violent media content are contradictory. Paik and Comstock's meta-analysis (1994) found that the effect sizes on both genders for television violence were equal in nonexperimental studies, but that experimental studies identified a somewhat larger effect for male subjects. Other meta-analyses find no

---

[4] For example, various meta-analyses demonstrate that media violence has a greater impact on children, especially younger children, than on adolescents or adults (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Paik & Comstock, 1994); Bushman and Huesmann (2006) later refine this finding to show that short-term effects of media violence are greater for adults but the long-term effects greater for children. However, there are no valid findings on the childhood media behavior of school shooters, so it is impossible to tell whether they represent a risk group in this category.

gender-specific effects of violent media content (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson et al., 2010; Bushman & Anderson, 2002; Hogben, 1998). However, published studies broadly agree that boys and men appreciate media violence considerably more than girls and women do (Ferguson et al., 2008; Oliver, 2000), with this gender-specific preference already identifiable in children aged between 3 and 5 years (Kunczik & Zipfel, 2006, p. 270). It follows that one possible reason why many studies fail to find larger effects of violent media content on male subjects could be because of a stronger habituation of male recipients as a consequence of their preference for violent media content. Various studies demonstrate a connection between a preference for violent media content and aggressive or violent behavior (Baier, Pfeiffer, Simonson, & Rabold, 2010; Baier et al., 2006; Hopf, 2004; Mößle, Kleimann, & Rehbein, 2007). To pick out but one finding, Baier et al. (2006, p. 134) find a linear relationship between the frequency of playing first-person shooters and self-reported violence in school students of both sexes.

Another finding of media effects research is that there is a relationship between the duration of media use and violent behavior. Although Messner (1986) finds a violence-preventing effect of high rates of media violence consumption at the level of populations (which he puts down to high-intensity viewers spending a lot of time in the comparatively safe environment of their homes and therefore being less frequent victims of violent crime), the overwhelming majority of studies at the level of individuals find a positive relationship between frequency of media use and violent behavior (Baier et al., 2006, 2010; Hopf, 2004; Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen, & Brook, 2002; Melzer & Rostampour, 1998; Mößle et al., 2007). In a representative school student survey, Baier et al. (2006, p. 131) find evidence that medium-duration computer game use, especially, increases the probability of violent behavior, while the relationship becomes weaker again at a very high use rates. Intensive users possibly spend so much time at the computer that they have fewer opportunities for violent behavior.

Whether school shooters can be designated a risk group on this basis is difficult to assess, because there is to date no viable evidence for the hypothesis that perpetrators exhibit excessive and above-average interest in violent media (Ferguson, 2008). At most, the literature indicates that school shooters devoted a considerable proportion of their time to the intensive consumption of various media (films, books, video games, etc.), focusing most of their attention on topics such as violence, weapons, hate, death, and destruction (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999, p. 8; O'Toole, 1999, p. 20; Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 43f.). Vossekuil et al. (2002, p. 22) report that almost three fifths of perpetrators "demonstrated some interest in violence, through movies, video games, books, and other media" (without defining in detail what is meant by "some interest"). One in four showed an interest in violent movies, one in four in violent books, and one in eight in violent games. More than one third had documented their interest in violence in writing, for example in poems, essays, or journal entries. Verlinden et al. (2000, p. 43) find violent writings or drawings by five out of ten perpetrators. These findings are largely confirmed by Kidd and Meyer (2002), whose study found that seven of eight perpetrators had demonstrated an "intense interest" in violent media, including violent movies, music, video games, or books (here again, without defining what characterizes an "intense interest"). Six of

eight perpetrators had written about killing or death (typically scenes of mass killing) in school essays or personal writings (Kidd & Meyer, 2002). Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, and Gray (2001, p. 721f.) report that 48% of the adolescent mass murderers they investigated had shown an intense prior interest in themes of war and violence. Unfortunately the published studies say nothing about whether the conspicuous interest in media violence shown by school shooters is above the average for nondeviant adolescents, nor whether their interest went back to childhood, which could be classified as an additional risk factor (Bushman & Huesmann, 2006).

One central risk factor for the negative effects of violent media content is trait aggressiveness, a temporally and situationally stable disposition for aggressive behavior (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Bushman & Huesmann, 2001, p. 240; Ferguson et al,. 2008; Giumetti & Markey, 2007). Firstly, individuals with high trait aggressiveness react more strongly than individuals with low trait aggressiveness to violent media content (Bushman, 1995; Josephson, 1987). Secondly, there is evidence for reciprocal influence between exposure to media violence and aggressiveness (Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003; Hopf, Huber, & Weiß, 2008). Thirdly, individuals with high aggressiveness exhibit a preference for violent media content and correspondingly expose themselves to such content more often (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003; Kristen, Oppl, & von Salisch, 2007). Slater, Henry, Swaim, and Anderson (2003) therefore speak of a downward spiral leading to successively greater aggressiveness and greater use of violent media (see also Bushman & Huesmann, 2001, p. 240; Möller, 2011, p. 22f.).

Studies of perpetrators of school shootings provide numerous indications of prior aggressive and violent behavior. Although most school shooters had no known record of serious violent or other crime (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999, p. 8), most studies do conclude that some had already drawn attention for aggressive or violent behavior (although the cited rates of prevalence and information about the seriousness of the incidents both vary). Verlinden et al. (2000, p. 43) conclude that nine of ten perpetrators had shown aggressive behavior (physical, verbal, or both) in advance. Kidd and Meyer report that seven of eight perpetrators had already demonstrated aggressive or violent behavior, "including fighting in school, bringing weapons to school, harming animals, or previous involvement with law enforcement" (2002). According to Vossekuil et al. (2002, p. 22), one third of perpetrators had exercised violence against others before the shooting, one in eight are known to have mistreated or killed animals, and one in four had been arrested. However, the degree of variation in the cited prevalence rates and the seriousness of the acts means it is impossible to reliably judge whether the reported behaviors deviate unusually from the norm for the age group.

13.2.2 Contextual Risk Factors

Alongside personal factors, the relevant literature also identifies contextual factors that can increase the risk of negative effects of media violence. In relation

to the family environment, direct and indirect experiences of violence are especially problematic. Browne and Pennell (1998) demonstrate that male adolescents from violent families have a stronger preference for violent films and are more willing to break the law than their counterparts from nonviolent families. Although this study can tell us nothing about the direction of causality, Kunczik and Zipfel (2006, p. 280) propose that the "double dose" of violence-affirming role models poses a particular danger for children growing up in such a social environment: one dose is supplied by violent content in comics, films, television, and computer games; the second through domestic violence or sexual abuse. Under these conditions, parenting cannot act as a corrective to media-conveyed images to the same degree as when the behavioral repertoire of the parents does not involve violence. However, studies rarely find evidence of domestic violence or sexual abuse in the families of school shooters (Fast, 2008; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 44), so with respect to this potential risk factor there is no reason to assume increased vulnerability for the negative effects of violent media content.

In terms of their broader personal circumstances, too, school shooters are "conspicuously inconspicuous" (Hoffmann, 2007, p. 28, translated). McGee and DeBernardo (1999) report that the perpetrators they investigated generally grew up in outwardly completely inconspicuous middle-class families. Most lived in a joint household with two biological parents or with one biological parent and a step-parent; some grew up with just one biological parent or split time between two biological parents, and very few grew up with foster parents or a legal guardian (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 19). But while the families of school shooters appear outwardly absolutely normal, many studies describe relations within the family as problematic and dysfunctional (Fast, 2008; Kidd & Meyer, 2002; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999, p. 7; Newman et al., 2004; Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 44), with lack of parental supervision (Verlinden et al. 2000, p. 44), lack of intimacy and closeness (O'Toole, 1999, p. 21), and lack of emotional support (Kidd & Meyer, 2002) seeming to characterize the family atmosphere. According to McGee and DeBernardo (1999, p. 7), open and hidden anger and hostility are the predominant emotions in these families.

From the perspective of media violence research, such family socialization conditions represent a risk factor for a preference for violent media content. For example, Vandewater, Lee, and Shim (2005) demonstrate a clear connection between familial conflict and the use of violent media by the affected children. A preference for violent media content is, as described earlier, associated with an increased risk of negative effects. These findings are corroborated by Wallenius, Punamäki, and Rimpelä (2007), who demonstrate that boys who experience poor parent–child communication are especially susceptible to the aggression-promoting effects of video games.

Bushman and Huesmann (2001) conclude, on the basis of a multitude of studies, that a lack of parental media education can increase the risk of the effect of media violence. For example, Robinson, Wilde, Navracruz, Haydel, and Varady (2001, Robinson, 2003) demonstrate in various studies that parental

oversight and control have a great influence on children's media consumption. Trudewind and Steckel (2002) find evidence that positive parent–child bonding in combination with a strong parental interest in their children's game-playing activity is an important protective factor against the negative effects of computer games. Bofinger (2001), too, concludes that good integration in an intact family is associated with a lower preference for fighting and shooting games.

In these respects, too, some school shooters grow up under unfavorable family conditions. McGee and DeBernardo (1999, p. 7) describe their parenting as strict and inconsistent. The relationship between the parents and the children is typically characterized by intense conflicts over power and control in which the children increasingly intimidate their parents and eventually gain the upper hand. According to O'Toole (1999, p. 22) this role reversal is rooted in the parents' fear of the child. Whether the parents' withdrawal from parental responsibility is also reflected in a lack of control over the child's media consumption is not known. But the school shooters who spent a considerable part of their free time consuming problematic media content were plainly not prevented by anybody from doing so.

To summarize, on the one hand, the literature on school shooters contains many findings indicating that school shooters share characteristics that media violence research identifies as risk factors for a heightened susceptibility to the negative effects of violent media content, and at the same time suggests that school shooters largely lack the personal or social resources that could otherwise function as protective factors.

On the other hand, the weight of these findings is reduced by the use in some studies of media reports that may be incomplete or imprecise (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimersonet, 2010). It is also possible that in some cases concurrent findings result from investigation of the same cases (Scheithauer & Bondü, 2011). Finally, it must be noted that statistical verification of the question of increased risk is precluded by the lack of comparative studies that would allow reliable statements about whether the identified characteristics deviate unusually from the average for the corresponding age group.

13.3 School Shootings and the Copycat Effect

According to Muschert and Larkin (2007, p. 6f.), there were about 400–500 reporters, 75–90 outside broadcast vans, and 60 television cameras on location at Columbine High after the shooting there, and nearly seven in ten Americans closely followed the reporting on the events in Littleton (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1999). This made the Columbine shooting by far the most prominent media event in the United States in 1999 and the third most closely watched story of the 1990s. Even if the intensity of national and international media coverage of the Columbine High massacre was rather exceptional (Maguire, Weatherby, & Mathers, 2002; Muschert & Carr, 2006), media interest

in school shootings is still higher than in other types of homicide in schools (Borum et al., 2010; Modzeleski et al., 2008; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010, p. 347). We know from media effects research that reporting of suicides in television news and the press can increase the suicide rate in the population.[5] Although there has been comparatively little research on this phenomenon in relation to school shootings, the relevant literature certainly provides indications of an imitation effect.

One of the few empirical studies was conducted by Kostinsky, Bixler, and Kettl (2001), using data from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. Whereas the Agency typically registered one or two threats of school violence per year before the Columbine shooting (April 20, 1999), there were 354 cases between April 22 and June 9, 1999. About 56% of these came within the first 10 days after the Columbine shooting, with a clear cluster on days eight, nine, and ten. From the day 11 the frequency of reports declined again, and between days 30 and 50 there were only 37 cases altogether.

This phenomenon has also been observed in Germany, albeit on a considerably smaller scale. Using data from the 2002 report of the violence prevention center in Hamburg (Beratungsstelle Gewaltprävention), Robertz (2004, p. 85) shows that during the first 3 months after the shooting incident at the Gutenberg-Gymnasium (high school) in Erfurt, Germany, on April 26, 2002, 15 school shooting threats severe enough to warrant a response were recorded, whereas this occurred only three times during the subsequent 5 months.

While copycat threats following school shootings represent a great burden on the affected schools and the police, not every threat carries an intention of implementation (Robertz, 2007, p. 72). Often copycats exploit public sensitivity after a school shooting to place themselves at the center of public attention with minimal effort. Furthermore, media reporting can also create a state of oversensitivity where statements made by students that would have otherwise been ignored are interpreted as threats. But regardless of the motives of copycats and the seriousness of their threats, it is clear that media reporting about a school shooting incident can trigger further threats.

Additionally, an empirical study by Schmidtke, Schaller, Stack, Lester, and Müller (2005) based on newspaper reports on 132 different rampage events between early 1993 and mid-2000 demonstrates that media reporting about rampage incidents can trigger actual rampages rather than mere threats. The mean period between incidents was 20.6 days, with a variability between 0 and 102 days. Statistical anal-

---

[5] In suicide research, the phenomenon of imitation following media reports of suicides is known as the "Werther effect" after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which is said to have triggered numerous imitation suicides and was for that reason banned for a time in certain European countries (Gould, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003, p. 1270). As early as the 1970s and 1980s, Phillips demonstrated that newspaper and television reports about suicides were followed by an increase in suicide rates (Bollen & Phillips, 1981, 1982; Phillips, 1974, 1979; Phillips & Carstensen, 1986, 1988). Numerous subsequent studies also demonstrate this effect outside the United States (Jonas, 1992; Sonneck, Etzersdorfer, & Nagel-Kuess, 1994; Stack, 1996). Various studies also report an imitation effect of fictional suicides (Gould, Shaffer, & Kleinman, 1988; Hawton et al., 1999; Schmidtke & Hafner, 1988). This is variously described as a suggestion, contagion, or disinhibition effect.

ysis of the actual distribution confirms the hypothesis that rampage incidents can trigger repetitions, with 44% of all events occurring within 10 days after an earlier event. While there is unfortunately an absence of empirical studies examining this phenomenon specifically in relation to school shootings, Robertz (2004, p. 77f.) finds some evidence suggesting that the same tendency holds true.

Alongside this temporal clustering, the literature describes performative similarities between school shootings and real and fictional models. For example, Coleman (2004, p. 168f.) and Newman et al. (2004, p. 252) describe a shooting at Frontier Middle School in Moses Lake, United States, where the 14-year-old Barry Loukaitis shot dead his algebra teacher and two students and injured another. Then he turned to the class and reportedly quoted the fictional figure Charlie Decker from Stephen King's novel *Rage* (published under the pseudonym Peter Bachman) with the words: "This sure beats algebra, doesn't it?" Barry Loukaitis later said that he had drawn inspiration from Stephen King's book, in which Charlie Decker shoots his algebra teacher, Mrs. Underwood, and another teacher and takes the class hostage after the principal expelled him from school for various transgressions.

Towards the end of the 1990s, real-life models began to gain importance for school shootings. This development is attributed on the one hand to increasing media interest in the phenomenon, which culminated in the reporting on the 1999 incident at Columbine High (Muschert & Carr, 2006), and on the other hand to the growth in internet use and access, which meant that media reports about school shootings remained accessible to a steadily growing number of users even after media interest had ebbed away.[6] Beyond that, police reports, other official reports, and academic studies are usually published some time after the incident, and often contain detailed information about preparations and execution. In this respect, too, Columbine is a special case: although not everything that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold prepared in connection with their attack has been made available to the public, tens of thousands of pages of documents have been published.

Not least because of this exceptional media presence, Columbine became a model for school shooters both within the United States and elsewhere (Böckler, 2012; Larkin, 2010, p. 335f.; Robertz, 2004, p. 82f.). After analyzing 23 post-Columbine shootings, Larkin (2009a, p. 1315) concludes that 11 perpetrators copied certain aspects. He finds the most references in Jeffrey Weise's shooting at Red Lake Senior High School (p. 1314):

> First, under the names Todesengel and NativeNazi, he posted rants and expressed admiration of Adolf Hitler on neo-Nazi Internet sites (Benson, 2005). Hitler was lionized by Eric Harris on his Trench Coat Mafia Web site. Second, he wore a duster of similar style to those worn by Klebold and Harris (Wilgoren, 2005). Third, prior to shooting a fellow student, Weise asked him if he believed in God. This last act was a reference to one of the myths that emerged from the Columbine shootings that Cassie Bernall was asked whether she believed in God, to which she responded "yes" before she was shot. Although there was no evidence that this confrontation actually occurred, it became an article of faith within the evangelical

---

[6] Muschert's media analysis (2007) shows that just two weeks after the Columbine shooting the media had already lost interest.

community and was reported as fact nationwide for several months before it was debunked (Cullen, 1999; Muschert, 2007; Watson, 2002).

Bastian Bosse strongly identified with and virtually worshipped Eric Harris in particular, as his journal demonstrates:

> Probably the most sensible guy a shitty high school can produce . . . tsk . . . ERIC HARRIS IS GOD! There's no doubt about that. It's shocking how similar Eric was to me. Sometimes it seems to me as if I'm reliving his life, as if it's all being repeated again (journal entry of September 26, 2006, translated).

His preparations were so strongly oriented on the acts of his idol that he feared his own actions might be regarded simply as copycat (Bannenberg, 2010, p. 58; Böckler & Seeger, 2010, p. 124), and felt compelled to underline the autonomy of his actions in the journal he published shortly before the shooting:

> Before any of you go claiming that I'm just copying Harris or whoever you should think about it for a moment. Is a little village priest just a "copycat" of the Pope? No! Of course not! He believes in the same thing as the Pope, but he's not copying him. He sees things the same way. He is, like the shite Pope, part of a greater whole (journal entry of October 18, 2006, translated).

According to Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002, p. 189) and Newman et al. (2004, p. 245f.), media-communicated cultural scripts can not only supply the design for a school shooting, but also suggest to potential perpetrators that a rampage offers a potential solution to their problems. Especially when identification with a school shooter occurs, they all argue, a student may wake up one day with the conviction that taking revenge on their tormentors in the same way as their idol is a perfectly logical thing to do. The increase in school shootings since the 1970s (Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2010, p. 263f.) and the changes in the scripts of school shootings can both be interpreted as indicators of the media's modeling and dissemination of cultural scripts:

> In the United States, rampage shootings began to escalate with six school rampage shootings in the 1980s, rising to 19 incidents in the next decade. In the 1980s, teachers and administrators with whom attackers had conflicts were targeted along with the shooters' peers (Larkin, 2009a). However, in the 1990s, especially in the latter part of the decade, fellow students become the prime targets of school rampage shooters. The majority of rampage shooters sought revenge, primarily against elite students—referred to as "jocks," "preps," or "soshes" (high status students who may not have been athletes)—for bullying, harassment, and humiliation (Larkin, 2010, p. 333).

In their empirical study of adolescents' appropriations of perpetrator self-presentations, Böckler and Seeger (2010) show that school students with a disposition for violent stress reactions who find themselves in a similar personal situation to the perpetrators of school shootings may come to identify with the shooters. The basis of this identification is primarily the school shooters' media self-presentations, which grant detailed insights into their thoughts and feelings and allow their decision leading up to the attack to be followed step by step. To the extent that these self-testimonies show a potential way out of a situation that they experi-

ence as unbearable, they represent for certain students an attractive model for dealing with their own problems. Some of the adolescents interviewed by Böckler and Seeger had already adopted their idols' patterns of thought and perception and were already presenting themselves in a similar manner—for example, posing with gun in hand—on the internet.

13.4 Media Communication of Cultural Scripts of Hegemonic Masculinity

Some scholars connect the overwhelming predominance of male perpetrators with the existence of cultural scripts of hegemonic masculinity. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, p. 77). However, hegemonic masculinity is not constructed exclusively through the relations between the two gender groups, but also in relation to subordinate forms of masculinity within the dominant gender group. This is manifested as exclusion (for example of gay men) or subordination (typical of school classes, for example between jocks and goths, seniors and freshmen, etc.).

The features that characterize hegemonic masculinity vary historically and geographically. According to Larkin, American society primarily defines it in terms of potential for violence:

> the idealized male is mesomorphic, athletic, compulsively heterosexual, clean-shaven, short-haired, and not given to public displays of emotion, with the exception of anger. The idealized male is a leader who uses command- and control-methods. Although outlets for male bonding are provided through sports and sexual escapades, male relationships are expected to steer away from homosexual behavior, which is viewed as gender treason. American hegemonic masculinity can best be defined by its opposite—homosexuality (2010, p. 318).

With certain provisos, this ideal of masculinity could also apply in other countries where school shootings have occurred.

Hegemonic masculinity is (re)produced in social interactions between men and women and among men, and is entrenched practice in institutions (Connell, 1993, p. 602). Newman et al. (2004, p. 144, in this volume) and Larkin (2010, p. 318) emphasize that the media play an important role in the (re)construction and dissemination of cultural scripts of hegemonic masculinity. Even if male and female roles today are less strictly divided by gender stereotypes than in earlier film and television productions, the media still have the power to define social norms and conventions and to disseminate a "common-sense" understanding of masculinity and femininity (Feasey, 2008). And the sports programs and action films preferred by young males remain dominated by an ideal of masculinity characterized by heterosexuality, strength, fighting spirit, success, and the willingness and ability to use violence.

In the context of school, cultural scripts of hegemonic masculinity lead to the devaluation of those who depart from the ideal of masculinity. Those who lack the characteristics associated with masculinity are bullied, harassed, and subjected to public humiliation by those who possess them to a greater degree (Larkin, 2009a; Leary et al., 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 21). Kimmel and Mahler report that: "All or most of the shooters had tales of being harassed—specifically, gay-baited—for inadequate gender performance; their tales are the tales of boys who did not measure up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity" (2003, p. 1440). At the same time, those who correspond less to the male ideal themselves perceive the discrepancy between the hegemonic ideal of masculinity and their own actual, supposed, or attributed inability to live up to it (Kalish and Kimmel, 2010).

According to Newman et al. (2004, p. 150), powerlessness in the face of physical and verbal attack and failure to satisfy the normative concept of masculinity can cause feelings of inferiority and hopelessness that can ultimately manifest themselves in depression and suicidal thoughts. Ironically, the same unachievable ideal of masculinity that causes these feelings of worthlessness also prevents potential school shooters from following through on their own suicidal intentions, for suicide is regarded as weak and incompatible with the cultural script of hegemonic masculinity, which demands that a man face up to the challenges of life (Newman et al., p. 150). In this light, various authors interpret the publicly staged killing of students and teachers as an attempt to experience power and domination and thus to achieve masculinity (Katz & Jhally, 1999; Larkin, 2007, 2010; Neroni, 2000; Newman et al., 2004).

To the extent that the cultural norm is associated with violence, the media-communicated ideal of masculinity may even contribute to the legitimation of massive use of violence, because the school shooter is acting in conformity with this supposed norm (Katz & Jhally, 1999; Newman et al., 2004). Kimmel and Mahler therefore conclude that rampage shooters "are not psychopathological deviants but rather overconformists to a particular normative construction of masculinity, a construction that defines violence as a legitimate response to a perceived humiliation" (2003, p. 1440).

13.5 Media Inspiration for Phantasy

As outlined earlier, there is ample evidence that school shooters exhibit a foible for topics like violence, weapons, hate, death, and destruction, and that these interests are reflected both in their media use and in their own media productions (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999, p. 8; O'Toole, 1999, p. 20; Verlinden et al., 2000, p. 43f.). It is also known that the deed itself is preceded by intense thought processes which in some cases span years (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 23f.). As internet access has grown, it has become common to research previous school shootings during the planning phase (Larkin, 2009a). It is widely documented that school shooters refer to earlier school shooters in self-presentations, journals, and pamphlets, and in some cases even identify with them (Böckler and Seeger, 2010;

Coleman, 2004; Larkin, 2009a; Newman et al., 2004; Robertz, 2004). This raises the question of the importance of intense thought processes about violence-related topics and past school shootings for the genesis of school shootings.

Robertz (2004, in this volume) interprets intense preattack interest in violent media content and past school shootings as flight from a reality of helplessness in the face of repeated insults and persistent deficiencies. In their phantasy, Robertz argues, the later perpetrators can place themselves in the role of the omnipotent avenger and, at least for the duration of the phantasy, compensate the control deficit experienced in the real world.

However, the resulting prioritization of omnipotence, vengeance, and superiority phantasies leads to a vicious circle with the real-world failures. As the adolescent spends ever more time in his phantasy world, the real world becomes less and less important; as a result he is increasingly unable to assert himself and in turn flees further and further into his power phantasies. Violent films, songs, books, and games, as well as real-world role models in the form of media reports about and self-presentations of school shooters, all can feed the phantasy. Here the media are used specifically to hone, develop, and expand the phantasy and heighten the experience of control. According to Robertz (2004, in this volume), identification with violent role models in particular can intensify the control experience.

This intense interest in violent media and school shootings is expressed before and during the deed in subtle or explicit references to books, song lyrics, games, films, etc., and especially in references to a school shooter with whom an identification has developed. Numerous examples of such references are documented in the relevant literature (Bannenberg, 2010; Böckler & Seeger, 2010; Coleman, 2004; Larkin, 2009a; Newman et al., 2004).

13.6   Communicating Through the Mass Media

Several studies highlight the importance of the mass media as a channel of communication for school shooters, who exploit the interest of news services in extreme acts of violence to communicate with an unlimited audience. In the context of deadly violence in schools, media interest bias leads to a situation where school shootings attract considerably more media attention than other more numerous types of homicide occurring on school premises (gang-related, drug-related, or otherwise associated with criminal activity or inter-personal conflict) (Borum et al., 2010; Modzeleski et al., 2008; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010, p. 347).

13.6.1   Sending a Message

Some school shooters made use of the anticipated media attention to disseminate explanations, justifications, or political messages. Newman et al. (2004, p. 249)

report that Luke Woodham gave a manifesto and a last will explaining the meaning of his attack to a friend a few minutes before opening fire at Pearl High School on October 1, 1997. After this manifesto was withheld from the public, subsequent perpetrators learned the lesson. Bastian Bosse, for example, ensured that his video messages and photographs, a suicide note, excerpts from his journal, chat logs, and various forum contributions would be available after his death by e-mailing a list of internet links to acquaintances shortly before the attack and also publishing the list on his website (Engels, 2007, p. 45f.). Seung-Hui Cho turned directly to the mainstream media, mailing a package containing a video, photos, and a manifesto to NBC corporate headquarters in New York on the day of his attack (Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010, p. 350). To date school shooters have always been able to rely on news desks enthusiastically disseminating material provided to them.

Some school shooters wore garments bearing a message during their attack (Ogle, Eckman, & Leslie, 2003). Dylan Klebold wore a black T-shirt with "WRATH" in red letters, Eric Harris a white T-shirt with "Natural Selection" in black. Statements from his website, which are extensively quoted in the publicly accessible police files, imply that Eric Harris understood this phrase in the sense of social Darwinian survival of the fittest (Larkin, 2007, p. 133). Years later, Eric Pekka Auvinen said that he had adopted this meaning in choosing to wear a T-shirt bearing the words "Humanity Is Overrated" (Larkin, 2009a). Also noteworthy is the T-shirt worn by Georg R. in the shooting in Ansbach, Germany, where "MADE IN SCHOOL" appears to have represented a clear attribution of blame (Böckler, Seeger, & Sitzer, 2012; Lehnberger, 2009).

In order for their messages to reach as many people as possible, some school shooters whose native language was not English nonetheless produced their pamphlets, declarations, and self-presentations in English. For example, Bastian Bosse began writing his online journal in English about 1 month before attacking his school in Emsdetten, Germany. He also speaks English in the video explaining his motives, which was uploaded to YouTube on the morning of the attack (Böckler & Seeger, 2010, p. 104f.). Eric Pekka Auvinen in Finland also ensured that his "Natural Selector's Manifesto" (subtitled "How Did Natural Selection Turn Into Idiocratic Selection?") would be accessible to the widest possible readership by placing both English and Finnish versions on the internet 2 days before his attack (Ministry of Justice, 2009, p. 17).

The school shooters' messages are normally addressed to an undefined audience. Their intention in most cases is to draw attention to their experiences of injustice and injury and to justify the planned deed. In a video recorded 1 day earlier, Bastian Bosse justifies his attack in terms of the exclusion and violence he experienced at school (Böckler & Seeger, 2010, p. 109f.). In his suicide note, also published shortly beforehand, he describes his motives in greater detail and calls, like his idols Harris and Klebold before him, for a "revolution of the dispossessed." In this sense school shootings have a similar communicative function to that described for suicide attacks (Larkin, 2009a).

13.6.2   Fame Beyond the Grave

Media reporting in particular contributes to school shooters becoming inscribed into the collective memory of society, and thereby attaining "immortality." Various studies demonstrate that achieving fame beyond death is not only a more or less inevitable side effect of staging a school shooting, but an explicit objective for some school shooters (Engels, 2007; Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2003, p. 118; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010, p. 349f.; Newman et al., 2004, p. 250f.). At the latest since Columbine, achieving the status of a "superstar killer" has become a topos of the school shooting script, "crowning" the transformation from powerless victim to omnipotent avenger. As Bastian Bosse puts it in his suicide note, which he published shortly before the attack: "I want my face to be burned into your minds! I don't want to run away any more! I want to do my part for the revolution of the dispossessed! I want R E V E N G E!" (Ich will R.A.C.H.E, 2006, translated).

Harris and Klebold in Columbine also expected to go down in history, and wondered whether Steven Spielberg or Quentin Tarantino could be trusted with the script (Gibbs & Roche, 1999). They were plainly aware that, to achieve the desired media attention, they would have to surpass the Westside Middle School massacre, where less than a year earlier Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden had killed four female students and one teacher and wounded ten others (Newman et al., 2004, p. 250). In order to kill the largest possible number, Harris and Klebold planned to detonate several bombs in the school cafeteria at lunch time and shoot survivors in crossfire as they fled. Although the bombs failed to explode because of faulty detonators, this part of their plan succeeded nonetheless: in terms of deaths and injuries they exceeded all previous school shootings, and no previous case attracted comparable national and international attention. In this light, Harris and Klebold became not only idols for many later school shooters, but also a yardstick of success, a target to beat.

13.7   Conclusion

The relationship between the media and the phenomenon of school shootings is close and complex. While there is significant research challenging the idea of a general violence-promoting effect of violent media content, there are indications that under certain circumstances media depictions of violence can have a negative influence on subjects where particular risk factors are present. In terms of whether and to what extent school shooters exhibit a special susceptibility for the negative effects of violent media content, the empirical evidence is often vague and further research is needed. As far as threat assessment is concerned, it would be appropriate to consider use of violent media as one factor, especially as an intense interest can also be an indicator of withdrawal into violent phantasies that seek to compensate loss of control in the real world.

Secondly, studies suggest that media reporting about school shootings can trigger imitation threats and actual attacks. Although further research is required, the findings to date already give grounds for a debate on how school shootings should be reported. The public interest in information and the danger of copycat shootings must both be given due consideration. While the first media guidelines for appropriate reporting have already been prepared (Deutscher Presserat, 2010; Expertenkreis Amok, 2009, p. 59f.; Ministry of Justice, 2009, p. 107ff.; Robertz, 2007, p. 77f.), their effectiveness has yet to be investigated empirically.

Thirdly, there is clear evidence that media-communicated cultural scripts both suggest the school shooting as a potential solution for an individual problem and influence the manner in which a school shooting is conducted. The media play an important role in the dissemination of cultural scripts of hegemonic masculinity that, in the context of school, can lead to the devaluation of those who fail to satisfy the current ideal of masculinity and can also legitimize the use of massive violence to create or restore masculinity. In the context of these findings, it is clear that the key to preventing school shootings cannot lie in more restrictive control of media content. Students with personal and social resources who treat everyday problems as challenges to be productively overcome will not regard school shootings as potential solutions. Even if media play a certain role in the genesis of school shootings, it would be jumping to conclusions to see them as their actual cause.

In terms, finally, of the communicative aspects of school shootings, it is clear that some school shooters use the anticipated media attention to send a political message and to attain "immortality" by going down in history. Although one can again point to the responsibility of the mass media in this connection, it must be remembered that the perpetrators would never have felt the need to plan and carry out a school shooting if earlier pleas for attention had not fallen on deaf ears.

References

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2002). Media violence harms children. In J. D. Torr (Ed.), *Is media violence a problem?* (pp. 10–12). New York: Springer.

Anderson, C. (2004). An update on the effects of playing violent video games. *Journal of Adolescence, 27*(1), 113–122.

Anderson, C., & Dill, K. (2000). Video games and aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior in the laboratory and in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*, 772–790.

Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2001). Effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, psychological arousal, and prosocial behavior: A meta-analytic review of the scientific literature. *Psychological Science, 12*, 353–359.

Anderson, C. A., Carnagey, N. L., & Eubanks, J. (2003). Exposure to violent media: The effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 960–971.

Anderson, C. A., Shibuya, A., Ihori, N., Swing, E. L., Bushman, B. J., Sakamoto, A., et al. (2010). Violent video game effects on aggression, empathy, and prosocial behavior in Eastern and Western countries: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 151–173.

Baier, D., Pfeiffer, C., Simonson, J., & Rabold, S. (2010). *Kinder und Jugendliche in Deutschland: Gewalterfahrungen, Integration, Medienkonsum: Zweiter Bericht zum gemeinsamen Forschungsprojekt des Bundesministeriums des Innern und des KFN (KFN-Forschungsbericht 109)*. Hannover: KFN.

Baier, D., Pfeiffer, C., Windzio, M., & Rabold, S. (2006). *Schülerbefragung 2005: Gewalterfahrungen, Schulabsentismus und Medienkonsum von Kindern und Jugendlichen: Abschlussbericht über eine repräsentative Befragung von Schülerinnen und Schülern der 4. und 9. Jahrgangsstufe*. Hannover: Kriminologisches Forschungsinstitut Niedersachsen.

Bannenberg, B. (2010). *Amok: Ursachen erkennen—Warnsignale verstehen—Katastrophen verhindern*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Benson, L. (2005, March 24). Web postings hold clues to Weise's actions. *Minnesota Public Radio*. Retrieved May 4, 2012, from http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/03/24_ap_moreweise/.

Böckler, N. (2012). Mediale Selbstdarstellungen jugendlicher Amokläufer. Paper presented at the conference on Mörderische Phantasien—Mediale Selbstdarstellung jugendlicher Amokläufer, Akademie für politische Bildung Tutzing, Bayreuth, Germany, April 21, 2012.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2010). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Sitzer, P. (2012). Media dynamics in school shootings: A socialization theory perspective. In G. W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age*. Bingley: Emerald.

Bofinger, J. (2001). *Kinder—Freizeit—Medien: Eine empirische Untersuchung zum Freizeit- und Medienverhalten 10- bis 17-jähriger Schülerinnen und Schüler*. Munich: Kopaed.

Bollen, K. A., & Phillips, D. P. (1981). Suicidal motor vehicle fatalities in Detroit: a replication. *American Journal of Sociology, 87*, 404–412.

Bollen, K. A., & Phillips, D. P. (1982). Imitative suicides: a national study of effects of television news stories. *American Sociological Review, 47*, 802–809.

Bortz, J., & Döring, N. (2006). *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation: für Human- und Sozialwissenschaftler*. Berlin: Springer.

Borum, R., Cornell, D. G., Modzeleski, W., & Jimersonet, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 27–37.

Boxer, P., Huesmann, L. R., Bushman, B. J., O'Brien, M., & Moceri, D. (2008). The role of violent media preference in cumulative developmental risk for violence and general aggression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(3), 417–428.

Browne, K., & Pennell, A. (1998). The effects of video violence on young offenders. London: Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. *Research findings*, No. 65, pp. 1–4.

Bushman, B., & Anderson, C. A. (2002). Violent video games and hostile expectations: A test of the generalized aggression model. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 1679–1686.

Bushman, B. J. (1995). Moderating role of trait aggressiveness in the effects of violent media on aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 950–960.

Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2001). Media violence and the American public: Scientific facts versus media misinformation. *American Psychologist, 56*(6/7), 477–489.

Bushman, B. J., & Huesmann, L. R. (2001). Effects of televised violence on aggression. In D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of children and the media* (pp. 223–254). London: Sage.

Bushman, B. J., & Huesmann, L. R. (2006). Short-term and long-term effects of violent media on aggression in children and adults. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 160*, 348–352.

Coleman, L. (2004). *The copycat effect: How the media and popular culture trigger the mayhem in tomorrow's headlines*. New York: Paraview.

Colwell, J., & Kato, M. (2003). Investigation of the relationship between social isolation, self-esteem, aggression and computer game play in Japanese adolescents. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 6*, 149–158.

Connell, R.W. (1993): The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History. In: *Theory and Society, 22*, 597–623.

Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities* (Vol. 1). Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Cullen, D. (1999, September 30). Who said "yes?" *Salon.com*. Retrieved May 4, 2012, from http://www.salon.com/1999/09/30/bernall/.

Deutscher Presserat. (2010). *Berichterstattung über Amokläufe: Empfehlungen für Redaktionen*. Berlin: Deutscher Presserat. Retrieved March 6, 2012, from http://www.presserat.info/fileadmin/download/PDF/Leitfaden_Amokberichterstattung.pdf.

Engels, H. (2007). Das School Shooting von Emsdetten—der letzte Ausweg aus dem Tunnel!? Eine Betrachtung aus Sicht des Leiters der kriminalpolizeilichen Ermittlungen. In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen: Früherkennung/Risikomanagement/Kriseneinsatz/Nachbetreuung* (pp. 35–56). Frankfurt: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Expertenkreis Amok. (2009). *Prävention, Intervention, Opferhilfe, Medien: Konsequenzen aus dem Amoklauf in Winnenden und Wendlingen am 11. März 2009*. Baden-Württemberg: Expertenkreis Amok.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. New York: Overlook.

Feasey, R. (2008). *Masculinity and popular television*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ferguson, C. J. (2007). Evidence for publication bias in video game violence effects literature: A meta-analytic review. *Aggression & Violent Behavior, 12*, 470–482.

Ferguson, C. J., & Kilburn, J. (2009). The public health risks of media violence: A meta-analytic review. *The Journal of Pediatrics, 154*(5), 759–763.

Ferguson, C. J., Rueda, S. M., Cruz, A. M., Ferguson, D. E., Fritz, S., & Smith, S. M. (2008). Violent video games and aggression. Causal relationship or byproduct of family violence and intrinsic violence motivation? *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 35*(3), 311–332.

Ferguson, C. J., San Miguel, C., Garza, A., & Jerabeck, J. M. (2012). A longitudinal test of video game violence influences on dating and aggression: A 3-year longitudinal study of adolescents. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 46*(2), 141–146.

Ferguson, C. J., San Miguel, C., & Hartley, R. D. (2009). A multivariate analysis of youth violence and aggression: The influence of family, peers, depression, and media violence. *The Journal of Pediatrics, 155*(6), 904–908.

Funk, J. B. (2003). Violent video games: Who's at risk?'. In D. Ravitch & J. P. Viteritti (Eds.), *Kid stuff: Marketing sex and violence to America's children* (pp. 168–192). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Gibbs, N., & Roche, T. (1999, December 12). The Columbine tapes. *Time*. Retrieved April 26, 2012, from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,35870,00.html.

Giumetti, G. W., & Markey, P. M. (2007). Violent video games and anger as predictors of aggression. *Journal of Research in Personality, 41*(6), 1234–1243.

Gould, M., Jamieson, P., & Romer, D. (2003). Media contagion and suicide among the young. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*(9), 1269–1284.

Gould, M. S., Shaffer, D., & Kleinman, M. (1988). The impact of suicide in television movies: Replication and commentary. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 18*, 90–99.

Grimm, J. (1999). *Fernsehgewalt: Zuwendungsattraktivität, Erregungsverläufe, sozialer Effekt: Zur Begründung und praktischen Anwendung eines kognitiv-physiologischen Ansatzes der Medienrezeptionsforschung am Beispiel von Gewaltdarstellungen*. Opladen & Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Grimm, J. (2002). Wirkungsforschung II: Differentiale der Mediengewalt—Ansätze zur Überwindung der Individualisierungs- und Globalisierungsfalle innerhalb der Wirkungsforschung. In T. Hausmanninger & T. Bohrmann (Eds.), *Mediale Gewalt: Interdisziplinäre und ethische Perspektiven* (pp. 160–176). Munich: Fink.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. D. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies: Lessons from a study of rampage school shootings. *Sociological Methods & Research, 31*(2), 174–217.

Hawton, K., Simkin, S., Deeks, J. J., O'Connor, S., Keen, A., Altman, D. G., et al. (1999). Effects of a drug overdose in a television drama on presentations to hospital for self-poisoning: Time series and questionnaire study. *British Medical Journal, 318*, 972–977.

Hearold, S. (1986). A synthesis of 1043 effects of television on social behavior. In G. Comstock (Ed.), *Public communication and behavior* (Vol. 1, pp. 65–133). New York: Academic.

Hoffmann, J. (2007). Tödliche Verzweiflung—der Weg zu zielgerichteten Gewalttaten an Schulen. In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen: Früherkennung/Risikomanagement/Kriseneinsatz/Nachbetreuung* (pp. 25–34). Frankfurt: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hogben, M. (1998). Factors moderating the effect of television aggression on viewer behavior. *Communication Research, 25*, 220–247.

Hopf, W. H. (2004). Mediengewalt, Lebenswelt und Persönlichkeit—eine Problemgruppenanalyse bei Jugendlichen. *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie, 16*(3), 99–115.

Hopf, W. H., Huber, G. L., & Weiß, R. H. (2008). Media violence and youth violence: A 2-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Media Psychology, 20*(3), 79–96.

Huesmann, L. R. (2007). The impact of electronic media violence: Scientific theory and research. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*, S6–S13.

Huesmann, L. R., Moise-Titus, J., Podolski, C. L., & Eron, L. D. (2003). Longitudinal relations between children's exposure to TV violence and their aggressive and violent behavior in young adulthood: 1977–1992. *Developmental Psychology, 39*, 201–221.

Ich will R.A.C.H.E. (2006, November 21). *Telepolis*. Retrieved September 28, 2012, from http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/24/24032/1.html.

Irwin, A. R., & Gross, A. M. (1995). Cognitive tempo, violent video games, and aggressive behavior in young boys. *Journal of Family Violence, 10*, 337–350.

Johnson, D. J., Cohen, P., Smailes, E. M., Kasen, S., & Brook, J. S. (2002). Television viewing and aggressive behavior during adolescence and adulthood. *Science, 295*, 2468–2471.

Jonas, K. (1992). Modeling and suicide: A test of the Werther effect. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 31*, 295–306.

Josephson, W. L. (1987). Television violence and children's aggression: Testing the priming, social script, and disinhibition predictions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*, 882–890.

Kalish, R., & Kimmel, M. (2010). Suicide by mass murder: Masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and rampage school shootings. *Health Sociology Review, 19*(4), 451–464.

Katz, J., & Jhally, S. (1999, May 2). The national conversation in the wake of Littleton is missing the mark. *The Boston Globe*, E1.

Kidd, S. T., & Meyer, C. L. (2002). Similarities of school shootings in rural and small communities. *Journal of Rural Community Psychology, E5*(1). Retrieved March 6, 2012, from http://www.marshall.edu/jrcp/sp2002/similarities_of_school_shootings.htm.

Kimmel, M. S., & Mahler, M. (2003). Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*(10), 1439–1458.

Kostinsky, S., Bixler, E. O., & Kettl, P. A. (2001). Threats of school violence in Pennsylvania after media coverage of the Columbine high school massacre: Examining the role of imitation. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 155*, 994–1001.

Kristen, A., Oppel, C., & von Salisch, M. (2007). *Computerspiele mit und ohne Gewalt: Auswahl und Wirkung bei Kindern*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Kunczik, M., & Zipfel, A. (2006). *Gewalt und Medien: Ein Studienhandbuch*. Cologne, Weimar, & Vienna: Böhlau.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2009a). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Larkin, R. W. (2010). Masculinity, school shooters, and the control of violence. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence* (pp. 315–344). New York: Springer.

Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 202–214.

Lehnberger, G. (2009). *Abschließender Pressebericht i. S. Amoklauf Ansbach – neue Erkenntnisse über Tathergang und Tatmotiv*. Retrieved May 2, 2012, from http://www.justiz.bayern.de/sta/sta/an/presse/archiv/2009/02227/.

Maguire, B., Weatherby, G. A., & Mathers, R. A. (2002). Network news coverage of school shootings. *The Social Science Journal, 39*, 465–470.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger. *The Forensic Examiner, 8*, 1–16.

Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A. G., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A. A., & Gray, B. T. (2001). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of adolescent mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*(6), 719–728.

Melzer, W., & Rostampour, P. (1998). Prädiktoren schulischer Gewalt im außerschulischen Bereich. In Arbeitsgruppe Schulevaluation (Eds.), Gewalt als soziales Problem in Schulen. Untersuchungsergebnis und Präventionsstrategien (pp. 149–188). Opladen: Leske & Budrich.

Messner, S. (1986). Television violence and violent crime: An aggregate analysis. *Social Problems, 33*, 218–235.

Ministry of Justice. (2009). *Jokela School Shooting on 7 November 2007: Report of the Investigation Commission*. Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.

Modzeleski, W., Feucht, T., Hall, J. E., Simon, T. R., Butler, L., Taylor, A., et al. (2008). School-associated student homicides—United States, 1992–2006. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 57*(2), 33–36.

Möller, I. (2011). Gewaltmedienkonsum und Aggression. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, 2011(3), 921 18–23.

Möller, I., & Krahé, B. (2009). Exposure to violent video games and aggression in German adolescents: A longitudinal analysis. *Aggressive Behavior, 35*(1), 75–89.

Moore, M. H., Petrie, C. V., Braga, A. A., & McLaughlin, B. L. (Eds.). (2003). *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Mößle, T., Kleimann, M., & Rehbein, F. (2007). *Bildschirmmedien im Alltag von Kindern und Jugendlichen*. Nomos: Baden-Baden.

Muscari, M. (2002). Media violence: Advice for parents. *Pediatric Nursing, 28*(6), 585–591.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). The Columbine victims and the myth of the juvenile superpredator. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 5*(4), 351–366.

Muschert, G. W., & Carr, D. (2006). Media salience and frame changing across events: Coverage of nine school shootings 1997–2001. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 83*(4), 747–766.

Muschert, G. W., & Larkin, R. W. (2007). The Columbine high school shootings. In S. Chermak & F. Y. Bailey (Eds.), *Crimes & trials of the century* (pp. 253–266). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Muschert, G. W., & Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and control of violence: Communication in school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence* (pp. 345–361). New York: Springer.

National Institute of Mental Health. (1982). *Television and behavior: Ten years of scientific progress and implications for the eighties: Vol. 1. Summary report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Neroni, H. (2000). The men of Columbine: Violence and masculinity in American culture and film. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society, 5*(2), 256–263.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

Nolting, H.-P. (2004). *Lernfall Aggression: Wie sie entsteht—wie sie zu verhindern ist*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Ogle, J. P., Eckman, M., & Leslie, C. A. (2003). Appearance cues and the shootings at Columbine High: Construction of a social problem in the print media. *Sociological Inquiry, 73*(1), 1–27.

Oliver, M. B. (2000). The respondent gender gap. In D. Zillmann & P. Vorderer (Eds.), *Media entertainment* (pp. 215–234). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Paik, H., & Comstock, G. (1994). The effects of television violence on antisocial behavior: A meta-analysis. *Communication Research, 21*, 516–539.

Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (1999). Columbine shooting biggest news draw of 1999. Retrieved March 2, 2012, from http://www.people-press.org/1999/12/28/columbine-shooting-biggest-news-draw-of-1999.

Phillips, D. (1974). The influence of suggestion on suicide: Substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect. *American Sociological Review, 39*, 340–354.

Phillips, D. (1979). Suicide, motor vehicle fatalities, and the mass media: Evidence toward a theory of suggestion. *The American Journal of Sociology, 84*, 1150–1174.

Phillips, D., & Carstensen, L. L. (1986). Clustering of teenage suicides after television news stories about suicide. *The New England Journal of Medicine, 315*, 685–689.

Phillips, D. P., & Carstensen, L. L. (1988). The effect of suicide stories on various demographic groups, 1968–1985. In R. Maris (Ed.), *Understanding and preventing suicide: Plenary papers of the first combined meeting of the AAS and IASP* (pp. 100–114). New York: Guilford.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School Shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Frankfurt: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Robertz, F. J. (2007). Nachahmung von Amoklagen: Über Mitläufer, Machtphantasien und Medienverantwortung. In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und Zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen: Früherkennung/Risikomanagement/Kriseneinsatz/Nachbetreuung* (pp. 71–85). Polizeiwissenschaft: Frankfurt am Main.

Robertz, F. J., & Wickenhäuser, R. (2010). *Der Riss in der Tafel: Amoklauf und schwere Gewalt in der Schule* (2nd ed.). Berlin: Springer.

Robinson, T. N. (2003). The effects of cutting back on media exposure. In D. Ravitch & J. P. Viteritti (Eds.), *Kid stuff: Marketing sex and violence to America's children* (pp. 193–213). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Robinson, T. N., Wilde, M. L., Navracruz, L. C., Haydel, K. F., & Varady, A. (2001). Effects of reducing children's television and video game use on aggressive behavior. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 155*, 17–23.

Savage, J. (2004). Does viewing violent media really cause criminal violence? A methodological review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 10*, 99–128.

Savage, J., & Yancey, C. (2008). The effects of media violence exposure on criminal aggression: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 35*, 772–791.

Scheithauer, H., & Bondü, R. (2011). *Amokläufe und School Shootings*. Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht.

Schmidtke, A., & Hafner, H. (1988). The Werther effect after television films: New evidence for an old hypothesis. *Psychological Medicine, 18*, 665–676.

Schmidtke, A., Schaller, S., Stack, S., Lester, D., & Müller, I. (2005). Imitation of amok and amok-suicide. In J. McIntosh (Ed.), *Suicide 2002: Proceedings of the 35th annual conference of the American Association of Suicidology* (pp. 205–209). Washington, DC: American Association of Suicidology.

Sherry, J. (2001). The effects of violent video games on aggression: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research, 27*, 409–431.

Slater, M. D., Henry, K. L., Swaim, R. C., & Anderson, L. L. (2003). Violent media content and aggressiveness in adolescents: A downward spiral model. *Communication Research, 30*(6), 713–736.

Sonneck, G., Etzersdorfer, E., & Nagel-Kuess, S. (1994). Imitative suicide on the Viennese subway. *Social Science & Medicine, 38*, 453–457.

Stack S (1996). The effect of the media on suicide: evidence from Japan. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 26*, 405–414.

Steiner, O. (2009). *Neue Medien und Gewalt: Expertenbericht 04/09* (Beiträge zur sozialen Sicherheit). Bern: Bundesamt für Sozialversicherungen.

Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. (1972). *Television and growing up: The impact of televised violence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Trudewind, C., & Steckel, R. (2002). Unmittelbare und langfristige Auswirkungen des Umgangs mit gewalthaltigen Computerspielen: Vermittelnde Mechanismen und Moderatorvariablen. *Polizei und Wissenschaft, 1*, 83–100.

Unsworth, G., Devilly, G., & Ward, T. (2007). The effect of playing violent video games on adolescents: Should parents be quaking in their boots? *Psychology, Crime and Law, 13*, 383–394.

Vandewater, E. A., Lee, J. H., & Shim, M. S. (2005). Family conflict and violent electronic media use in school-aged children. *Media Psychology, 7*(1), 73–86.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education.

Wallenius, M., Punamaki, R.-L., & Rimpela, A. (2007). Digital game playing and direct and indirect aggression in early adolescence: The roles of age, social intelligence, and parent–child communication. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36*, 325–336.

Watson, J. (2002). *The martyrs of Columbine: Faith and the politics of tragedy*. New York: Palgrave.

Wilgoren, J. (2005, 22 March). Shooting rampage by student leaves 10 dead on reservation. *The New York Times*, p. A1.

Wood, W., Wong, F. Y., & Chachere, J. G. (1991). Effects of media violence on viewers' aggression in unconstrained social interaction. *Psychological Bulletin, 109*, 371–383.

Chapter 14
Revolution of the Dispossessed: School Shooters and their Devotees on the Web

Nils Böckler and Thorsten Seeger

Rampage school shootings, involving the planned killing of numerous people by students or former students, are one of the forms of violence that stun and distress entire societies and give rise to intense public, political, and scientific discussions (Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2010). Especially since Columbine, school shootings have become recurrent subjects of extensive media coverage (Frymer, 2009; Muschert, 2007; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004). The theme also features in various products of popular culture—video games, TV series, movies, and theater productions as well as in rap, pop, and rock songs (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a; Muschert & Larkin, 2007). Highly emotionalized interpersonal communication about school shootings is observed on the internet, in online discussion forums, Facebook groups, YouTube videos, MySpace comments, and Twitter messages (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b; Lindgren, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Liu, & Hughes, 2009; Sumiala, 2011). Despite their rarity, these specific acts of violence become huge media events, sometimes while they are still in progress and certainly in the hours and days that follow (Kellner, 2008; Sumiala & Tikka, 2010).

School shootings probably provoke such an enormous media echo because these "spectacular" and often particularly gruesome acts of violence apparently appear from nowhere and initially seem peculiarly devoid of motive (Altmeyer, 2002). But if we consider the specific characteristics of the deed and its staging by the perpetrator, it becomes clear that there is a complex prehistory (see the contributions in parts II and III of this volume), and that, in many cases, the performative script of violence is deployed deliberately as a means of communication (Larkin, 2009; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010). It is precisely these media-conveyed messages (appeals, ideologies, justifications, world views, self-images) that make it possible for certain adolescents to feel solidarity with school shooters—and in some cases even regard them as idols (Böckler & Seeger, 2010). This can create fertile ground for

N. Böckler (✉) • T. Seeger
Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence,
University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: nils.boeckler@uni-bielefeld.de; t.s.5@web.de

identification and imitation effects that play a significant role in origination (Schmidtke, Schaller, Stack, Lester, & Müller, 2005). In their precrime self-testimony, some adolescent rampage shooters express both great admiration for their predecessors and the hope that they themselves will become equally iconic models for potential imitators through their own rampage (Robertz & Wickenhäuser, 2007).

14.1   School Shooters as Idols of a Radicalized Milieu?

The central subject of this contribution is the self-narratives, self-stagings, and self-glorifications of school shooters and the reactions, appropriations, and communications of adolescents who consume and discuss these messages left behind by the perpetrators and circulated by the media.

We will focus first on the staging of self and violence by perpetrators (Sect. 14.1), examining the typical forms of action scripts, and ideological components, and exploring the functionality of these communicative-expressive elements in generating a group identity or sense of cohesion between perpetrators. The analysis is based on a survey of the relevant international research literature and the findings of our own qualitative study which used individual case studies to identify specific motives and recurring topoi in the self-narratives of perpetrators (Böckler & Seeger, 2010).

We then move on to examine the phenomenon of "virtual fan communities" that gather around the issue in the World Wide Web (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011b; Sumiala, 2011). Although it has been widely noted that numerous adolescents around the globe feel represented by the opinions and actions of school shooters (for example, Larkin, 2009; Muschert & Larkin, 2007; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010), concrete empirical data has been lacking. Section 14.2 describes the theoretical and methodological framework and Sect. 14.3 the findings of the first study investigating the reasons that lead adolescent internet users of the interactive video portal YouTube to pursue an intense interest in school shooting events and actors.[1] The following research questions were addressed:

---

[1] YouTube was selected as the field of research because it is the world's largest and most intensely used portal of its kind, with about 60 h of video material uploaded every minute and about four billion video views per day. Numerous media self-presentations by school shooters can be found on YouTube, including Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Sebastian Bosse, Seung-Hui Cho, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, and Matti Saari, uploaded by the perpetrators before the shooting or later by others. Numerous documentary reports and films about school shootings are also available on the site. The search term "School Shooting" returns 55,200 results on YouTube, with 12,900 videos for "Columbine" alone (as of February 11, 2012). Lindgren gives a general overview of user discussion relating to school shootings (2011), demonstrating that in comments on video clips showing images and texts from Seung-Hui Cho or Pekka-Eric Auvinen, for example, YouTube users refer above all to the issue of bullying as a possible reason.

- To what extent do portrayals of school shooters in the media provide a crucial frame of reference for certain adolescents in developing, articulating, and protecting their own identities?
- What are the different psychological and social functions of the appropriation of the topic of "school shooting" via the internet?
- What are the psychosocial characteristics that cause recipients to identify strongly with the perpetrators and the world-schemas and self-schemas they provide?

We were thus able to gain insights into (a) why adolescents see school shooters as models or even heroes and (b) what psychosocial circumstances condition such admiration. The findings suggest that particular adolescents who find themselves socially disintegrated through repeated experience of contempt and powerlessness in the family, school, and peer group find a meaningful point of reference for shaping and formulating their own identity in school shooters' media presentations of self-image and world view (Böckler & Seeger, 2010). This leads straight to the next question: Must school shooters be regarded as the idols or avant-garde of a radicalized milieu in which fundamental social values of solidarity, equality, and nonviolence are no longer shared and recognized, but instead begin to erode where participation and integration are blocked? After dealing with this question, we conclude in Sect. 14.4 by summarizing the central findings, discussing the limitations of the study, and proposing some avenues for future research.

14.2 Communication with the Audience: Expressive Elements in School Shootings

14.2.1 The Group Identity

According to Larkin, post-Columbine school shooters deliberately plan for media effectiveness, not only in a quest to avenge the humiliations and affronts they have suffered, but also in the belief they are acting in the name of a greater collective (2009).[2] In the perception of these adolescents, the violent deed is a subversive act of rebellion carried out by proxy for millions of others who share their outsider status, their pain, and their experience of victimization (see also Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011a; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010). This perpetrator ideology is largely sourced from Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who called for a "revolution of the dispossessed" (Gibbs & Roche, 1999). After analyzing twenty-three post-Columbine shootings, Larkin (2009) is able to demonstrate empirically that this appeal was understood, with about 60% of perpetrators citing Harris and Klebold or referring to their call to revolution (see Table 14.1).

---

[2] On the relevance of marginalization and bullying experiences as causes of school shootings see Larkin, Madfis, & Levin, and Newman in this volume.

Table 14.1 Violence in the name of a larger collectivity: statements by rampage shooters

1999 T.J. Solomon	One big Question everybody's probably wondering about now is *WHY*?! Well, for the sake of my brothers and sisters related to the trench coat mafia […] I have been planning this for years, but finally got pissed off enough to do it (cited from Sullivan & Guerette, 2002, p. 50)
2006 Sebastian Bosse	I'm not a copy of REB, VoDKa, Steini, Gill, Kinkel, Weise or whoever else![a] […] Is a village priest just a "copycat" of the Pope? No! Of course not! He believes in the same thing as the Pope, but he's not emulating him. He has the same take on things. He is, like the shite Pope, a part of a whole […] I want to do my bit for the revolution of the dispossessed. (translated from Böckler & Seeger, 2010, pp. 123–4)
2007 Seung-Hui Cho	I didn't have to do this. I could have left. I could have fled. But no, I will no longer run. It's not for me. For my children, for my brothers and sisters that you fucked, I did it for them. […] Thanks to you, I die *like Jesus Christ* to inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people. (cited from Böckler & Seeger, 2010, p. 126; see also Dewan & Santora, 2007)
2007 Pekka-Eric Auvinen	If we want to live in a different world, we must act. […] I can't alone change much but hopefully my actions will inspire all the intelligent people of the world and start some sort of revolution against the current systems. (cited from Langman, 2007)
2007 Mathew J. Murray	Like Cho, Eric Harris, Ricky Rodriguez and others, I'm going out to make a stand for the weak and the defenseless this is for all those young people still caught in the Nightmare of Christianity for all those people who've been abused and mistreated and taken advantage of by this evil sick religion Christian America this is YOUR Columbine (cited from Meyer, Migoya, & Osher, 2007)
2011 Wellington Menzes de Oliveira	The struggle for which many brothers died in the past, and for which I will die, is not solely because of what is known as bullying. Our fight is against cruel people, cowards, who take advantage of the kindness, the weakness of people unable to defend themselves (cited from Gomes, 2012)

[a]Bosse is referring to Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Robert Steinhäuser, Kimveer Gill, Kipland Kinkel, and Jeffrey Weise (for data on these and all other cases mentioned see the list of incidents in the appendix to this volume)

Even the attack plans suggest a strong identification with their predecessors: Sebastian Bosse wore a long dark trench coat, the trademark of the Columbine killers, during his 2006 rampage in Emsdetten, Germany (Böckler & Seeger, 2010); Steve Kazmierczak wore a T-shirt bearing the word "Terrorist" during his 2008 rampage at Northern Illinois University and had a tattoo reading "FTW" (Fuck The World) on his left middle finger (Northern Illinois University, 2008).

Such (explicit) communicative elements (Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010) are often an essential part of the modus operandi: before his rampage in April 1999, Eric Harris had already chosen a shirt bearing the words "Natural Selection" (Larkin, 2007). These

specific visual and/or organizational characteristics can be interpreted as "performative protest codes" (Fahlenbrach, 2008, p. 100)[3]: Meaningful symbols and gestures designed to express a particular message, while a mimetic staging of violence expresses a sense of belonging among the perpetrators. This construction of an imaginary group identity is also reflected in many media presentations by perpetrators (see Sect. 1.2).

Findings from violence research show that adolescents largely turn to violent groups for a feeling of support and belonging (Böttger, 1998). This search for social integration is often based on a lack of recognition and emotional reciprocity in the family, school, and peer group, which the violent group compensates through what is to some of its members a completely new experience of cohesion and shared values (Sitzer, 2002). Because school shooters suffer considerable integration and recognition deficits in family and peer group (Böckler et al., 2010; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999), their needs for community and participation remain, one can conclude, chronically unsatisfied.[4]

The imagined community (and shared destiny) of the school shooters and the transferred cultural script of school shooting (Newman & Fox, 2009) obviously offer a fatal way out of their misery, where (imaginary) membership in a group of fellow-sufferers subjectively eases the feelings of social disintegration and emotional powerlessness and grants a new meaning to life.[5] A school shooting can thus also be viewed as a student's desperate attempt to gain or regain control over their own social identity: The shooting turns an erstwhile nobody into a "deviant superstar" (Robertz, 2004, p. 181) and gives him the hope of achieving ultimate, historical recognition of his hitherto marginalized personality (Newman et al., 2004; Böckler, Seeger, and Sitzer, 2012).

14.2.2   The Ideology

In an earlier publication (Böckler & Seeger, 2010), we examined the extent to which the free availability of rampage shooter testimonies (circulated by mass media or available on the internet) provides materials for recipients to emulate and identify with.[6] We conducted in-depth analyses of the self-reflective and

---

[3] The term is borrowed from protest research, where Fahlenbrach uses it to identify particular social processes among participants in street demonstrations.

[4] While school shooters generally come from outwardly inconspicuous white middle-class families, their family relationships are often dysfunctional and characterized by emotional indifference (Fast, 2008; O'Toole, 1999). In some cases the perpetrator is loosely attached to a clique of outsiders, but this does not function adequately as a "surrogate informal recognition structure" (Sitzer, 2002) and therefore *cannot* protect them from feelings of hopelessness and identity threat (Böckler & Seeger, 2010; McGee & DeBernardo, 1999).

[5] For Heintz, imagined communities form "symbolic substitutes for real world ties that are lacking, where semantics and symbolism create a sense of togetherness that bridges all differences and allows real spatial and social distance to be forgotten. In this connection, the disseminating media and unity-generating symbols play a central role" (translated from 2003, 188–189).

[6] Considerations of space here preclude more detailed discussion of the details of the methodology, which is described in full elsewhere (Böckler & Seeger, 2010).

communicative components of highly frequented video material produced by Eric Harris/Dylan Klebold, Sebastian Bosse, and Seung-Hui Cho and found that the perpetrators employed characteristic techniques of self-representation, thereby constructing some sort of ideology behind their deed. In a second step, we contrasted the identified categories with available self-depictions of other shooters (e.g., self-staging on video or photo). The core elements of self-representation were as follows:

- *Between vulnerability and hate, powerlessness and fantasies of omnipotence*: On the one hand, the perpetrators openly or symbolically report their often precarious social experiences (typically experiences of contempt at school and in the family or peer group) which are accompanied by strong feelings of powerlessness, despair, and anger. On the other, these revelations are contrasted with self-definitions in which the future perpetrators depict themselves as heroic, martial, and omnipotent avengers.
- *Condemnation of the condemners*: The perpetrators use their self-portraits to attract public attention to the subjective injustices they have experienced. Those whom the perpetrators perceive as harming them by denial of recognition are condemned and severely denigrated according to self-defined moral yardsticks. The social environment becomes the object of blame for the perpetrators' own desolate psychosocial condition and is portrayed as repressive and unjust. While "condemnation of the condemners" (Sykes & Matza, 1957) is partly a neutralization technique for the purpose of justifying the perpetrator's violent intentions, it would also seem to take on the status of a central aspect of identity in the minds of the perpetrators, allowing them to redefine themselves by a demonstration of supremacy and dominance.
- *The call to a "revolution of the dispossessed"*: For the perpetrators, these self-representations appear to serve as justification for their own actions on the one hand and as a means of mobilizing potential successors on the other. They contain elements that may be regarded as appeals to members of their own group— in other words, to those who, like the perpetrators, feel themselves to be outcasts experiencing social exclusion, denigration, and contempt. Thus, the school shooting is propagated as a justified means of protest directed not only against the personal tormentor specifically, but *globally* against a (youth) culture and society that treats them as humiliated losers.

Our assumption is that both the self-representation of the shooters and the communicative outreach to their "fellow-sufferers" cause the perpetrators' self- and world-schema to become a possible identity model for other adolescents who likewise perceive themselves as despised rejects.[7] Additionally, identifying with persons who provide a cognitive world-schema of this kind may result in affiliation with a social group in which thoughts of retribution and vengeance can be articulated.

---

[7] Of course, we cannot claim that the described ideological components and feelings of group belonging are part of the motivation and self-perception of *all* school shooters. While the academic discourse to date assumes that there is no uniform perpetrator profile (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010), the findings described here could possibly be paradigmatic for a certain subtype existing within a phenomenon that is as a whole heterogeneous and requires closer empirical scrutiny and definition.

14.3 Reception and Appropriation of the Shooters' Messages: Exploring a Research Gap

If we are to understand why certain adolescents pursue such an intense interest in the self-presentations of school shooters and draw on these as the interpretative frame for their own lifeworld and experience, the empirical approach must be based on a subject-oriented concept of media appropriation that takes systematic account of the individual dispositions of the recipients (needs, views, interests, social status, etc.) (Krotz, 2001; Wegener, 2008).

14.3.1 Theoretical Framework: Identity and Media Appropriation

New developments in internet-based communication offer enormous scope for identity, relationship, and information management, of which adolescents make especially active use in the course of their socialization (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Rhein, 2011). We define socialization as the productive processing of the individual's internal and external reality, thus building on a concept whose central point of reference is a subject capable of reflection and confronted with age- and gender-specific psychobiological development tasks and societal and institutional demands (Havighurst, 1974; Hurrelmann, 2006; Mansel, 1995).

Particular forms of appropriation, evaluation, and processing give rise to a reciprocal socialization process between the individual and the environment, in the course of which a stable experience of identity on the part of the subject emerges from the synthesis of successful individuation and integration processes. Social networks (in the case of adolescents, mainly family, school, and peer group) must be attributed central importance in this connection: On the one hand, social resources can be used to develop competences for dealing with central life challenges and to compensate competence deficits in particular fields; on the other, the social environment also represents the foundation for confident interaction between individual and environment (Hurrelmann, 2006). In the interactionist tradition we draw on here, it is argued that conscious human identity can only develop within a peer group: only where individuals are perceived, recognized, and reflected by others as unique psychophysical entities can they arrive at a conscious experience of their singular self and enter into a reflexive *self-relation* (Goffman, 1990/1959; Honneth, 1994; Mead, 1987). Emotionally appreciative and supportive intersubjective recognition is of existential importance for the emergence and maintenance of a consolidated and fundamentally *positive* sense of self and identity (Keupp et al., 2008).

Alongside the social and societal systems of meaning that provide the subject with cognitive, normative, and aesthetic categories for developing an understanding of self and world (Bachmair, 2005), the media have become increasingly central mediators between internal and external reality, with the possibility of reflection or even relocation and reconception of identity occurring in the interaction with particular media content (Charlton & Neumann-Braun, 1990; Neumann-Braun, 2005).

The various different forms of media appropriation are outlined in the following and serve as points of reference for the empirical analysis.

14.3.1.1 Identification and Projection

Cohen defines individual identification with media figures as "an imaginative process invoked as a response to characters presented within mediated texts. . . . While identifying with a character, an audience member imagines him- or herself being that character and replaces his or her personal identity and role as audience member with the identity and role of the character within the text" (2001, pp. 250–251). Either recipients find their preexisting personal dispositions confirmed (preferences, views, values, etc.) or they modify these in the course of the interaction with media models (Hoffmann, 2004). Wegener distinguishes three forms of identification, which can be regarded as specific acquisition patterns (2008):

- *Confirmatory identification*: Identification with the media reference person provides the recipient with new justifications and/or motivators for maintaining preexisting personal patterns of thought and behavior.
- *Corrective identification*: Identification with the media model leads the recipient to modify their own patterns of thought and behavior and adapt them to the media model.
- *Generative identification*: Identification with the media model leads the recipient to develop completely new patterns of thought and behavior.

Compared with this, in projection processes the media reference person in a sense becomes a representative of the recipient's own self. This means that the media figure can both function to provide external relief and security and serve as a projection screen for emotions and unfulfilled needs, or as legitimation for the recipient's actions (Wegener, 2008).

14.3.1.2 Parasocial Interaction

In certain respects, the appropriation mode of parasocial interaction resembles the modes of identification and interaction, "with the primary conceptual distinction being that, under parasocial interaction, media characters are still seen as 'other' and the consumer cognitively 'interacts' with them as if they were an external entity" (Sestir & Green, 2010, p. 275). According to Horton and Wohl, the attraction of parasocial interaction can be summarized in terms of the following aspects (1956):

- *Continuity*: The continuous media presence of a persona can provide a continuity of interaction that gives the recipient a feeling of dependability.[8] In the context of the present study, the characteristics of internet-based media are of particular significance

---

[8] Horton and Wohl also designate a media person as a persona (1956).

here: adolescents can pursue their interest in school shooters and their media legacies via numerous websites, video portals, and chat forums at any time of day or night.

- *Narration*: Where a recipient follows the media presence of a persona over a longer period, a shared history arises in the course of time. This also occurs through secondary media, where a recipient learns details about the life, interests, and personal opinions of a media actor via background reports, interviews, etc. The World Wide Web offers a multitude of information about school shooters and their deeds.
- *Intimacy*: The style of media formats can create an atmosphere that recipients interpret as intimate or personal between themselves and a media person. For example, some school shooters recorded video footage in their home or bedroom that grants the viewer a vivid insight into their living arrangements.

14.3.1.3   Communitization

The appropriation mode of communitization involves communicative processes in which a media person forms the starting and reference point of interaction and communication processes between media users (Charlton & Neumann-Braun, 1990). Furthermore, interest in a particular media person can function as a "vehicle of social communitization" for recipients (Wegener, 2008, p. 67), with the possibility of forming fan communities. In such a fan group, the media person (who may be a specific musician, actor, sports star, or, in our case, school shooter) represents a symbolic point of reference through which fans communicate and which they use for personal identity construction.[9] Membership of fan communities is especially attractive for adolescents, because they provide a framework within which to experiment with new roles and behavior patterns. Moreover, adolescents can satisfy their needs for contact, belonging, and entertainment in fan communities (Baacke, 1996; Fritzsche, 2003). The creation of fan communities does not per se depend on direct contact and increasingly takes place via internet-based media. For adolescents, the new computer-based communication technologies are increasingly "the crystallization point for scenes and fan cultures that have their own rules, rituals, and forms of belonging" (Vogelgesang, 2003, p. 4, translated).

14.3.2   Research Design

In order to do justice to research questions exploring the preferred modes of juvenile interaction with the subject of school shootings, we needed a methodology that allowed us to reconstruct both the subjective perspectives of actors and the latent meaning of their activities. To this end, the study is based on the paradigms of inter-

---

[9] In this connection, Sumiala writes of "networked communities of destruction," which she describes as "virtual global communities held together by a social imaginary constructed around the visualization of texts of death and violence" (2011).

pretative social research and rests on the methodological pillars of grounded theory.[10] Survey participants were selected by theoretical sampling, with a sample initially defined by criteria of relevance and variability (Flick, 2007).

The *criterion of relevance* referred to the YouTube user's perceptible interest in the subject of school shootings, as indicated by:

- Active participation in group discussions relating to the issue
- A personal channel that made direct references to school shootings or shooters
- The subject's own production and publication of videos on school shootings

The *criteria of variability* comprised:

- Attitude to the issue
- Mode and intensity of presentation of opinions
- Age, gender, and nationality

Relevant cases were added until the criterion of "theoretical saturation" was satisfied (Strauss & Corbin, 1996).[11] The sample ultimately comprised 14 females and 17 males aged 15–24. An overview of their central socio-demographic characteristics is provided in Table 14.2.

The use of online interviews appeared to be an appropriate means to generate profitable interactions with recipients.[12] They allowed us to gain authentic access to the research subjects, because the spatial and temporal disjoint inherent in computer-mediated communication meant that participants responded from within their familiar environment and without disruption to their daily rhythm and routines.[13]

---

[10] This is an inductive-deductive method characterized by a permanent search for a balance between theory-driven work and empirical openness (Rosenthal, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1996; Strübing, 2004).

[11] In connection with the present study, this refers to the point at which, after an exhaustive case comparison, no additional cases could be identified on YouTube that presented identifiable but hitherto unobserved facets of reception relating to the media self-presentations of school shooters. However, it must be pointed out that social interaction patterns on YouTube are not fixed, with numerous new users joining every day while others terminate their activities. Thus, this virtual community is in permanent flux, and here more than anywhere we cannot expect to identify "final and conclusive" empirical results.

[12] We joined YouTube and created a special user's channel for the purpose of contacting subjects. The research process extended over a period of 18 months (06/2008 to 11/2009). In the initial pretest phase, data was collected in synchronous chat interviews. The subsequent e-mail survey used a qualitative questionnaire that allowed the adolescents to have only minimal contact with the researchers if they so wished. In some cases, however, communication extended over a period of several months by exchange of e-mails.

[13] Within open/communicative qualitative social research, there is a widespread tendency to tie the value of qualitative data to a personal encounter between subject and researcher (Früh, 2000). In some respects, especially with regard to central principles of qualitative social research (naturalistic and communicative inquiry) this would appear to be outdated, especially considering the expansive societal mediatization processes of past decades (that are so important for adolescents) (Baacke, Sander, & Vollbrecht, 1990; Krotz, 2007). Computer-mediated communication using structured online interviews appears to satisfy this paradigm especially well, because e-mail is one of the most internationally prevalent communication tools of the twenty-first century (van Eimeren & Frees, 2011).

Table 14.2 Overview of the sample

No.	User name	Sex	Age	Country	Occupation	Housing
01	False	M	19	Germany	Unemployed	Parents
02	SophieX	F	20	Germany	Unemployed	Mother
03	Moviator	M	19	Germany	Student	Mother
04	HateInVain	F	24	Germany	Student	Alone
05	XIncognito	M	19	Germany	Military service	Barracks
06	Angel92	F	16	Israel	Student	Mother
07	Charlie C.	M	16	United States	Student	Mother or father
08	Jordon	M	19	Germany	Unemployed	Parents
09	Totentanz	F	18	Germany	Student	Parents
10	Karakara	F	16	Finland	Student	Parents
11	Didimonkey	F	21	Canada	Employee	Husband/daughter
12	Graveyard89	M	17	Germany	Student	Parents
13	DarkImperium	M	15	Scotland	Student	Mother
14	FireBird	M	19	United States	Student	Dormitory
15	Sora	F	23	Germany	Housewife	Partner
16	SuddenDeath	M	16	Germany	Student	Parents
17	MasterFro	M	15	Germany	Student	Parents
18	Helena L.	F	21	Sweden	Student	Parents
19	VodkasArmy	M	16	United States	Student	Parents
20	TheSnake	M	17	Germany	Student	Parents
21	BomberPilot	declined	declined	United States	Unemployed	Parents
22	UnwantedOutcast	F	18	United States	Student	Parents
23	LadyReb	F	21	United States	Unemployed	Parents
24	TPO	F	22	Poland	Student	Alone
25	DirtySunshine	F	21	Germany	Apprentice	Alone
26	Pechsträhne	F	20	Germany	Student	Parents
27	SneakersGuy	M	17	Germany	Student	Parents

(continued)

Table 14.2 (continued)

No.	User name	Sex	Age	Country	Occupation	Housing
28	BBT	M	16	Germany	Student	Parents
29	Masochist3	F	21	Germany	Unemployed	Father
30	Sergio	M	24	Panama	declined	declined

Note: Personal details and user names have been anonymized. Emphasis and errors of spelling and grammar in quoted interview passages correspond to the originals

It also provided us with the possibility of reaching a geographically very diverse sample quickly and directly (Bampton & Cowton, 2002; Chen & Hinton, 1999; Houston, 2008; Mann & Stewart, 2000).

The textuality, anonymity, and asynchronicity of computer-mediated communication appeared especially promising for an exploration of the planned interview themes (including attitudes to serious acts of violence and personal experience of victimization in the school context), as the addressees were plainly adolescents who specifically sought the anonymity of the internet to pursue and discuss their (sometimes controversial) views, psychosocial problems, and aspects of the self. We thus shared an interest with the participants in creating an open and trustful communication climate, in order to gain authentic results (Flick, 2007). We made compound use of the "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004): respondents were able to respond to the largely open-ended questions anonymously, invisibly, in their own time, and in the form of their choosing (freely associated or well considered), and were able to do this without fear of rejection, condemnation, or any other reaction that would be experienced as unpleasant or invasive.

The survey focused on the following themes:

1. User behavior on YouTube, especially whether respondents had produced their own videos on the subject of school shootings and to what extent they watched other users' videos on the same subject.
2. The extent to which respondents were more generally interested in school shootings and their contexts (also outside the internet). Here we sought information about whether respondents believed school shootings to be justified and how they felt about media reporting on the issue.
3. The personal situation of respondents, focusing especially on school experiences, family situation, and leisure activities.

The data was evaluated in accordance with grounded theory, using processes of open, axial, and selective coding to produce a differentiated picture of respondents' individual appropriation patterns in relation to school shooters' self-presentations.[14]

14.4 Defining the Audience: Reception and Appropriation of the Shooters' Messages

Through repeated minimal/maximal case comparisons among the 31 respondents (comparing and contrasting the most similar and most different cases), we were able to distinguish and characterize group-specific modes of reception. We turn first to

---

[14] The multistage coding and analysis process of grounded theory was applied as follows (Strauss, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1996): *open coding* to conceptualize specific appropriation patterns concerning school shooters and their media legacies; *axial coding* to examine the situative contextual conditions (individual psychosocial and biographical constellations) of the recipients in relation to their individual appropriation patterns and develop initial reception types; and finally *selective coding* to continue axial coding at a higher level of abstraction. Using the key category of *"identification"* allowed us to differentiate and compare the identified reception types.

the "identification group," beginning by illustrating the characteristics of affective, identificatory appropriation processes with a single case that prototypically exemplifies the phenomenon. Then we compare and contrast the other respondents in that group, using minimal contrasting to systematically draw out commonalities and subtle differences. Finally, we move on to the cases or groups where, for various reasons, *no* identification with school shooters and their views was found, highlighting the basal differences and maximal contrasts between identificatory and nonidentificatory reception.

14.4.1   Identificatory Modes of Relatedness to School Shooters

14.4.1.1   Introducing the Prototypical Case: "VodkasArmy," a Reject Searching for Fellow Sufferers

At the time of the survey VodkasArmy was 16 years old, living with his parents and two sisters in the United States, and attending high school. His YouTube membership was primarily for "entertainment and research" (F19–133), he said. He predominantly watched video material dealing with his favorite music groups and video games, as well as with school shooters and shootings.

Before examining data from the e-mail questionnaire, we will begin by describing VodkasArmy's virtual self-presentation: (a) his personal YouTube channel and (b) the videos uploaded there.

(a) *Personal YouTube channel*: VodkasArmy's channel features a personal logo composed of two machine guns and two knives, above which "Pain Productions" is written in red letters on a black background. His introductory text describes the channel as follows:

> Hey there. Welcome to my channel. […] This is my new one since my last time it was deleted after last school shooting. If you want to talk to me, add me on msn. My videos will be mostly about school shooters. Why you might ask, because I know how they feel. I know what it feels like to be kicked down, how it feels like when no one in the world likes you. When everyone despises you, even tho you only want two things…….love and happiness. They never got theirs, and I feel like I won't either…

Here we can already identify several various aspects of individual appropriation of school shooter self-depictions. In connection with a clearly articulated interest in shootings and shooters, VodkasArmy makes an explicit offer of communication to other YouTube users. This also expresses his wish for communitization. There are also significant indications of strong identification with school shooters: he regards them as figures who, like himself, feel excluded, ignored, and humiliated. VodkasArmy makes it absolutely clear that he sees himself as an outsider who is desperately lacking in social resources and suffers massively as a result.

(b) *Uploaded videos*: At the time of the research, VodkasArmy had uploaded three videos, all of which relate directly to school shooters and their acts of violence:

- In "Eric Harris" VodkasArmy presents various quotes from Harris's diaries and internet presentations in the form of an artistic film montage. The final sequence shows photographs of the crosses for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold that are part of a memorial to the victims of the Columbine attack, above the words: "GONE. R.I.P REB. R.I.P. VODKA. YOU WILL LIVE ON, IN GLORY!"
- "Weapons" shows an advert for an American metal detector manufacturer suggesting that the introduction of metal detectors and school uniforms that make it difficult to hide guns could play a decisive role in preventing acts of armed violence.
- The third video is a documentary on the phenomenon of bullying and postulates a connection between experiences of bullying and the motivation of school shooters. Quotes from Luke Woodham, Eric Harris, and Cho-Seung Hui are used to back this up. The closing sequence of the video calls on parents, teachers, and pupils to be more caring and empathic with one another.

In short, the way VodkasArmy presents himself on YouTube suggests intense, emotionally sympathetic processes of identification with the perpetrators. We now turn, using data from the e-mail questionnaire, to his home life and other aspects of his appropriation of perpetrators' media self-presentations.

14.4.1.2 Personal Background: From Rejection to Hate

VodkasArmy complains of lacking emotional support within his family. He repeatedly complains that he has nobody within the family to support him in coping with his personal problems: "Family is supposed to be where you feel safe, comfortable and where you could be at and not be judged and actually be happy but sadly that's not what happens in my family" (F19–137). This quote makes two things clear: Firstly, his wish to find more emotional empathy in the family system, and secondly, the existence of interpersonal conflicts in which he feels looked down upon and judged. His relationship with his siblings is especially conflictual: "I don't have a future, as so kindly said by my sisters" (F19–137). This debasing comment about his personal prospects appears to severely hurt the respondent and provoke strong feelings of sadness, anger, and disappointment.

VodkasArmy's experiences in the school and peer contexts are characterized by equally grave feelings of stress and frustration. According to his reports, these stem from a multitude of negative social experiences which he finds extremely burdensome. Asked what problems he is confronted with at his high school, he answers: "Bullying from friends, and from classmates ignoring you always calling you stupid, always saying that you were fat, always calling you names just because you thought differently" (F19–136). Given that he plainly does not connect these nega-

tive social experiences with personal fault, he has no constructive possibility for escaping these aversive interactions of his own volition. In the past, as he reports himself, this has repeatedly led him to adopt the role of the bully: "I've experienced it all. On both sides, the bully and the bullied. I only was the bully because I had so much anger in me, I just couldn't keep it to myself" (F19–136).

These statements suggest that repeated attacks on his feeling of self-worth generated considerable feelings of aggression that almost inevitably demanded an escape valve. But to VodkasArmy, this form of letting off steam plainly failed to adequately compensate the numerous emotional and moral transgressions he suffered. At the time of the survey, he appeared transfixed by the idea of bottling up his anger for a final as yet undefined catharsis: "I still have anger, much more than before but I just learned to save it for the day when I can release it all" (F19-136).

14.4.1.3   The Parasocial Relationship with Dylan Klebold: Feelings of Sameness and Affinity

VodkasArmy became aware of the topic of school shootings through the Columbine case, and he immediately showed admiration and approval: "I thought it was cool, I thought that'd be the way I'd die if I popped my top at school. Kill all these people" (F19–134).

The primary basis for his identification was Dylan Klebold's diary, which the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office published on the internet in 2001 together with the writings of Eric Harris:

> I just find it interesting because when I look at what VoDKa [Klebold] wrote in his book of existence, I know what he was feeling then. When I first read his journal, it was like someone saw inside of me and knew what I was feeling and wrote it down for me. I do engage on it ouside, my sister calls me a weirdo and a freak for talking about it. And everyone else at school thinks so too, those fuckheads (F19–135).

To VodkasArmy, Klebold's words plainly succeed in expressing that hopeless yearning for belonging and confirmation for which he himself finds no words. Here, he uses Klebold's self-revelations as a projection screen to gain awareness of his own feelings:

> I feel like as if we felt the same feelings. Like VoDKa said, *My existence is shit to me, how I feel that I am in eternal suffering.*
> Me is a god, a god of sadness
> Exiled to this eternal hell
> The people I helped, abandoned me
> I am denied what I want,
> to love & to be happy
> Being made a human
> without the possibility of BEING human
> The cruellest of all punishments
> To some I am crazy
> It is so clear, yet so foggy
> Everything's connected, separated
> I am the only interpreter of this.

> I'd rather have nothing than be nothing.
> Humanity is the same thing I long for
> I just want something I can never have..
> The story of my existence.
> That was made by VoDKa, it's pretty accurate of how I feel. It's so accurate that I can't believe it. I am called crazy at school, and most the friends I once helped have left me. Some just ignore me until they need me again (F19–136).

VodkasArmy's recognition of a fellow-sufferer in Klebold is associated with an intense feeling of parasocial connection. This also makes Harris and Klebold's thoughts and actions highly attractive as a frame for asserting his own identity: They show him a potential way to end his own situation, which he experiences as unbearable, and channel his agonizingly bottled-up emotions into a final act of retribution against his tormentors:

> *Interviewer*: What do you think are the motives for a young person to attack his mates and teachers?
> *VodkasArmy*: Revenge, and a release from all their troubles. It'll be finally a way for them to show people all the anger, all the emotions that they've kept. And then it'll be ended so no one can judge them while their alive.
> *Interviewer*: Do you perceive any commonalities between the perpetrators?
> *VodkasArmy*: Anger, so much of it (F19–135).

14.4.1.4   Admiration and Solidarity

Through the continual experience of psychosocial denials of recognition, VodkasArmyhas plainly lost any hope of being able to change his situation through his own efforts. Here, too, he recognizes parallels to the school shooters, interpreting their protesting public self-representations as essentially desperate cries for help:

> *Interviewer*: According to your opinion, why did the perpetrators announce their plans in the internet or other media?
> *VodkasArmy*: To get help. Help as in for someone to come and talk to them. Someone to see past all that violent talk, past all of that and for someone to see that they need help. Or for someone to just tell them that their life does mean something and that they shouldn't do anything as glorious as that (F19–134).

Although VodkasArmy recognizes the school shooters as persons who are, like himself, extremely powerless with respect to their environment, he nonetheless regards their deeds as "glorious" and the perpetrators as martyrs whose actions draw public attention to grave social grievances. On the basis of his own experience he unhesitatingly evaluates the shootings as justified:

> *Interviewer*: Could you please describe what kind of thoughts and emotions were evoked in yourself while watching the "farewell-video" of Cho Seung Hui or that of another school shooter?
> *VodkasArmy*: Disbelief-I thought this is one of us and he's getting *his* message out. And at the same time apprehensive, people could see this and what would others say about it. What if they start looking for people who have said they wanted to shoot their school (F19–134).

14.4.2   Characterizing the Identification Group: Comparisons of Minimal Difference

14.4.2.1   Precarious Lives: Severe Problems in Family, School, and Peer-Group

All respondents who identify with school shooters report fundamental dissatisfaction with their family situation. With one exception (Charlie C.), none have a reference figure in the family who provides the desired empathy and support, and they feel left alone with their problems large and small. All the respondents perceive this emotional detachment in family relationships as a deficit or burden; some are also distressed by intra-family interactions that make them feel actively rejected and devalued (SophieX, VodkasArmy, Charlie C.). Thus Charlie C., for example, who experiences only the relationship with his older sister as positive, describes the general family atmosphere as exceptionally conflictual:

> *Charlie C.*:My family has nothing but fighting, and it doesn't help when you go to talk to someone and the other's fight over you wanting to know what it is you said (F7–47).

Overall, however, the family atmosphere appears to be characterized by indifference and lack of parental empathy:

> *FireBird*: My parents are nice but I find it hard to talk to them about things that matter to me or my problems because they are very religious and their religious beliefs conflict with anything that I might tell them about how I feel (F14-93f).

At school pressure to achieve is less of an issue than everyday social interactions with fellow students and teachers, which are perceived as torment:

> *SophieX*: The other students picked on me terribly, day in day out, and even the class teacher. Just because I weighed more than others back then. There was not a day without bullying (F2–10f., translated).
> *SuddenDeath*: I myself was beaten, spat on, and humiliated […] In my case, they took all my clothes and even my towels away in the pool changing rooms and filmed it all with their cell phones (F16–116, translated).
> *SneakersGuy*: At 13 or 14 I was overweight, my main hobby was computers, and I was shy. The perfect formula for a victim of bullying. I was often bullied, insulted, beaten up (F27–187, translated).
> *Charlie C.*:I get picked on because I'm Atheist, because I don't want to accept what most people believe. And I get called a "Freak." (F7–46)

All the respondents from the identification group, without exception, report having experienced repeated verbal and/or physical slights and harassment by their fellow students.[15] They possess little in the way of positive connections to peers; some report having no contact at all to peers outside the context of school. Those who do report loose inclusion in cliques (SuddenDeath, SneakersGuy, False, and FireBird) indicate that these relationships are generally superficial in nature and

---

[15] It is conspicuous that, in most cases, teaching staff were not perceived as helpful or supportive, and consequently school as an institution was characterized as an unjust and threatening place.

therefore offer little in the way of deeper friendships. Only two respondents (SneakersGuy and FireBird) have a friend within the peer group with whom they maintain a close and trustful relationship. LadyReb said: "i feel alone, but for me this is how i want it. Because nobody would understand" (F23–159). This ambivalence reflects a significant moment in the experience of the affected adolescents: while painfully missing contact with peers, they at the same time openly or subtly complain that their peers are lacking in understanding, intolerant, or "stupid."

14.4.2.2   Cut to the Quick: Fatally Threatened Identities

We found different sequences and coping styles concerning individual problems in family, school, and peer group. At the time of the survey daily experiences of exclusion and contempt in the school context were still acute for two respondents (VodkasArmy and Charlie C.). While such occurrences may have been things of the past for the other respondents, they still had considerable impact on their current experience and action. In five cases, problematic social experiences had had a significant impact on respondents' personal lives. SophieX quit school without qualifications because she was "mentally at the end of her rope" (F2–11, translated). Comparable tendencies of deep psychoemotional exhaustion in direct connection with school experiences can also be inferred from the responses of FireBird, False, SneakersGuy, and LadyReb, whose state of mind at the time of the survey was largely characterized by feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and powerlessness. The result is a feeling of threatened identity:

> *SophieX*: I don't have a life anymore, no future, no nothing. I'm useless for everything. Because my school hated me, because I had no support in my family, and because I had no friends (F2–11, translated).
>   *False*: I have more than enough experience of [bullying] myself. It's almost a miracle that I'm still alive after all these years, I've been in therapy for over a year and I take antidepressants, but none of it really helps, I have no idea why […] at the moment I'm doing nothing, because I can't (social inhibitions), if I went to school or got a job I definitely wouldn't feel comfortable with it. […] I don't think there's anything interesting left in store for me in my life, for me the whole thing's just grey and depressing and that's the way it's going to be forever (F1–5, translated).
>   *SneakersGuy*: I don't think there's much that's nice about life (F27–188, translated).

VodkasArmy and Charlie C., who were still experiencing personal harassment at school, also demonstrated actively aggressive tendencies toward fellow students and bullies.

14.4.2.3   The Search for Relief: Media as Retreat

The respondents' experiences of victimization, restricted peer contact, and dysfunctional family relations are associated with a social withdrawal that is also reflected in their leisure activities. These center on the use of various media, especially

computer-mediated information and communication technologies. In part, this type of intense media use represents an attempt to flee a situation of social deficit in which needs and desires for belonging and emotional recognition remain unfulfilled:

> *Interviewer*: Do you have anyone close with whom you can speak about everyday or special problems?
>
> *AngryBe*: No. I unload my problems in forums, or if need be I write things down. It doesn't help in the long run, but it's better than letting everything stew inside (F31–212, translated).
>
> *SophieX*: No I don't. I've only got my computer and internet (F2–12, translated).
>
> *FireBird*: There is one close friend that I can talk to about my issues. I actually meet her on the internet as a result of making videos for YouTube (F14–94).

For most respondents, the anonymity of computer-mediated communication makes it easier to establish social contact and express personal opinions openly and authentically. This gives them the feeling of being able to assert their own real personality more strongly than in real-world social contexts.

14.4.2.4   Recourse to School Shooters' Media Self-Presentations

Respondents report pursuing their interest in school shootings above all via the internet, because only there do they find like-minded partners and only there are they able to communicate their opinions unfiltered. Their interest in shooters and shootings is fed in the first place by their own negative social experiences:

> *FireBird*: This topic is interesting to me because of the things in common that I have found with the perpetrators of such events. I share many of the same interests, likes, dislikes, and thoughts of people like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. I don't talk about this topic outside of the internet because it would not be socially acceptable to do so (F14–91).
>
> *SneakersGuy*: Many parts of Bastian Bosse's past match mine, so I can relate to it pretty well. If I had met him I think we would have become pretty good friends (F27–185, translated).
>
> *SophieX*: He [Bosse] was a wonderful person. Someone who was just as much an outsider (F2–8, translated)

On the basis of their perceived biographical and psychosocial commonalities, the recipients demonstrate great empathy with the fate of the perpetrators and show solidarity with their views and violent acts. Conspicuously, they experience this parasocial contact exceptionally intensely:

> *VodkasArmy*: I look at what VoDKa [Klebold] wrote in his book of existence, I know what he was feeling then. When I first read his journal, it was like someone sw inside of me and knew what I was feeling and wrote it down for me (F19–135).
>
> *FireBird*: I can still remember the way I felt as I read Eric's journal entries slowly (his hand writing was poor and I had to read each line carefully). […] I felt simply amazed at what I was reading. It was like all my bottled anger and contempt that I could not express was being poured out by Eric [Harris]. It just felt amazing to read his words and realize that I felt the same way; I just could not express it (F14–94).

The school shooters not only share similar social experiences, like exclusion and victimization, but describe the psychoemotional consequences of those experiences

in a manner in which the respondents precisely recognize their own feelings. These shared patterns of perception are significant components of a sense of *parasocial belonging* on the part of the respondents. Through this sense of belonging, they appear to a certain extent to experience the emotional recognition that is largely denied to them in the real-world context. Their turn to the media presentations of school shooters thus plainly serves to create meaning and assert identity: the perpetrators offer a frame within which to reflect personal burdens and their causes. The figurations of identification are confirmatory, but also corrective or generative. In extreme cases, the identification may be so strong that no distinction is made between self and perpetrator:

> *Interviewer*: Do you think the shooters had anything in common?
> *SophieX*: Yes, we do. We were all bullied and treated unfairly and worse too (F2–10, translated).

Individual identification is also expressed in performative elements, of which three principal forms can be differentiated:

(a) *Video productions on the subject of school shooting*: All the respondents in the identification group had produced at least one video on the subject, with which they attempt to correct what they perceived to be a distorted and inappropriate public image of the perpetrators. They see themselves as mediators seeking primarily to show the public the everyday, human, and vulnerable facets of the perpetrators:

> *FireBird*: I wanted to make videos that portrayed the perpetrators as humans, not as heroes or villains. […] I think that by doing this, people will come to better understand what happened (F14–94f).
> *SuddenDeath*: Mainly I showed the images where they look like absolutely normal people. That included photos as children with their parents, or simply just their homes and bedrooms (F16–110, translated).
> LadyReb: I want to obtain is people can realize there is more to them then what is put in the media, such as what kind of people they were […] how they were feeling (F23–156).

The strong emotions experienced by all the respondents while producing videos on the subject suggest that this is also accompanied by intense processes of self-reflection:

> *Interviewer*: What feelings accompanied the work of producing your video or videos?
> *SuddenDeath*: I was glad to finally be able to make videos that I had been thinking about for so long (F16–110, translated).
> *Charlie C.*: At first I did it for fun, but then I realized that I knew a lot on the topic (F7–43).
> *LadyReb*: awe, admiration, sadness, sorrow (F23–156).
> *SophieX*: Mainly sadness, hate for the people who drove him [Bosse] to it (F2–8, translated).

The school shooters are in many respects treated as surrogates for the self, publicly articulating and representing views that had hitherto been kept very private. This appears especially attractive in a context where the uploaded videos generally

become the point of reference for diverse communication processes with other YouTube users.

(b) *Self-presentation on YouTube*: Central elements of self-presentation in the respondents' personal YouTube channels are conspicuously associated with the theme of school shootings:

- User names are in some cases directly connected with perpetrators, drawing in particular on the internet pseudonyms of Eric Harris (Reb) and Dylan Klebold (VoDKa) (for example, LadyReb, VodkasArmy).
- Respondents refer to negative school experiences or address these in their videos. The issue of bullying is prominent.
- Overlap between respondents and particular perpetrators is also found in music, film, and video game preferences, although this may simply be a product of general youth culture trends.

(c) *Real-world adoption of behavior patterns*: Whereas for most respondents in the identification group the elements of performative appropriation remained largely restricted to the virtual persona, they were also transferred to the real-world context in the cases of VodkasArmy, AngryBe, FireBird, and Charlie C.:

> *FireBird*: When I learned that Eric and Dylan were fans of bands like KMFDM and Rammstein, I checked out their music and really quite liked it. […] I also tried to watch as many of the movies that they liked as I could. In essence, I tried to become like them in many ways. I even considered, though I did not act upon, thoughts about doing what they did (F14–94).
> > *Interviewer*: Tell us about your leisure activities.
> > *AngryBe*: Well here I'm not writing anything direct. Find out what the hobbies of Robert [Steinhäuser] and Bastian [Bosse] were. – Macabre, but that's how it is (F31–212, translated).

In the cases of VodkasArmy, FireBird, and Charlie C., changes in self-presentation inspired by intense appropriation processes were also increasingly registered in the immediate social environment.

> *FireBird*: During that summer, my parents noticed my changed behavior and were very alarmed. They took me to a doctor and he prescribed an antidepressant medication. I actually wanted to be on some sort of antidepressant because I knew that Eric Harris had been on Zoloft and Luvox (F14–94).

One special peculiarity is found in the case of Charlie C., who already felt stigmatized by teachers and students as a potential school shooter. According to his reports, he got into considerable trouble with the school authorities after speaking with a tutor about school shooters and saying that he could definitely comprehend their motivations. The situation escalated after classmates drew the attention of teaching staff to his YouTube channel and his interest in Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. Thereafter he was regarded as a "time-bomb" (F7–45) and reminded of this on a daily basis at school. He felt so provoked that he had once threatened to really bring a gun to school. This had again only drawn the ridicule of his fellow students, who at the time of the survey still regularly greeted him, he said, with the mocking words: "Oh damn there's Charlie! He's gonna blow us away!" (F7–45).

14.4.3   Maximal Comparison: Identificatory vs. Nonidentificatory Relatedness to School Shooters

The findings outlined earlier demonstrate the connection between specific psycho-social constellations, characterized specifically by dereliction or violation of social recognition needs, and a resulting growing identification with school shooters. If we now compare these findings with those respondents who pursue an interest in perpetrators' media self-presentations but do *not* identify with their patterns of perception and interpretation, the question arises: What are the characteristics of the forms of reception and the psychosocial context factors in the case of "nonidentification"? A maximum-contrast juxtaposition of affective identificatory vs. nonidentificatory appropriation patterns provides further verification and validation of the robustness of the findings.

Respondents in the "nonidentification group" demonstrate diverse social backgrounds and widely differing individual lifeworlds and living situations. Alongside cultural differences (places of residence included United States, Central America, and eastern and central Europe) they exhibited widely diverging psychosocial characteristics, with experiences in the family ranging from sexual abuse in one case through to broadly helpful and emotionally supportive scenarios. In the crucial spheres of peer group and school, we also found a diversity of situations, with some respondents integrated in a stable and extensive social network and others perceiving themselves as excluded, isolated, or neglected. It is notable that almost all the respondents in the nonidentification group also reported some kind of experience with bullying.

What distinguished these respondents from their counterparts in the identification group is the following: Despite apparently grave problems in one or several spheres in certain cases, almost all the former were integrated in relationship networks that they experienced as adequately positive and supportive; problems in certain social spheres were balanced by relevant help and coping resources in others. Respondents in the nonidentification group—in contrast to the identification cases—were thus able to compensate contempt and recognition violations (especially victimization in the school context) through the feeling of belonging, reciprocal esteem, and emotional recognition within the family or peer group. As a result, the individual experience of identity does not appear to be impaired and threatened to the same extent as it is in the identification cases. In this context, school shooters offer *no* attractive parasocial relationship satisfying a psychoemotional need to reflect negative social experiences and address them in online networks of like-minded individuals.

The decisive difference between identificatory and nonidentificatory reception thus lies in the individual needs and interests that prompt adolescents to turn to perpetrators' media presentations. The interest of the nonidentification group is driven less by the need to process their own problematic experiences. Instead, their available social contacts are sufficient for coping. These adolescents' interest in school shootings stems from other sources: appropriation patterns that can be largely characterized as information-, entertainment-, or discourse-led, as outlined below.

14.4.3.1 Reception and Socially Critical Reflection

For some recipients, the subject of school shooting is primarily a matter of interest in politics and society; these recipients primarily interpret the shootings as indicators of social grievances. Where the recipients themselves suffer to some extent as adolescents, as school students, or as nonconformists, they are perhaps able to comprehend the personal problems of the shooters, but differ from the identification group in placing a clear distance between themselves and the perpetrators. They may feel sympathy for their highly individual suffering, but they explicitly disassociate themselves on the moral plane:

> *UnwantedOutcast*: I have watched videos like that but I don't find them appealing. I find them sad that that person felt so depressed, hated and bullied, that this is what they had to resort too. Videos made by actual school shooters make my blood run cold and my heart break, it's like you're watching them die inside their own minds. It's heart-wrenching. […] People need to OPEN their pretty eyes and look the hell around (F22–152f).
>
> *HateInVain*: I find these videos very interesting because they express best what the perpetrators felt. People always ask what the reasons were for these deeds, although you can mostly find the answers in the videos. […] They [the perpetrators] wanted attention because it seems everyone ignored them. […] Fortunately I didn't have this problem (F4–24ff).
>
> *TheSnake*: That shows me how broken society is. I see how they are isolated and rejected. This person's environment and relationships are totally screwed up (F20–140).

Here the reception of such content does not lead to identification; instead these adolescents feel that their personal socially critical position is confirmed by the fate of the perpetrators.

14.4.3.2 Fascination for the Morbid and Inexplicable

A second reception pattern that can be identified in the sample feeds on the almost cineastic fascination of these tragic incidents and their apparent inexplicability. Thus, XIncognito said that his interest in his "favorite school shooter" Sebastian Bosse stemmed primarily from his general predilection "for the whole realm of human depravity" (F5–31, translated):

> *XIncognito*: Bowling for Columbine and the original CCTV recordings are paradigmatic. I feel much too much all at the same time when I think about it. If their plan had worked out a lot more people would have died. […] I have sympathy for all the victims and their friends and relatives, but all the same I would really like to know more about what the shooters were thinking" (F5–33, translated).

The respondents are visibly impressed by the performative elements. Rather than using them as a means of self-reflection, they assess the perpetrators' self-presentations for their suitability as entertainment. In contrast to the identification group, these assessment patterns clearly point to an emotional distance between recipient and shooter. Sergio sees the videos exclusively in terms of the possibility to pursue his enthusiasm for firearms, while the 21-year-old Masochist3 enthuses above all about the violence they show:

Interviewer: By what criteria do you decide whether another user has produced a "good" school shooting video?

    Masochist3: Hm, well of course first of all I decide according to the technical quality of the video, and then the content. But really what I want to see in such a video is violence. After all I don't play censored games either (F29–198f., translated).

As a rule, the entertainment value for the recipient is greatest when detailed information is provided about the events or original footage of the location is shown. For these recipients, violence-related content generally appears to feature prominently in the context of media use.

14.4.3.3 Reception Driven by Anxiety

The media self-presentations of school shooters generate strong feelings of fear, worry, and insecurity in some of the respondents in the nonidentification group, who believe it not unlikely that they or their friends/relatives could themselves become the victim of a school shooting:

Didimonkey: I have a daughter who will one day be in school… and it terrifies me knowing that there are people out there who could / will take actions into their own hands and use violence […] I always keep in mind that anything could happen at any moment. I work just on the outskirts of a University Campus, and the potential of a shooting is a very real possibility to me (F11–71ff).

Although these respondents can certainly empathize with the school shooters and their plight, and suspect underlying social problems, they massively condemn and reject their views and actions. Instead, with these respondents we find sympathy and *identification with the victims*. As *Helena L.* says: "Those kids died and their last minutes in life most have been such a complete terror. It's awful to think about" (F18–129).

YouTube contributions by these predominantly female respondents seek to commemorate the victims, for example by producing videos listing the names of students killed at Columbine High. The specific social backgrounds of these respondents create an interesting picture, as they come from social circumstances that they largely evaluate as positive:

Helena L.: Family to me is where I can feel safe and be myself. I am happy with the situation in my family. I also have a lot of friends that feels like family to me, plus my friends' parents who I can talk to about important things as well as with my own parents (F18–131).

These statements stand in stark contrast to those made by respondents from the identification group, who all expressed grave problems relating to a *lack* of social inclusion. The contrast between these two specific recipient groups ("identification" and "worry") confirms the hypothesis that adolescents who feel severe threat to their sense of identity are predisposed to identification with school shooters (through precarious social relations and associated recognition violations setting in motion a turn to media models who suffered a similar fate).

14.5   Résumé and Outlook

14.5.1   Summary of Results

We opened this chapter by considering the communicative-expressive elements of school shootings. A literature review and comparative case analysis identified shared patterns in the public self-presentations of perpetrators and in the modi operandi of their acts of violence. This revealed the importance of identification processes between school shooters and allowed us to identify a typical perpetrator's identity construction constituted by the articulation of subversive political fragments of ideology in media-staged narratives and performative protest codes. It became clear that, in advance of their acts of violence, most perpetrators had experienced what they subjectively perceived as extremely grave violations of recognition in their immediate social environment. Many school shooters plainly found a new sense of meaning in the self-presentations and deeds of their predecessors; they were able to perceive themselves as part of a group whose ideology and content allowed them to reinvent themselves as "omnipotent avengers" and thus assert their own ideas against a hostile social environment. Ideology and action scripts were thus reproduced from case to case.

In the second part, we moved on to examine the virtual fan groups that pursue their interest in school shootings on the internet. Whereas the role of identification processes has hitherto generally been reconstructed only in retrospect through the comparison of perpetrator self-presentations, our study produced empirically founded insights into broader qualitative dimensions of these identification figurations. We hypothesized that the expressive-communicative elements in particular would lead to specific forms of appropriation and identification under particular circumstances. Analysis of a survey of 31 adolescents showed that parts of the sample felt represented by the world views and self-interpretations of the perpetrators, regarding school shootings as morally justified acts directed against injustice in school and in society at large. According to our data, such affective-identificatory reception is rooted in grave psychosocial stresses in the socialization context. On the basis of perceived commonalities between their own life and the perpetrator's biography, recipients develop a psychologically highly significant parasocial interaction. This can also be understood as an elementary component of a strategy of identity assertion by which these adolescents respond to continuous experiences of harassment and powerlessness. In contrast to other appropriation types we identified, affective-identificatory reception occurs as the result of a social withdrawal process where no emotionally supportive resources appear available, in order to satisfy personal needs for belonging and recognition. While it would require large-scale representative surveys to determine whether this phenomenon is not limited to the individuals who participated in our survey, the qualitative findings presented here certainly point to a radicalized youth milieu where school shooters not only function as spokespersons for a larger group, but in a sense become the forerunners of a "revolution of the dispossessed."

14.5.2   Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research

Our focus on exploring the *commonalities* between the media self-narratives of various school shooters meant that the *differences* between perpetrator narratives fell by the wayside, along with the possibility of systematically categorizing, for example, diverging types of staging or case-specific peculiarities. Such a research focus would be useful to answer the still unresolved question as to whether some perpetrator personalities, individual life histories, or media-communicated views are more relevant than others for certain specific (groups of) recipients. Do particular forms of media (such as videos vs. diaries) or particular messages (for example political vs. religious) differ in the strength of their attraction, and do they lead to different forms of appropriation among adolescents?

More broadly, our findings on the importance of perpetrator self-presentations for the identity construction of identifying recipients represent merely a snapshot. The extent to which these adolescents will continue to turn to school shooters and treat them as fellow-sufferers and self-surrogates remains unclear. Such parasocial relationship and identification processes are quite possibly transient or specific to a particular developmental phase. Longitudinal studies would be necessary in order to analyze the biographical development of individual relationships to school shooters. Only thus would it be possible to draw empirical conclusions and judge whether perpetrators' media self-presentations represent enduring reference points for individual identity production through into adulthood. Where does affective-identificatory appropriation of these media lead? To increasingly radical interpretations of self and world? To subversive activism and violence? Or does self-reflexive interaction with the theme of school shootings help adolescent recipients to cope in the long term with their precarious psychosocial state? Do other themes and media models become more attractive through age-related maturing processes or significant changes in the lifeworld?

From the perspective of education science and socialization theory, it would certainly be counter-productive to stereotype the members of the virtual fan communities that form around school shooters as *dangerous* and use computer-based screening to search the web for potential perpetrators—as proposed by Veijalainen, Semenov, and Kyppö (2010). Equally, in the light of the evidence presented here, banning or censoring perpetrators' media self-presentations would appear to be short-sighted and ignore the underlying problems. The recipient survey clearly shows that identification with school shooters is favored where adolescents suffer massive impairment in their experience of self and identity as a consequence of repeated experiences of violation and powerlessness. School shooters' self-presentations convey a sense of understanding because they report similar experiences and similar existential feelings of being *not* recognized by their social environment, but rather humiliated, rejected, and alienated. The aspiration to successful participation in social life (social relations, career perspectives, etc.) is first abandoned and ultimately rejected. Feelings of anger and hate arise, radicalized attitudes and violence-affirming ideologies take root. Nonetheless, both the perpetrators and their young admirers reveal a deep need for communication and integration that has been consistently overlooked and ignored. It would be productive to take a preventive approach and meet the adolescents with the recognition and empathy they have otherwise been so painfully denied.

References

Altmeyer, M. (2002, May 2). Rampage-killing: Über das Töten auf offener Bühne. *Die Tageszeitung*. Retrieved October 2, 2012 from http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2002/05/02/a0266.

Baacke, D. (1996). Medienkompetenz: Die Welt als Clip? Jugendstile und Medien. In B. Schorb & H.-J. Stiehler (Eds.), *Medienlust – Medienlast: Was bringt die Rezipientenforschung den Rezipienten?* (pp. 193–204). Munich: KoPäd.

Baacke, D., Sander, U., & Vollbrecht, R. (1990). *Lebenswelten sind Medienwelten*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Bachmair, B. (2005). Mediensozialisation im Alltag. In L. Mikos & C. Wegener (Eds.), *Qualitative Medienforschung: Ein Handbuch* (pp. 95–114). Konstanz: UVK.

Bampton, R., & Cowton, C. J. (2002). The e-interview. *Forum Qualitative Social Research, 3*(2). Retrieved October 2, 2012 from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/848/1842.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim and Munich: Juventa.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2010). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Sitzer, P. (2012). Media dynamics in school shootings: A socialization theory perspective. In G. W. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *School shootings: Mediatized violence in a global age* (pp. 25–46). Bingley: Emerald.

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 27–37.

Böttger, A. (1998). *Gewalt und Biographie: Eine qualitative Analyse rekonstruierter Lebensgeschichten von 100 Jugendlichen*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Charlton, M., & Neumann-Braun, K. (1990). *Medienrezeption und Identitätsbildung*. Tübingen: Narr.

Chen, P., & Hinton, S. M. (1999). Realtime interviewing using the World Wide Web. *Sociological Research Online, 4*(3). Retrieved October 2, 2012 from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/3/chen.html.

Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication & Society, 4*(3), 245–264.

Dewan, S., & Santora, M. (2007, 19 April). Officials knew troubled state of killer in '05. *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 2, 2012 from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/19/us/19gunman.html.

Fahlenbrach, K. (2008). Protest-Räume – Medien-Räume: Zur rituellen Topologie der Straße als Protest-Raum. In S. M. Geschke (Ed.), *Straße als kultureller Aktionsraum: Interdisziplinäre Betrachtungen des Straßenraums an der Schnittstelle zwischen Theorie und Praxis* (pp. 98–111). Wiesbaden: VS.

Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. New York: Overlook.

Flick, U. (2007). *Qualitative Sozialforschung*: Eine Einführung (new revised and expanded ed.). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.

Fritzsche, B. (2003). *Pop-Fans: Studie einer Mädchenkultur*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Früh, D. (2000). Online-Forschung im Zeichen des Qualitativen Paradigmas: Methodologische Reflexion und empirische Erfahrungen. *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, *1*(3). Retrieved October 2, 2012 from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0003353.

Frymer, B. (2009). The media spectacle of Columbine: Alienated youth as an object of fear. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(10), 1387–1404.

Gibbs, N., & Roche, T. (1999, December 20). The Columbine tapes. *Time*. Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,992873-1,00.html.

Goffman, E. (1990). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin. (original work published 1959).

Gomes, D. (2012). *Numerous sectors attack bullying in Brazil.* Global Press Institute. Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://www.globalpressinstitute.org/global-news/americas/brazil/numerous-sectors-attack-bullying-brazil.

Havighurst, R. (1974). *Developmental tasks and education* (3d ed.). New York: McKay.

Heintz, B. (2003). Gemeinschaft ohne Nähe? Virtuelle Gruppen und reale Netze. In U. Thiedeke (Ed.), *Virtuelle Gruppen*: *Charakteristika und Problemdimensionen* (2d rev. and updated ed.) (pp. 188–218). Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Hoffmann, D. (2004). Zum produktiven Umgang von Kindern und Jugendlichen mit medialen Identifikationsangeboten. *merz-wissenschaft, Zeitschrift für Medienpädagogik, 48*(6), 7–19.

Honneth, A. (1994). *Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry, 19*, 215–229.

Houston, M. (2008). Tracking transition: Issues in asynchronous e-mail interviewing. *Forum Qualitative Social Research, 9*(2). Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0802116.

Hurrelmann, K. (2006). *Einführung in die Sozialisationstheorie* (9th ed.). Weinheim & Basel: Beltz.

Kellner, D. (2008). *Guys and guns amok: Domestic terrorism and school shootings from the Oklahoma City bombings to the Virginia Tech massacre*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Keupp, H., Ahbe, T., Gmür, W., Höfer, R., Mitzscherlich, B., Kraus, W., et al. (2008). *Identitätskonstruktionen: Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne* (4th ed.). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011a). Soundtrack of the school shootings: Cultural script, music and male rage. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 19*(3), 247–269.

Kiilakoski, T., & Oksanen, A. (2011b). Cultural and peer influences on homicidal violence: A Finnish perspective. *New Directions for Youth Development, 33*(129), 31–42.

Krotz, F. (2001). *Die Mediatisierung kommunikativen Handelns: Der Wandel von Alltag und sozialen Beziehungen, Kultur und Gesellschaft durch Medien*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Krotz, F. (2007). *Mediatisierung: Fallstudien zum Wandel von Kommunikation*. Wiesbaden: VS.

Langman, P. (2007). *Pekka-Eric Auvinen online*. Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Subject-Auvinen_files/Pekka-Eric%20Auvinen%20Online.pdf

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Lindgren, S. (2011). YouTube gunmen? Mapping participatory media discourse on school shooting videos. *Media, Culture & Society, 33*(1), 1–14.

Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet communication and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online*. London: Sage.

Mansel, J. (1995). *Sozialisation in der Risikogesellschaft: Eine Untersuchung zu psychosozialen Belastungen Jugendlicher als Folge ihrer Bewertung gesellschaftlicher Bedrohungspotentiale*. Neuwied, Kriftel, & Berlin: Luchterhand.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger. *Forensic Examiner, 8*, 1–16.

Mead, G. H. (1987). Der Mechanismus des sozialen Bewusstseins. In H. Joas (Ed.), *George H. Mead: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vol. 1, pp. 232–240). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Meyer, J. P., Migoya, D., & Osher C. N. (2007, December 12). "Your Columbine": Gunman wrote of rejection as reason for revenge. *The Denver Post*. Retrieved from http://www.denverpost.com/ci_7696043.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.

Muschert, G. W., & Larkin, R. W. (2007). The Columbine high school shootings. In S. Chermak & F. Y. Bailey (Eds.), *Crimes and trials of the century* (Vol. 2, pp. 253–266). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Muschert, G. W., & Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and control of violence: Communication in school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 345–361). New York: Springer.

Neumann-Braun, K. (2005). Strukturanalytische Rezeptionsforschung. In L. Mikos & C. Wegener (Eds.), *Qualitative Medienforschung: Ein Handbuch* (pp. 58–66). Konstanz: UVK.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

Newman, K. S., & Fox, C. (2009). Repeat tragedy: Rampage shootings in American high school and college settings 2002–2008. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1286–1308.

Northern Illinois University. (2008). *Report of the February 14, 2008 Shootings at Northern Illinois University*. Author. Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://www.niu.edu/feb14report/Feb14report.pdf.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Palen, L., Vieweg, S., Liu, S., & Hughes A. (2009). Crisis in a networked world: Features of computer mediated communication in the April 16, 2007 Virginia Tech event. *Social Science Computer Review*, *27*(5) (special issue on e-social science), 1–14.

Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. New York: Basic.

Rhein, S. (2011). Jugendliche und das internet: Soziologische Überlegungen und empirische Befunde. *Zeitschrift für Jugendkriminalrecht und Jugendhilfe, 22*(1), 52–58.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School Shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Robertz, F. J., & Wickenhäuser, R. (2007). *Der Riss in der Tafel: Amoklauf und schwere Gewalt in der Schule*. Heidelberg: Springer.

Rosenthal, G. (2005). *Interpretative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung*. Weinheim and Munich: Juventa.

Schmidtke, A., Schaller, S., Stack, S., Lester, D., & Müller, I. (2005). Imitation of amok and amok-suicide. In J. McIntosh (Ed.), *Suicide 2002: Proceedings of the 35th annual conference of the American Association of suicidology* (pp. 205–209). Washington, DC: American Association of Suicidology.

Sestir, M., & Green, M. C. (2010). You are who you watch: Identification and transportation effects on temporary self-concept. *Social Influence, 5*, 272–288.

Sitzer, P. (2002). Jugend und Gewalt: Zur Grammatik von Missachtung und Identitätsentwicklung. Paper given at the symposium "Psychodynamik des aggressiven Verhaltens bei Kindern und Jugendlichen" at the 27th conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie und Psychotherapie in Berlin.

Strauss, A. L. (1994). *Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung: Datenanalyse und Theoriebildung in der empirischen soziologischen Forschung*. Munich: Fink.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1996). *Grounded Theory: Grundlagen Qualitativer Sozialforschung*. Weinheim: Beltz.

Strübing, J. (2004). *Grounded Theory: Zur sozialtheoretischen und epistemologischen Fundierung des Verfahrens der empirisch begründeten Theoriebildung*. Wiesbaden: VS.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyber Psychology and Behavior, 7*, 321–326.

Sullivan, M. L., & Guerette, R. T. (2002). The copycat factor: Mental illness, guns, and the shooting incident at Heritage High School, Rockdale County, Georgia. In M. H. Moore, C. V. Petrie, A. A. Braga, & B. L. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence* (pp. 25–69). Washington, DC: The National Academic Press.

Sumiala, J., & Tikka, M. (2010). "Web first" to death: The media logic of the school shootings in the era of uncertainty. *Nordicom Review, 31*(2), 17–29.

Sumiala, J. (2011). Circulating communities online: The case of the Kauhajoki school shooting. *M/C Journal, 14*(2). Retrieved October 02, 2012 from http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/321.

Sykes, G. M., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review, 22*, 664–670.

van Eimeren, B., & Frees, B. (2011). Drei von vier Deutschen im Netz—ein Ende des digitalen Grabens in Sicht? Ergebnisse der ARD/ZDF-Onlinestudie 2011. *Media Perspektiven, 7–8*, 334–349.

Veijalainen, J., Semenov, A., & Kyppö, J. (2010). Tracing potential school shooters in the digital sphere. *Communications in Computer and Information Science, 76*, 163–178.

Vogelgesang, W. (2003). *Wie beeinflusst das Netz die Jugendkultur*. Mainz: rlp-inform.

Wegener, C. (2008). *Medien, Aneignung und Identität: „Stars" im Alltag jugendlicher Fans*. Wiesbaden: VS.

Part IV
Prevention and Intervention Concepts

Chapter 15
International Perspectives on Prevention and Intervention in School Shootings

**Rebecca Bondü, Herbert Scheithauer,
Vincenz Leuschner, and Dewey G. Cornell**

15.1   General Considerations and Problems

Especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century, school shootings have been an infrequent but increasing problem. School shootings have occurred in at least 23 different countries, distributed on all continents, making them a global phenomenon. The general increase in the number of offenses includes a rising number of extremely violent school shootings that leave large numbers dead and/or wounded (Bondü, 2012). The most severe offenses receive widespread media attention and have inflamed great public fear and uncertainty about the safety of our schools. Although school shootings are statistically rare events, they have a devastating impact on schools and communities. In response to intense public concern, there have been many proposals for preventive action. However, because of methodological problems and limitations, predicting and preventing school shootings is a difficult task (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2009, 2010; Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Cornell, 2006).

A key conceptual problem lies in the lack of a consistent definition of the phenomenon. There is general agreement that school shootings can be defined as offenses by a present or former student who purposely chooses his or her school as the site to carry out an attempt to kill one or more persons. However, there is no consensus on details of the definition, which Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2002) referred to as a "case definition

R. Bondü (✉)
Department for Psychology, University of Potsdam,
Karl-Liebknecht-Str. 24-25, 14476 Potsdam, Germany
e-mail: rebecca.bondue@uni-potsdam.de

H. Scheithauer • V. Leuschner
Department of Educational Science and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin,
Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195, Berlin, Germany
e-mail: herbert.scheithauer@fu-berlin.de; vincenz.leuschner@fu-berlin.de

D.G. Cornell
Curry School of Education, University of Virginia,
405 Emmet Street South, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA

problem." The definition might include any attempt to kill someone, regardless of the outcome, or it may be limited to cases in which one or more persons are killed. There are also questions concerning whether prior planning is required and whether a firearm must be used. Because some students have used weapons other than firearms, alternatives to the term "school shooting" have been suggested, such as school rampage, lethal school violence, targeted violence in schools, or homicidal violence in schools. However, most of these terms face the converse problem of being too broad and not clearly differentiating school shootings from other lethal acts in school. These variations in definition not only affect the selection of cases for study, they lead to different calculations of their frequency and hinder comparisons between studies.

However, the chief difficulty in studying and preventing school shootings is their low frequency, that is, the low base rate. Although the United States averaged 21 student homicide fatalities per year over a 10-year period, with approximately 125,000 schools, the average school can expect such a student killing every 6,000 years (Borum et al., 2010). In Germany, which has around 43,500 schools, there have been 12 school shootings in the past 13 years; consequently, the average school can expect a similar student attack every 40,000 years. Thus, simply predicting that no student will carry out a violent attack will be correct more than 99.99% of the time. This leads to several methodological problems:

– Due to the low occurrence rate of school shootings, there are few offenses to study, and reliable data are hard to acquire (i.e., case files/court records, interview data). Easily accessible information in the news media is more often than not imprecise and stereotyped (Muschert & Larkin, 2007). Therefore, the quality of the data underlying research results is often not clear.
– Small sample sizes may generate statistically unreliable findings that capitalize on chance.
– Studies of school shootings have to date been conducted without comparison groups (see Harding et al., 2002, for more detail on the problem of defining suitable comparison groups), making it difficult to determine whether there are "risk factors" that are specific to these offenders. In those cases where comparative data are available (i.e., cases with suicidal ideation, violent media usage; see below for more details), they do not seem specific to school shooters and are sometimes quite common among adolescents.
– Research on school shootings is limited to retrospective analyses of offenses, further hampering the identification of *causal* risk factors. Longitudinal, prospective studies would require extremely large samples and raise ethical questions about the need for interventions with high-risk youth.
– Because not all relevant cases have yet been used for research on school shootings (e.g., because relevant data are hard to obtain) studies often rely on overlapping cases, making it difficult to replicate previous results in independent samples or generate new findings.
– Finally, cultural differences may make cross-national generalizations difficult. For example, a recent study of German school shootings suggests that there are important differences between US-American and German offenders (Bondü, 2012).

Prevention depends on the ability to identify high-risk youth, but efforts to pinpoint reliable risk factors have not been successful.

– First of all, the risk factors that seem to be most prevalent among the small population of students who commit school attacks have little specificity. Specificity refers to the percentage of nontarget cases that are correctly identified, i.e., what proportion of nonviolent students in the entire population are appropriately excluded from the intervention. This means that the risk factors are so common in the general population that they are not useful predictors. For example, three factors generally considered important risk factors for school shootings are violent media consumption, suicidal ideation, and experiences of bullying. However, in a representative sample of German children and adolescents, 51% of boys and 10% of girls played violent video games (Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund, 2010). More than one-third of a sample of German adolescents had thought about suicide or even talked about it with friends (Plener, Libal, Keller, Fegert, & Mühlenkamp, 2009). Finally, studies around the world find victimization rates for bullying in schools at around 10% or even higher (Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007; Mishna, 2008; Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jugert, 2006). These risk factors are so prevalent, even normative in some respects, that their presence cannot be considered a useful indicator of potential violence.

– Considering the high prevalence of single risk factors among adolescents, it is not surprising that even an accumulation of these factors is not sufficient to distinguish youth who have carried out school shootings from other youth in the general population. Attempts to use these nonspecific risk factors to construct a profile would result in a high rate of false positives, which means that numerous adolescents would be erroneously identified, and stigmatized, as "dangerous" (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).

– Beyond their weak specificity, the sensitivity of these risk factors is also limited. Sensitivity refers to the percentage of target cases that are correctly identified, i.e., what proportion of truly violent students in the entire population are selected for an intervention. A risk instrument could be highly sensitive but lack specificity: a simple hypothetical risk measure based on gender and age might identify all males over age 13 as violent. This measure would have high sensitivity because it would identify a high proportion of violent students, but it would have so little specificity that it has no practical utility. Many characteristics of school shooting offenders are not consistent across cases or have not been present in every case. Although school shootings are often treated as a homogenous phenomenon, several studies have shown that a school shooter profile does not exist. For example, among 41 US-American school shooters, Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) found offenders with high and low academic performance, with and without a circle of friends, and with and without prior aggressive or violent behavior. Results from a recent study on German offenders support these findings and provide empirical evidence for different types of offenders (Bondü, 2012). If there is no consistent profile of a typical school shooter, different combinations of risk factors and different developmental pathways can lead to a

shooting. In order for an offense to occur, a complex interaction of a large number of factors seems necessary.

– This finding points to what Harding et al. (2002) refer to as the "degrees of freedom problem": the large number of possible risk factors relative to the low frequency of the phenomenon itself. As a result, single factors have only small to moderate predictive value for violent behavior in general and minimal predictive power for rare events such as school shootings (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010).

To conclude, although some of the aforementioned factors may constitute risk factors for school shootings, they cannot be utilized as reliable predictors to identify persons with a high risk of committing a school shooting. This is especially true for so-called macro variables such as gender, which apply to large parts of the population and therefore are not practical (Lange and Greve 2002). Nonetheless, even these macro factors have been discussed as pivotal risk factors for school shootings (Klein 2002). In the face of the reviewed problems, Bondü (2012) recommends concentrating on particular warning signs in the form of observable behaviors that lead to a shooting. Table 15.1 gives an overview of various proposed strategies for the prevention of school shootings as well as emergency response interventions. What is considered effective and appropriate prevention and intervention differs not only between authors, but also by national and cultural background.

15.2 Universal or Primary Prevention

Universal prevention approaches seek to limit the influence of causal risk factors and strengthen protective factors in the general population before any negative development can be observed. In criminological contexts, such approaches are traditionally referred to as primary prevention. Universal or primary prevention strategies for school shootings are often based on working to prevent aggressive and violent behavior among children and adolescents in general.

15.2.1 Limiting Violent Media Consumption

Violent media consumption, especially violent video game consumption, is considered to be an important risk factor for school shootings (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2012; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000). Therefore, prohibiting or limiting access to extremely violent video games, particularly first-person-shooter games, has been discussed repeatedly in Europe as well as in the United States. For example, in 2005 the state of California passed a law to ban the sale of violent video games to minors, but in 2011 the US Supreme Court ruled that the law violated the First Amendment right to free speech (Brown vs. Entertainment Merchants Association; http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/10pdf/08-1448.pdf). There is

Table 15.1 Approaches to the prevention of school shootings (Adapted from Bondü & Scheithauer, 2009, p. 692)

	Universal/primary prevention	Indicated/secondary prevention	Emergency response
Social/political level	Tightening gun/weapon laws Reducing access to violent media, especially violent video games Fostering more appropriate media coverage	Installing hotlines to report risk factors and warning signs	Optimizing and accelerating police intervention
School level	Improving school climate Reducing pressure to perform Bullying prevention Zero tolerance Increasing numbers of school psychologists and other mental health service providers	Close monitoring of high-risk students Training school staff to recognize warning signs Computerized risk assessment Checklists/profiling Implementing threat assessment in schools	Door locks, cameras, and other security measures to block access to schools and classrooms Alarms to notify students and staff of an attack Safety drills and training for students and staff
Individual level	Fostering social and emotional competencies	Psychological treatment Conflict resolution and mediation programs Fostering integration/preventing social exclusion	Self-defense training for students and staff Arming school staff

still controversy regarding whether video games have a causal effect, and whether that effect is strong enough to produce acts of violence (Ferguson, 2011).

15.2.2   Bullying Prevention

Experiences of bullying and social isolation have been discussed as a pivotal trigger or important motive for school shootings (O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Therefore, bullying prevention at schools is considered as one possibility to prevent the conditions that lead to school shootings (Cornell 2006; Dill, Redding, Smith, Surette, & Cornell, 2011; Expertenkreis Amok, 2009).

15.2.3   Improving School Climate

In a similar vein, many authors call for the improvement of the school climate as a general prevention strategy for school shootings (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998; Fein et al., 2002). To reach this goal, various measures were suggested, such as teaching in small groups and fostering cooperation, reducing academic pressure, and addressing prejudices and conflicts (Dwyer & Osher, 2000; Fein et al., 2002). Creating a supportive and trusting climate in schools seems particularly important. A supportive school climate may not only reduce conflicts among students and with teachers, but also encourage students to come forward when they have concerns about potential violence (see below; Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010).

15.2.4   Employing more School Psychologists

In order to reduce bullying at school, improve school climate, and prevent aggression and suicide among children and adolescents, some authors have suggested employing more school psychologists or other mental health professionals (Expertenkreis Amok, 2009). These professionals could also help to identify at-risk juveniles more reliably (see below, indicated prevention measures). However, this measure would only make sense if school psychologists had the necessary knowledge about risk factors and warning signs for school shootings and had been trained to work with children and adolescents who are at risk for violence. However, this approach would require reliable, empirical research results on warning signs, risk factors, and possible interventions—which are not currently available and/or need to be disseminated.

15.2.5   Fostering Social Competencies

Research on school shootings has suggested that perpetrators lack adequate coping and problem-solving skills to deal with stressful situations or events (Fein et al., 2002; Verlinden et al., 2000). Therefore, it may be useful to provide social skills training or some form of counseling to foster social competencies in children and youth.

15.2.6   Strengthening Gun Control Laws

In Europe, school shootings have prompted new restrictions in weapons laws. For example, Germany amended its weapons laws after the 2002 shooting in Erfurt and the 2009 shooting in Winnenden. Finland made changes following shootings in 2007 and 2008. In Germany, restrictions have been placed on access to certain kinds of firearms as well as some types of bladed weapons. In order to acquire a firearm in Germany, a citizen must obtain certification of personal adequacy and complete firearm safety training. Because some school shooters took weapons that were legally owned by family members, stronger requirements for the safe storage of firearms have been proposed. However, a substantial proportion of school attacks have involved bladed weapons and explosives.

15.2.7   Zero Tolerance

The zero tolerance approach of seeking school safety through firm discipline has become widely used in US schools. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 mandated that all public schools in the United States have a zero tolerance policy for firearms (http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS/gfsaguidance.html). It is common for schools to have additional zero tolerance policies that ban knives and other kinds of weapons such as nunchucks. Zero tolerance policies have even been applied to toy guns, including water pistols and the accessories to toy action figures. Still other zero tolerance polices ban verbal threats, bullying, or other undesirable behavior. A zero tolerance policy means that there is automatic punishment, usually a 1-year suspension or expulsion, for any violation. Although the federal law permits schools to make exceptions under appropriate conditions (e.g., a student unthinkingly brings a nonworking firearm to school for use as a prop in a school play), many school systems chose to apply them rigorously. Despite their widespread use, zero tolerance policies have been repeatedly criticized as excessively punitive and ineffective. The American Psychological Association task force concluded that there is no scientific evidence indicating that zero tolerance policies increase school safety

and considerable evidence that suspension is not an effective form of discipline, either in reforming the punished student or in deterring other students from misbehavior (Skiba et al., 2006).

15.2.8 Regulating Media Reports

One last approach aims at altering media reports on school shootings in order to limit their influence on youth who might be prompted to identify with perpetrators, imitate attacks, and commit copycat crimes (Dill et al., 2011). There is only anecdotal evidence that media coverage of school shootings has influenced later school attacks, but it is undeniable that high-profile school shootings have generated massive numbers of student threats (Kostinsky, Bixlwer, & Kettl, 2001). Therefore, there have been recommendations for voluntary efforts by the news media to report school shootings in a less inflammatory manner as well as to conduct public information campaigns that might discourage copycat behavior (Surette, 2010). Similar approaches have been shown to be useful in preventing the imitation of suicide (Chagnon, Houle, Marcoux, & Renaud, 2007). Accordingly, the news media might avoid reports that focus too heavily on the personal background and motives of the offender, and place more emphasis on the tragic consequences for victims and survivors. They should omit details that provide instructions for carrying out similar offenses or give the crime a dramatic, sensational quality. As the Internet has become a pivotal source of information on former offenses and offenders, it also seems important not to disseminate farewell letters or other media legacies.

Most of the primary prevention approaches (with the exception of zero tolerance policies) seem like desirable policies that would benefit the general school population. However, those approaches are not without problems. As already mentioned, one preliminary condition for successful primary or general prevention is sufficient empirical knowledge of single risk factors that increase the probability of the outcome long term. The identification of long-term risk factors that are amenable to diagnosis and treatment seems unlikely at present because the risk factors are not specific to school shootings and because it is unclear whether they are already effective in early childhood and youth and whether they can be diagnosed and treated at an early stage. Because school shootings have multiple causes, approaches focusing only on single risk factors fall short and touch only on parts of the problem. For example, even if violent video games were prohibited, youth would still be exposed to other forms of media violence, including media reports about former offenders. Similarly, while narcissistic and depressive traits are believed to constitute risk factors for school shootings, recent studies also point to the possible role of several other mental disorders (similar to results on adult offenders). Furthermore, not every risk factor is present in every offender. For example, there is evidence from recent studies that some school shooters were not victims of bullying or were not interested in violent media or even in prior shootings. Hence, there is insufficient evidence that preventive efforts targeted at any single risk factor will have an impact on school shootings. As a result, there are

differences of opinion between those who advocate primary prevention strategies (Cornell, 2006; Dwyer & Osher, 2000; Expertenkreis Amok, 2009) and others who doubt their effectiveness due to their poor sensitivity and low range (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2009; Kobe, 2009).

Although primary prevention may not be a useful strategy for tackling single risk factors, some of these factors might be reasonable targets of secondary prevention efforts. For example, Bondü and Scheithauer (2012) point out that extreme, time-consuming, and thematically linked violent media consumption may well constitute a risk factor for school shootings in some cases. Likewise, limiting access to firearms and other weapons could help to prevent school shootings by persons who have already revealed intent or interest in committing an offense. However, before any secondary or indicated prevention can be undertaken, it is essential to identify at-risk youth. It is to this that we now turn.

15.3   Indicated or Secondary Prevention

Indicated prevention efforts are appropriate when a student displays some indication of intention to commit a school shooting. In criminology, such prevention strategies are generally termed secondary prevention. There are two basic challenges for indicated prevention: (1) how to identify students in need of intervention; and (2) what intervention to implement.

15.3.1   Structured Risk Assessment

The conventional approach to identifying potentially violent individuals is to use a structured risk assessment instrument that combines a set of risk factors into a risk score. A variety of risk assessment instruments have been developed to predict violence in specific populations such as criminal offenders and persons with mental illness, and there has been substantial progress in improving the accuracy of structured risk assessment over the past three decades (Yang, Wong, & Coid, 2010). So it was natural to assume that similar instruments might be developed to identify students at risk of committing a school shooting. However, the low base rate problem and several other difficulties make this approach less useful for school shootings (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).

The problem of low specificity can be observed in many efforts to profile students likely to carry out a homicidal attack at school using checklists of risk factors and warning signs. Many of these risk factors are so general that numerous youth will be falsely identified as dangerous ("increase in risk-taking behavior," "increase in use of drugs or alcohol," "significant vandalism or property damage," "loss of temper on a daily basis"; American Psychological Association, 1999). The FBI's profiling experts found some common characteristics among students who committed school shoot-

ings—such as a history of being bullied and a fascination with violence-filled entertainment—but concluded that any profiles based on such characteristics would be misused and result in too many false identifications (O'Toole, 2000).

Another problem is that many risk measures have been based on research in broader populations of violent individuals, but have not been validated on youth who have attempted or carried out school attacks. For example, the Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment (DTVRA) consists of 19 risk factors derived from a review of literature on risk factors for violence (Van Dyke & Schroeder 2006). Some of the more general risk factors include low academic achievement, lack of parental supervision, exposure to violence, and a record of disciplinary problems. Each item is rated as low, medium, or high and assigned a score of 1, 2, or 3, respectively. Although such a structured system can be appealing, the scoring system and cutoff points were "arbitrarily chosen by the committee without empirical validation" (Van Dyke & Schroeder, 2006, p. 608). The DTVRA has been widely used in the United States, but there is no research on its accuracy.

A final problem is that many risk assessment instruments are designed to identify individuals who will commit any act of violence at some point in the future, often over a period of years (Schmidt, Campbell, & Houlding, 2011). Schools face a much more immediate problem in determining whether a student is at risk for carrying out an attack. Situational and environmental risk factors are much more salient. Risk cannot be regarded as a static property of the individual student, but changes in response to environmental contingencies. For example, a student under adult supervision is in a lower risk state than when the same student is unsupervised. A student's risk of committing violence will increase if he or she is teased and harassed, or experiences some other provocative, distressing event. Therefore, the emergence of guided professional judgment has been an important development in risk assessment (Reddy et al. 2001). In this approach the professional makes use of structured risk assessment instruments as a source of information, but does not adhere strictly to actuarial decision-making and reserves the right to make professional judgments based on additional observations specific to the situation. An exemplary model of this approach is the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY; Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2002). The SAVRY consists of 24 items empirically identified as predictors of adolescent violence and 6 protective factors. The manual discourages the use of a total score and recommends that professionals make a clinical judgment of risk as low, moderate, or high based on a review of all available information. Several studies have found good predictive validity for the SAVRY in samples of adolescent offenders (Schmidt et al., 2011). Although these findings are impressive, the predictions are for long-term outcomes (5–10 years in some studies), so that the SAVRY's ability to make short-term predictions is not yet established. Furthermore, the adolescents who have committed school shootings often have no history of prior offenses and may represent different populations than those typically studied with the SAVRY.

Some risk assessment instruments have also been computerized. A private consulting agency in the United States developed a software program called

MOSAIC for Threats by Students (MAST; De Becker n.d.). This program uses a series of multiple-choice questions to summarize what is known about the student and generate a report along with a rating on a 1–10 scale. The questions cover topics that the agency's experts believe to be important for identifying a violent student, but there appears to be no published research on the MAST. A similar computerized approach was developed by Hoffmann in Germany, based on analyses of German case files and relevant literature (see Hoffmann in this volume). On the basis of 32 questions (characteristic present, not present, no information available), the DyRiAS program (Dynamic Risk Analysis System) calculates the current risk of a violent attack at school on a seven-point scale. Computerized assessment is widely used in psychological testing as an efficient, reliable way to collect data, generate test scores, and summarize findings. However, critics point out that there is little research on the validity of computer-generated reports and caution that an automated report may convey unwarranted credibility because it seems more scientific (Butcher, Perry, & Atlis, 2000).

15.3.2   Threat Assessment at Schools

Research on the prevention of school violence must recognize, however, that prevention does not require prediction. There are many conditions that can be prevented even though individual prediction is not possible. For example, it is currently not possible to predict who will die of lung cancer, but rates have been dramatically reduced through public health campaigns to reduce smoking. Consequently, the rationale for indicated prevention should not be based on the accuracy of a predictive instrument for homicidal violence. Instead, students should be identified at least in part because their behavior raises concern on its own merit. Students who engage in aggressive or threatening behavior should be identified because their behavior is disruptive to others and may reflect a conflict or dispute that should be addressed. Others may engage in troubling behavior that suggests emotional disturbance, depression, or other adjustment problems that deserve attention. We hypothesize that effective intervention for these students will have widespread benefits that reduce less serious forms of aggression as well as homicidal violence.

In the United States, studies of school shootings by both the FBI (O'Toole, 2000) and the Secret Service (Fein et al., 2002) recommend a threat assessment approach (for Germany see Bondü, Cornell, & Scheithauer, 2011; Bondü & Scheithauer, 2009; Leuschner et al., 2011). Threat assessment is a form of risk management that is initiated in response to threatening statements or behavior and involves both assessment and subsequent intervention designed to reduce the risk of violence (Reddy et al., 2001). The assessment component is concerned with whether a student has expressed intent to harm someone. Threats can be addressed directly to the intended victim or communicated indirectly to third parties. They

may be explicit statements or more ambiguous. Threats can also be communicated by behavior such as possession of a weapon. The FBI also describes the broader phenomenon of "leakage" which refers to other ways in which students may intentionally or unintentionally reveal intention to carry out a violent act (O'Toole, 2000; also see Bondü, Leuschner, Lippok, Scholl, & Scheithauer, 2012). Students may leak their violent intentions through boasting comments, essays, letters, Internet postings, diary entries, or other forms of self-expression.

It is a guiding principle of threat assessment that there is no single profile or type of violent offender (Reddy et al., 2001). Students who commit school attacks may differ widely in their background and motivation. Threat assessment focuses on the context and seriousness of the student's behavior to determine what the student intended and whether he or she poses a threat. Any person can make a threat and many threats are little more than expressions of frustration, so that the critical issue for threat assessment is to determine whether the student's threat is serious and whether he or she is on a path of behavior leading to an attack. As a result, threat assessment is focused much more on whether the student is planning or preparing for an attack, and whether there are immediate environmental circumstances that would provoke or facilitate an attack.

15.3.3   Threat Assessment Research in the United States

Although threat assessment is a widely recommended practice, there is little empirical research on its effectiveness. The largest body of research has been conducted on the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (see Newman et al. in this volume). The Virginia Guidelines were designed for school-based teams typically consisting of a school administrator, one or more mental health professionals such as school psychologists and counselors, and a school-based law enforcement officer known in the United States as a school resource officer. These teams are trained to evaluate a student threat using a seven-step decision tree. In order for the process to be flexible and efficient, the first three steps represent a triage process in which the team leader (or other team members) determines whether the case can be quickly and easily resolved as a transient threat or will require more extensive intervention as a substantive threat. Transient threats include jokes, figures of speech, or expressions of anger that do not reflect a sustained or genuine intent to harm the other person that would constitute a substantive threat. If the student responds positively to the initial intervention, the threat can be resolved and the process ends at step three. Most cases are not serious and are resolved as transient threats.

When the initial intervention is not successful, or the team feels that there is still concern that the student has intent to harm someone, then the threat is considered substantive. A basic premise of the Virginia Guidelines is that teams should address the problem or conflict that stimulated the student to make a threat because a successful resolution of this problem or conflict would eliminate the student's motivation to carry out the threat. Therefore, the team engages in a progressively more extensive evaluation of the student and designs a safety plan to prevent violence. The evaluation may include

both a mental health assessment and a law enforcement investigation. A threat assessment may identify underlying problems with bullying or conflicts in friendships and romantic relationships. There may be disputes with teachers or concerns about academic failure as well as learning or attention problems. Other students may be undergoing stressful experiences leading to emotional distress, anger, and depression. Accordingly, a safety plan might include some form of mental health treatment, counseling to mediate a dispute or, in some cases, psychiatric treatment for a serious mental illness such as a psychotic disorder or severe depression. The plan also includes protective measures such as notifying potential victims and taking appropriate safety precautions.

Two field tests of the Virginia Guidelines (Cornell et al., 2004; Strong & Cornell, 2008) demonstrated that school-based teams were able to conduct threat assessments of several hundred students from grades K-12 and resolve threats without a violent outcome. In most cases, the students were able to return to school, or in some cases, transfer to a different school or educational program. Notably, few students were given long-term suspensions or placed in juvenile detention. This outcome contrasts strongly with the widespread use of zero tolerance discipline in American schools (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

After the two field tests, there were three controlled studies of the Virginia Guidelines. The first (Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009) was a retrospective comparison of 95 high schools reporting use of the Virginia Guidelines, 131 schools reporting use of locally developed procedures, and 54 schools reporting no use of a threat assessment approach. Students at schools that used the Virginia Guidelines reported less bullying, greater willingness to seek help over bullying and threats of violence, and more positive perceptions of school staff members than students in either of the other two groups. There were one-third fewer long-term suspensions. These findings were maintained after controlling for school size, minority composition and socioeconomic status of the student body, neighborhood violent crime, and the extent of security measures in the schools.

A second, quasi-experimental study found a 52% reduction in long-term suspensions and a 79% reduction in bullying infractions in 23 high schools 1 year after implementing the Virginia Guidelines, but the 26 control-group schools showed little change (Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). The third study (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012) was a randomized controlled trial that examined disciplinary outcomes for students who attended 40 schools randomly assigned to use the Virginia Guidelines or follow a business-as-usual disciplinary approach in a wait-list control group. Over the course of 1 year, students who made threats of violence in the threat assessment schools were four times more likely to receive counseling services and three times less likely to receive a long-term suspension in comparison to students who made threats in the control group schools.

15.3.4   Threat Assessment Research in Germany

In response to a series of school shootings in Germany, two projects developed a threat assessment program: the Berlin Leaking Project and the NETWASS (Network Against School Shootings) project (Leuschner et al., 2011). The projects were based on the analysis of German, and to some extent American research on school shoot-

ings and leaking. Bondü (2012) found that all German students who committed school shootings had engaged in repeated leaking behavior, and therefore considered it a critical warning sign. Leaking encompasses any observable communication, act, or behavior with a close thematic link to an offense that may convey an individual's violent thoughts or intentions. Leaking is a broader concept than threat because it includes a wider range of observable communications and behaviors (e.g., stories, diary entries, essays, poems, songs, drawings, interest in violent topics, suicidal ideation, changes in behavior). Leaking can also include information about planning or preparation such as asking a friend for help obtaining a weapon.

The Berlin Leaking Project (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2012; Leuschner et al., 2011) also trained teachers in eight Berlin schools to identify and report leaking to a central contact person or "leaking appointee" in each school. The study found that teachers had little knowledge about leaking and its treatment, felt the training was worthwhile, and were able to profit from it. However, they also expressed a desire for more involvement by police and school psychologists in dealing with leaking incidents. Over the course of 6–9 months, three incidents of leaking were reported. However, a follow-up questionnaire indicated that other observations of leaking had not been reported.

The NETWASS Project (Leuschner et al., 2011; see also Leuschner et al. in this volume) is a threat assessment approach derived in part from the Virginia Guidelines, but with adaptations based on the needs of German schools and the legal and administrative circumstances in the German federal states. Informed by results from the Berlin Leaking Project, NETWASS was designed to address threats and leaking by students as well as psychosocial risk factors. The core of this approach is to train teachers to be more aware of and attentive to indications of potential violence in their students and to foster a positive school climate in which students are willing to share sensitive information with teachers when a classmate threatens to commit a violent act.

In the NETWASS model, whenever teachers become aware of any information that raises concern, they report their concerns to a central "prevention appointee" in their school (usually the principal or a designated teacher). The prevention appointee then calls upon a threat assessment team consisting of the principal and other staff members who know the student, such as teachers or social workers. School psychologists may be members of the threat assessment team, but are often unable to participate in all cases because of their assignment to multiple schools. Law enforcement officers may be contacted as part of the process, but there is some reluctance to involve them in less serious cases because police officers in Germany are obliged to file charges as soon as they become aware of any statutory offense. Like the Virginia Guidelines, the NETWASS model is focused on identifying appropriate interventions for the student, such as mental health services.

The NETWASS model is currently being field-tested in approximately 100 German schools. Schools were randomly assigned to different types of training to determine the most effective and efficient means of preparing threat assessment teams. Outcome data will be collected directly after training and after a further 9 months. Compliance with the new model will be measured, incidents reported by school staff documented, and measures of school climate obtained from teachers and principals. In addition to evaluating the training program, the project objectives include assessing the frequency

of leaking in schools, the relationships between leaking, violent incidents, and subjective feelings of safety, and the potential for expanding this model to address other issues of concern such as bullying or political extremism.

Threats and leaking do not occur only during the school day, but also in leisure time. Consequently, there have been promising efforts to install hotlines to allow anonymous reporting of such incidents by anybody in contact with at-risk adolescents (Payne & Elliot, 2011).

15.4 Emergency Intervention

Because no prevention effort will ever be completely successful, it is important to have appropriate emergency response strategies. These generally aim at minimizing the harm caused by school shootings or avoiding them altogether, either by impeding their execution or by stopping the offender as quickly as possible. Generally, two broad strategies are considered. The first involves the installation of security systems, the second focuses on training students, school staff, and emergency services how to respond.

Technical security systems include cameras, metal detectors to detect weapons, as well as locking entrances and controlling them with security monitors or electronic locks. Many of these security measures have been adopted by American schools. Others employ special security staff. Indeed, some shootings seem to have been prevented by the early intervention of security staff (e.g., an incident in New York on November 12, 2004, when a suspended student tried to stab the principal; http://www.schoolsecurity.org/trends/school_violence04-05.html). However, in other cases, persons trying to intervene in the offense. In other cases, intervening persons have been among the (first) victims. were not members of the security staff, but teachers and students from the school (e.g., Erfurt, Germany, in 2002). But, as is the case with most other prevention strategies, there is little research on their effectiveness. However, there are reasons to doubt the value of some security measures. For example, video cameras and metal detectors will not stop a person who is determined to attack or willing to die. Some studies suggest that these technical security measures have a negative effect on school climate by triggering feelings of fear and reducing feelings of safety within the school (Juvonen, 2002; Skiba et al., 2006).

Because cameras, metal detectors, locked entrances, and security staff cannot detect every armed student or prevent all shootings, it may be necessary for schools to have secondary security measures to respond to an actual attack. Therefore, some require measures to block or at least control access to schools and classes. This goal is achieved by building walls around schools, installing gates that may be opened only with keycards, or installing classroom doors that can be locked from inside. Some schools have special codes or signals to let school staff members know if there is an intruder in the building. Teachers may also have cell phones, warning buttons, or some other means of communicating with the school office if an incident occurs in their classroom. Finally, schools may hold regular drills in which students

take cover in the event of an attack or practice exiting the building in an organized, rapid manner, similar to a fire drill. These security measures might be helpful in some cases, but there is no expectation that they can prevent all forms of attack.

There have also been efforts to prepare school staff and students for attacks by providing them with emergency response guidelines and training. Several countries have adopted emergency guidelines for schools, for example, advising students and school staff to lock and barricade doors, stay away from doors and windows, call for help, and wait for the arrival and clearance of the police before opening doors again. Research at US and German schools has shown, however, that school staff may not recall or even know about emergency guidelines (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2012; Graham, Shirm, Liggin, Aitken, & Dick, 2006). These studies indicate the need for better training of school staff. In a similar vein, many schools have established crisis response teams, for example, to guide interactions with the task forces, relatives, or the media and maintain contact with psychologists or social workers who can give assistance to victims and witnesses shortly after the incident (Borum et al., 2010).

Because school shooters carry out different kinds of attacks that can be thwarted in different ways, emergency plans must be flexible. In Germany, for example, rules for police responses to school shootings have changed in recent years. Currently, police officers are instructed to enter schools immediately rather than waiting for specially armed forces to arrive, and are instructed to stop the perpetrator by all means necessary, including the use of deadly force.

15.5   Discussion

What conclusions can be drawn from the discussion of prevention efforts? What prevention strategies can be recommended to schools? The most important criterion for all recommended prevention strategies is that they must be based on scientific research and evaluation. Other considerations, such as social and political desirability or practicability, are relevant for implementation and program marketing, but do not assure efficacy.

Predicting and preventing a low base rate phenomenon such as a school shooting is a complex task. Three problems hamper the scientific evaluation of prevention strategies: 1. the lack of a consistent definition of the phenomenon; 2. the low base rate of school shootings; and 3. the relative nonspecificity of warning signs and risk factors. Further research is needed here.

It is an open question whether universal prevention approaches can prevent events as rare and multiply-determined as school shootings. Nevertheless, it is certainly beneficial to improve school climate by reducing conflicts among students and with teachers and to encourage students to come forward when they have concerns about potential violence. Providing social skills training or some form of counseling also may be useful to foster social competencies in children and adolescents. Most of the universal prevention approaches seem desirable policies that

would benefit the general school population even if there are questions about their sensitivity to school shooting cases.

There has been little research on the effectiveness of technical security systems, and some concern that they might have an adverse impact on school climate (Juvonen, 2002; Skiba et al., 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to have appropriate emergency response strategies. Emergency guidelines can prepare school staff and students by providing clear organizational structure and guidance. However, because school shooters commit attacks in different ways, emergency guidelines need to be flexible.

The most promising options for preventing school shootings are strategies of indicated prevention, which are appropriate when a student displays some indication of intention to commit an offense. It is important to differentiate between risk assessment approaches and threat assessment. Many risk assessment measures are based on research in broader populations of violent individuals and have not been validated on school shooters. Structured risk assessment approaches are designed primarily to identify individuals who will commit any act of violence at some time in the future, but it has not been demonstrated that they would predict such a low base rate phenomenon as a school shooting. Regarding computerized risk assessment, it is important to emphasize that there is no published research documenting the accuracy of any risk measure to predict whether a student will engage in a school attack (Butcher et al., 2000). Additionally, there is concern that an automated report may convey unwarranted credibility because it seems more scientific.

In conclusion, threat assessment methods that identify students on the basis of threatening statements or behavior seem to be the most promising and efficient prevention strategy. Although threat assessment is a widely recommended practice, it faces similar problems as other prevention strategies. More research is needed to identify risk factors and determine the most effective interventions. Finally, the low base rate of school shootings makes it difficult to establish whether any strategy is effective at preventing school attacks. Therefore practitioners should consider programs that demonstrate other beneficial outcomes, such as a positive impact on school climate or student welfare. Both the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (Cornell, 2006) and the NETWASS Crisis Prevention Model (Leuschner et al., 2011) are designed to have broader effects on school functioning as well as prevent severe acts of violence.

References

American Psychological Association. (1999). *Warning signs of youth violence*. Retrieved January 22, 2011, from http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/warning-signs.aspx.

American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 63*, 852–862. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852.

Bondü, R. (2012). *School shootings in Deutschland: Internationaler Vergleich, Warnsignale, Risikofaktoren, Entwicklungsmodelle [School shootings in Germany. International compari-*

son, warning signs, risk factors, and developmental models]. Retrieved September 27, 2012, from http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000037683.

Bondü, R., Cornell, D. W., & Scheithauer, H. (2011). Student homicidal violence in schools: An international problem. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 13–30. doi:10.1002/yd.384.

Bondü, R., Leuschner, V., Lippok, A., Scholl, J., & Scheithauer, H. (2012). Leaking-Phänomene und Ankündigungen von Gewalt—ihr Nutzen für die Prävention von schwerer, zielgerichteter Gewalt an Schulen. Befunde aus dem Berliner Leaking-Projekt und dem Projekt NETWASS [Leaking and announcements of violene – their use for prevention of severe targeted violence in schools. Results from the Berlin Leaking-Project and the project NETWASS]. In J. Hoffmann & K. Roshdi (Eds.), *Schwere Schulgewalt, Jugend- und Erwachsenenamok—Täterpsychologie—Psychiatrische Aspekte—Risikoanalyse—Bedrohungsmanagement.* Stuttgart: Schattauer (in press).

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2009). Aktuelle Ansätze zur Prävention von School Shootings in Deutschland. *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie, 58*, 685–701.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2010). Explaining and preventing school shootings: Chances and difficulties of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H. G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 295–314). New York: Springer.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2012). Violent media consumption in German school shooters. In G. Muschert & J. Sumiala (Eds.), *Mediatized violence in a global age.* Chicago: Emerald (in press).

Borum, R., Bartel, P., & Forth, A. (2002). *Manual for the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY).* Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher, 39*, 27–37. doi:10.3102/0013189X09357620.

Butcher, J. N., Perry, J. N., & Atlis, M. M. (2000). Validity and utility of computer-based test interpretation. *Psychological Assessment, 12*, 6–18.

Chagnon, F., Houle, J., Marcoux, I., & Renaud, J. (2007). Control-group study of an intervention training program for youth suicide prevention. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 37*, 135–144.

Cornell, D., & Sheras, P. (2006). Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Cornell, D., Allen, K., & Fan, X. (2012). A randomized controlled study of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in grades K-12. *School Psychology Review, 41*, 100–115.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly, 24*, 119–129.

Cornell, D., et al. (2004). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 527–546.

Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2011). Reductions in long-term suspensions following adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 20*, 1–20. doi:10.1177/0192636511415255.

De Becker, G. (n.d.). *Gavin de Becker explains MOSAIC.* Retrieved November 11, 2011, from https://www.mosaicmethod.com/.

Dill, K., Redding, R., Smith, P., Surette, R., & Cornell, D. (2011). Recurrent issues in efforts to prevent homicidal youth violence in schools: Expert opinions. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 113–128. doi:10.1002/yd.391.

Dwyer, K., & Osher, D. (2000). *Safeguarding our children: An action guide.* Washington, DC: US Departments of Education and Justice, American Institutes for Research.

Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Eliot, M., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2010). Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence. *Journal of School Psychology, 48*, 533–553.

Expertenkreis Amok. (2009). *Gemeinsam Handeln: Risiken erkennen und minimieren: Prävention: Intervention: Opferhilfe: Medien: Konsequenzen aus dem Amoklauf in Winnenden und Wendlingen am 11. März 2009.* Stuttgart: Author.

Fein, R. A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W. S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and creating safe school climates.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program/U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center.

Ferguson, C. J. (2011). Video games and youth violence: A prospective analysis in adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 40*, 377–391. doi:10.1007/s10964-010-9610-x.

Ferguson, C. J., & Kilburn, J. (2010). Much ado about nothing: The misestimation and overinterpretation of violent video game effects in Eastern and Western nations: Comment on Anderson et al. (2010). *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 174–178. doi:10.1037/a0018566.

Graham, J., Shirm, S., Liggin, R., Aitken, M. E., & Dick, R. (2006). Mass-casualty events at schools: A national preparedness survey. *Pediatrics, 117*, e8–e15. doi:10.1542/peds.2005-0927.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. D. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies: Lessons from a study of rampage school shootings. *Sociological Methods Research, 31*, 174–217. doi:10.1177/0049124102031002003.

Iannotti, R. J., Nansel, T. R., & Haynie, D. L. (2007). Adolescent bullying involvement and perceived family, peer and school relations: Commonalities and differences across race/ethnicity. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*, 283–293. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.04.009.

Juvonen, J. (2002). *School violence: Prevalence, fears, and prevention* (RAND Issue Paper). Retrieved April, 19, 2009, from http://www.rand.org/pubs/issue_papers/IP219/index2.html.

Klein, J. S. (2002). *High-profile school shootings: How violence is hidden in masculinity expectations.* Ann Arbor: ProQuest.

Kobe, S. (2009). Statistik seltener Ereignisse: Über die Effizienz von Präventivmaßnahmen zur Verringerung des Restrisikos von "school shooting"-Attentaten nach Winnenden aus mathematischer Sicht. [Statistics of seldom incidents: On the efficacy of prevention measures for the risk-reduction of school shootings from a mathematical perspective]. *Forum Kriminalprävention, 7*, 7–9.

Kostinsky, S., Bixlwer, E., & Kettl, P. (2001). Threats of school violence in Pennsylvania after media coverage of the Columbine High School massacre. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine, 155*, 994–1001.

Lange, T., & Greve, W. (2002). Amoklauf in der Schule—Allgemeine Überlegungen aus speziellem Anlass [Rampage at school—general thoughts for a special reason]. *Soziale Probleme, 13*, 80–101.

Leuschner, V., Bondü, R., Schroer-Hippel, M., Panno, J., Neumetzler, K., Fisch, S., et al. (2011). Prevention of homicidal violence in schools in Germany: The Berlin Leaking Project and the Networks Against School Shootings Project (NETWASS). *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 61–78. doi:10.1002/yd.

Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (Eds.). (2010). *JIM 2010: Jugend, Information (Multi-)Media: Basisstudie zum Medienumgang 12-bis 19-Jähriger in Deutschland* [Youth, information (multi-)media: Basic study on media use of 12- to 19-year-olds in Germany]. Stuttgart: Author.

Mishna, F. (2008). An overview of the evidence of bullying prevention and intervention programs. *Brief treatment and crisis intervention, 8*, 327–341. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/brief-treatment/mhn020.

Mulvey, E. P., & Cauffman, E. (2001). The inherent limits of predicting school violence. *American Psychologist, 56*, 797–802.

Muschert, G. W., & Larkin, R. W. (2007). The Columbine High School shootings. In F. Bailey & S. Chermak (Eds.), *Crimes and trials of the century* (pp. 253–266). Westport: Praeger.

O'Toole, M. E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective.* Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Payne, S. R. T., & Elliot, D. S. (2011). Safe2Tell®: An anonymous, 24/7 reporting system for preventing school violence. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 103–111. doi:10.1002/yd.390.

Plener, P. L., Libal, G., Keller, F., Fegert, J. M., & Mühlenkamp, J. J. (2009). An international comparison of adolescent non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) and suicide attempts: Germany and the USA. *Psychological Medicine, 27*, 1–10. doi:10.1017/S0033291708005114.

Reddy, M., Borum, R., Berglund, J., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: Comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools, 38*, 157–172. doi:10.1002/pits.1007.

Scheithauer, H., Hayer, T., Petermann, F., & Jugert, G. (2006). Physical, verbal and relational forms of bullying among students from Germany: Age trends, gender differences, and correlates. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*, 261–275. doi:10.1002/ab.20128.

Schmidt, F., Campbell, M. A., & Houlding, C. (2011). Comparative analyses of the YLS/CMI, SAVRY, and PCL:YV in adolescent offenders: A 10-year follow-up into adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 9*, 23–42. doi:10.1177/1541204010371793.

Skiba, R., Reynolds, C. R., Graham, S., Sheras, P., Conoley, J. C., & Garcia-Vazquez, E. (2006). *Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations: A report by the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force*. Retrieved April, 16, 2009 from http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/commit/c530/handouts06/092006.c530.LevinM.1.pdf.

Surette, R. (2010). *Media, crime, and criminal justice*. Belmont, CA: Thomson.

Strong, K., & Cornell, D. (2008). Student threat assessment in Memphis city schools: A descriptive report. *Behavioral Disorders, 34*, 42–54.

Van Dyke, R., & Schroeder, J. (2006). Implementation of the Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment. In S. R. Jimerson & M. J. Furlong (Eds.), *The handbook of school violence and school safety* (pp. 603–616). Mahwah, NJ: Lawerence Erlbaum.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(99)00055-0.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington: U.S. Secret Service and U.S.Department of Education.

Yang, M., Wong, S. C. P., & Coid, J. (2010). The efficacy of violence prediction: A meta-analytic comparison of nine risk assessment tools. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 740–767. doi:10.1037/a0020473.

Chapter 16
School Shootings in Germany: Research, Prevention Through Risk Assessment and Threat Management

Jens Hoffmann and Karoline Roshdi

On April 26, 2002, an 18-year-old male student killed 16 people at his former school in Erfurt, Germany, and committed suicide. It was this shocking event that led us to start our research about school shootings to learn more about this extreme form of violence and seek ways to prevent it (Hoffmann, 2003; Hoffmann, Roshdi, & Robertz, 2009; Roshdi & Hoffmann, 2011).

Between November 1999 and February 2010, 42 people died as a result of targeted violence in German schools. Germany is ranked second worldwide after the United States for the total number of school shooting incidents (Robertz & Wickenhauer, 2010). Moreover, the shootings in Erfurt (16 dead) and Winnenden (15 dead) had the highest fatality rates internationally (leaving aside university shootings like Virginia Tech in 2007 with 32 deaths, which research suggests have different dynamics (Newman & Fox, 2009).

After the school shooting in Erfurt in 2002, we set out to better understand this phenomenon and discover how effective specialized prevention could work. Since 2002, we have developed different practical concepts for prevention based on the threat assessment approach.

16.1 Lessons Learned: Research on Targeted Violence in Schools

This type of homicide was already occurring on a regular basis in North America from the 1990s, and the first scientific papers on targeted violence in schools were published in the United States during this period (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; O'Toole, 1999).

J. Hoffmann (✉) • K. Roshdi
Institute for Psychology and Threat Management,
Darmstadt, Germany
e-mail: jens.hoffmann@i-p-bm.de

Severe targeted violence in school settings is defined as a specific, potentially deadly attack on specific individuals or groups where the school was deliberately selected as the location of the attack and was not simply a random site of opportunity (Fein et al., 2002). At a first glance, the concept of targeted violence covers a range of different acts such as mass murder in schools and targeted attacks against one person such as a teacher (Hoffmann et al., 2009; Newman, 2004; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). A killing spree or a mass murder at a school, therefore, falls into a subcategory of the phenomenon in which not only one but several people are attacked with an intention to kill. In the international literature, the term "school shootings" is also used as a synonym for "targeted violence in schools."

An overview of the international research concludes that school shootings are an independent form of youth violence with its own risk dynamics that are distinct from other acts of violence in the same age group (Robertz, 2004). For example, students who commit a targeted violent act against a teacher or other students rarely display factors such as excessive alcohol, drug use or repeated physical violence that are specifically known as classic risk variables for youth violence (Borum & Verhaagen, 2006).

In the first empirical study on cases of targeted violence in German schools, we found homogenous patterns of warning behavior (Hoffmann et al., 2009). Furthermore, a comparison with US school shootings found strong similarities between German and US offenders. Our study included all known cases of severe targeted violence in German schools committed by students or former students until 2006. For the seven cases identified by media research, court and investigative records as well as official investigative reports in the public domain were analyzed.

The study came to the following conclusions:

- Recognizable psychological characteristics are present in most perpetrators. Feelings of desperation and depression alternate with feelings of omnipotence. At the same time, they are very sensitive to criticism and rejection. Such a pattern points to a narcissistic personality of the shy type (Ronningstam, 2005). In narcissism, an individual compensates feelings of inferiority by immerging in fantasies of grandiosity. Knowledge of the compensatory narcissistic dynamic may be helpful for interventions with students who threaten to commit a school shooting.
- There is no monocausal explanation for targeted violence in schools. Instead, we have to examine each case for its specific mixture involving acute crises, difficulties in coping with problematic experiences, structural psychological vulnerabilities, and the perpetrator's belief that an act of violence represents the ultimate solution for his problems. This complex picture confirms the absence of any simple school shooter profile, as already pointed out by research in the United States (Randazzo et al., 2006).
- A targeted act of school violence is the final point of a process in which psychological, situational, and interpersonal aspects are involved. Recognizable warning signs are present in the student's behavior and communication before the act of violence is committed. These warning signs are never just a single action, but a dynamic interaction of different behaviors. Therefore, the question is whether a student shows a risk pattern of warning signs. This is the starting point for early recognition of problem-

atic developments in the student's life that may or may not lead to an act of violence. In the early phases of a problematic development, intervention is mostly about support and crisis resolution and rarely about disciplinary interventions.

- The perpetrator's planning and violent phantasies are noticeable to other students and peers in most of the cases. This phenomenon is called leakage and is of great importance in prevention (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011). Therefore, it is extremely advantageous that other research groups in Germany have recently started in this field also (Leuschner et al., 2011; Scheithauer, Bondü, Meixner, Bull, & Dölitzsch, 2008).
- Three of the seven incidents in this sample were committed by former students. Although it is unclear if this reflects an international trend, it shows the general importance of comprehensive case management network bringing together schools, school psychologists, police, and government agencies. It must be ensured that a case manager takes care of students identified as a high-risk case after they leave school.
- The copycat effect is an important aspect in the genesis of school shootings. Therefore, the way the media report on severe targeted violence in schools plays a central role in preventing such incidents (Dill, Redding, Smith, Surette, & Cornell, 2011; Robertz & Wickenhauer, 2010). In news coverage after a school shooting, the perpetrator should be made as anonymous as possible. No justification or pseudo-explanation should be presented (such as that the offender was a victim of an uncaring family or school system and thus the school shooting was a cry for help).

In a more recent study, we looked at ten German cases of targeted violence in schools that occurred between 1999 and 2009 to find out how acts of targeted violence against one single individual differ from mass murder cases (Roshdi & Hoffmann, 2011). The intention of the perpetrator was the key factor distinguishing the two categories. If the perpetrator planned to kill more than one person, it was categorized as a mass murder. If the plan was to kill only one person, it was categorized as a single targeted violent act. Again, court and other official records and police files were analyzed, as well as interviews with individuals who knew the offender. A codebook was created with categories allowing a systematic comparison.

The following results emerged from the study:

- Perpetrators of mass murder showed a stronger fixation on the idea of being a victim themselves.
- Perpetrators of mass murder were more deeply involved in grand revenge fantasies, such as being a warrior or an avenger.
- Perpetrators of mass murder were slightly older, more often suicidal, and more often former students.
- Perpetrators of targeted violence against one person were more likely to have been involved in an active conflict with a single individual in school, such as a teacher.
- The time spent on emotional and practical preparation was generally longer in cases of mass murder.

In general, the differences between the two groups appear to be more quantitative than qualitative in nature (with a little methodological caution regarding the small sample size). Few factors were exclusive to only one of the two groups. Exclusively to the mass murder group were: a fascination with military matters and war, an intensive preoccupation with other school shooters, leakage in the internet, and the use of explosives during the attack. In the concept of identification of warning behavior (Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldimann, & James, 2012), this set of variables indicates a psychological desire to be a "pseudo-commando" (Dietz, 1986; Knoll, 2009), have a "warrior mentality," (Mohandie, 2002), closely associate with weapons or other military or paraphernalia, identify with previous attackers, or identify oneself as an agent advancing a particular cause or belief system. This confirms that mass murder at school forms a subcategory of the phenomenon of targeted violence and is not a category of its own, as there appears to be more similarities than differences between the two groups (Hoffmann, 2011).

16.2 A Behavioral Development Model of Targeted Violence in Schools

Targeted violence in schools can be seen as the final act on a pathway to violence (Calhoun & Weston, 2009), along which different psychological, situational, and interpersonal processes are involved. In our research, we developed a pathway model of the different stages of targeted violence in schools (Hoffmann, 2011). This process is accompanied by an ongoing crisis and an emerging pattern of warning behavior. Our pathway model describes the inside perspective of the perpetrator as well as an outside perspective showing how the person acts at each stage. Before the final act of violence is committed, the individual passes through four stages (see Fig. 16.1).

Each stage is marked by a typical pattern of behavior. Nevertheless, it is not a phase model in which each action sequence replaces the previous. It is more a qualitatively additive pre-offense sequence. At each stage, new risk behaviors are added to existing ones.

16.2.1 Stage 1: Violent Fantasies

At the beginning of this destructive development stands an experience of grievance coupled with an unstable sense of self-confidence. The student is intensely preoccupied by the perception of his own inferiority and tries to convert these feelings of powerlessness into an attitude of power through violent fantasies. Idolization of other school shooters or a fascination with other violent offenders is regularly observed at this stage. Excessive use of violent media is also regularly present, with some perpe-
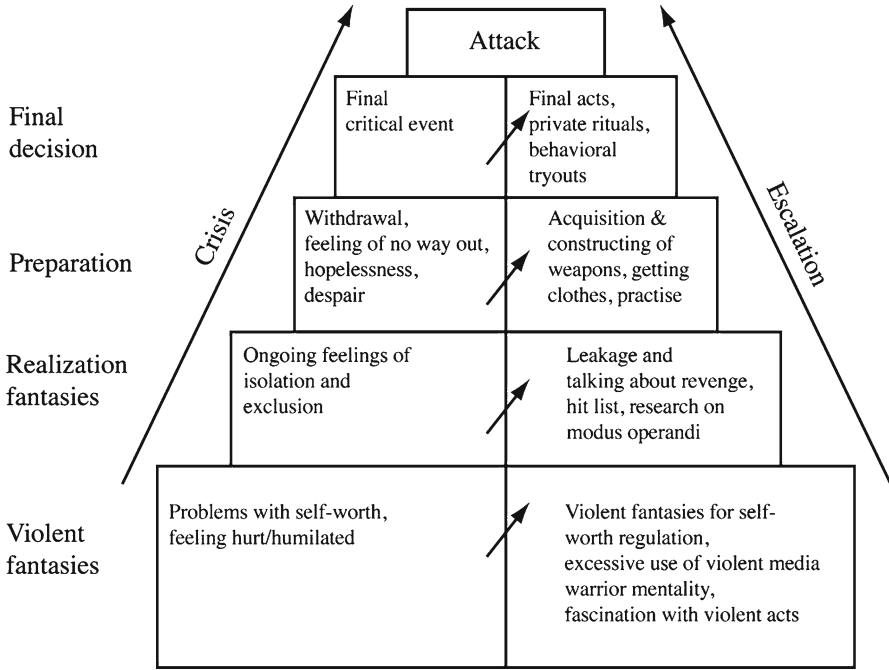
Fig. 16.1 Pathway model of the stages of targeted violence in schools

trators spending copious amounts of time with violent movies, books, computer games, etc. (Hoffmann et al., 2009). Such an extreme use of media refers to the inner process of identification (Meloy et al., 2012). Of course this does not mean that violent media cause targeted violence in school, as the base rate of general use of violent media probably differs little between school shooters and their non-violent peers (Hoffmann et al., 2009). Intense interest in weapons and militaria may indicate that the adolescent is slipping into the identity of an attacker or a fighter, a phenomenon known in threat management terminology as identification or warrior mentality (Hempel, Meloy, & Richards, 1999; Meloy et al., 2012). Often past school shooters like the Columbine perpetrators are glorified. Such forms of identification may be expressed in verbal statements, self-produced video clips, or online communication.

16.2.2   Stage 2: Realization Fantasies

At this stage, the adolescent thinks about how to actually carry out an act of targeted violence. The attack fantasy becomes more realistic and more concrete details are included (Robertz & Wickenhauer, 2010). During this stage, feelings of isolation

and exclusion increase. Research on the modus operandi of other offenders can often be observed here, and hit lists may be drawn up.

16.2.3 Stage 3: Preparation

As feelings of hopelessness and despair become increasingly overwhelming, the student becomes more and more withdrawn and reaches the stage of preparation. He or she tries to get a gun, starts practicing with weapons or building a bomb, and acquires special clothes or material for the attack.

16.2.4 Stage 4: Final Decision

Shortly before the school shooting is committed, a critical final triggering event occurs, which often has a humiliating or face-losing quality (Mohandie, 2002). As in suicidal developments, the perpetrators often show final act behaviors preparing for the time after their death (Calhoun & Weston, 2009; Wasserman & Wasserman, 2009), such as giving away personal belongings or saying good-bye to friends.

16.3 Prevention of Targeted Violence in Schools Using the Concept of Threat Assessment: Evidence-Based Prevention Programs

For several years now, threat assessment has been recognized as best practice by leading US experts (Cornell, 2006, 2011; Fein et al., 2002; Meloy et al., 2004; Mohandie, 2002; O'Toole, 1999) as well as by German scholars (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2009; Hoffmann 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Leuschner et al., 2011).

Bearing in mind the research on school shootings and the philosophy of threat assessment, our group developed three distinct prevention approaches. All three are closely intertwined and have been in practical use for several years.

1. System Safe School: This concept implements a threat or crisis team in schools based on the threat management approach.
2. Local networks: This concept brings different professions or institutions together for risk assessment and case management purposes.
3. DyRiAS-school: The online risk assessment tool DyRiAS (dynamic risk assessment system) assesses the current risk of a student or former student committing an act of severe violence against others or themselves.
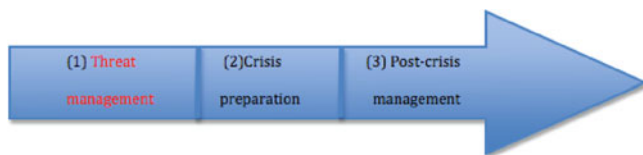
Fig. 16.2 Fields of activity of school-based teams

16.3.1   System Safer School

A crisis and threat assessment team comprises a small group of trained teachers, a member of school management, and, if available, a school social worker whose purpose is not only to prevent severe violence, but also, if desired, to conduct other prevention programs. Following the implementation of such teams in the United States, the number of school shootings began to drop (Robertz & Wickenhauer, 2010). Local crisis and threat assessment teams have a better chance of recognizing early warning behavior in at-risk students. However, as well as violence prevention the school-based teams also have to work in two other fields (see Fig. 16.2).

16.3.1.1   Prevention

Threat assessment and threat management are located in this field. The crisis and threat assessment team should not engage solely in the prevention of targeted violence but should also integrate other issues such as suicide prevention or dealing with sexual harassment. This gives the team better motivation because there are more cases to manage and a broader range of activities and topics arise.

16.3.1.2   Crisis Preparation

While every crisis is different, most follow known patterns. The crisis and threat assessment team has to prepare emergency plans to clearly define the actions to be taken if a crisis occurs. All German federal states have introduced guidelines for school principals on how to respond to crises (Leuschner et al., 2011). Crisis and threat assessment teams have to work with these guidelines to build up their own structure, adapting them to their own school system and update them periodically.

16.3.1.3   Post Crisis Management

The crisis and threat assessment team has to acquire knowledge for post-crisis management also and prepare for what has to be done after an acute crisis—for example, informing parents and others or taking care of traumatized students.

The crisis and threat assessment team is mostly made up of school staff, with an option of including outside experts from the local community. Networking with people and institutions outside the school is of great importance. Significant partners include psychological services for schools, youth welfare centers, psychotherapists, family or educational counseling offices, and police departments. Here personal contact is of great importance to achieve good cooperation between all involved and ensuring that everyone understands their reciprocal responsibilities and commitments.

The crisis and threat assessment team develops the internal process of threat assessment in the school, raising awareness of warning signs among teachers and students and providing an easy response option for students. Another important task is to take care of students who are exposed to leaking or other warning signs. The main concern is to become aware of any student who needs help and to notice the warning signs shown by troubled students, so that support and care can be given. The team also conducts an initial assessment to decide whether the support of external experts will be needed.

System Safer School is based on a 3-day training event for the school staff who will form the crisis and threat assessment team, which usually has four to six members. The following topics are covered in the training:

- The current knowledge of severe targeted violence in schools
- The two basic forms of violence (affective and predatory)
- Identifying warning signs
- Basics of threat assessment
- Media influence and the copycat effect
- The establishment and work of a crisis and threat assessment team
- Including students and parents in the prevention process
- Networking within and outside the school
- Cooperation with other professionals
- De-escalating case management
- Emergency preparations
- Behavior during a school shooting

The knowledge transfer methods applied are instruction, discussion, case studies, and role playing. After the training, the team is qualified to set up the individual structures they need. Other prevention programs that may be already in service can be integrated into the concept. The team works to prevent acts of targeted violence using the philosophy of threat management as their guide.

System Safer School is in use in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, and has been selected as the standard prevention program for targeted school violence in the Swiss canton of Solothurn and the German state of Saarland. The informal feedback from participating schools has been consistently positive, due to the great practical relevance of the concept and its flexibility of integration into pre-existing violence prevention programs. System Safer School is currently being evaluated by the State Institute of Prevention in Saarland, and empirical results are awaited.

A 3-year project to develop a blended learning version of *System Safer School* and create an internet platform with a large range of online training options was starting in summer 2012, funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research and the European Union. It is also planned for the German states of Hamburg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and North-Rhine Westphalia to use the blending learning version of *System Safer School* and launch a broader evaluation in the second wave.

16.3.2   Case Study for System Safer School

The following case study is based on the analysis of the investigative files following a school shooting that took place on March 16, 2000, in the Bavarian community of Brannenburg. The 16-year-old perpetrator had black stripes (like war paint) under his eyes and wore camouflage clothing when he went to his boarding school, shot his teacher, and tried to commit suicide.

What had happened before the school shooting? The shooter was known as being fascinated by weapons. His father was a member of a gun club and collected weapons. A few months before the shooting, the perpetrator copied the key for the room where his father's weapons were stored. Some of his classmates knew that he had done this.

In November 1999 in Germany, an adolescent shot three people before committing suicide. The Brannenburg perpetrator heard about this case in the media and told his classmates that he liked this kind of killings, and school shootings in general. In school, he very often showed aggressive behavior, such as physically attacking another student. He also had conflicts with the teacher he later murdered. In early 1999, he was suspended from school for assaulting a classmate, and in September in the same year he held a pistol to the head of a classmate.

Three months before the shooting, he became more and more isolated. He very often stayed in his room and one day he told a schoolmate that he wanted to kill his teacher. At first, the schoolmate did not take this seriously and told him he should stop saying such things. In response he pointed out that he had a gun.

The differences between the teacher and the perpetrator persisted, with serious ongoing conflicts. After a conversation between the perpetrator's parents and his teachers about his behavior in school, the mother went home and told her son that she would send him to school in London if he was expelled from his current school. Afterwards he said in school that if he had to leave school he would harm his teacher.

Two weeks before the shooting, he started to paint black stripes under his eyes and also painted his lips black. One day before the shooting, he again argued with his teacher. This led to a further suspension from school. It was decided that he would be taken home by two teachers as they were frightened that he would become violent. One of the teachers asked him if he regretted anything he did. His answer was that he only regretted not getting back at his teacher. The teachers told him that they would have to decide if he could stay in school, and that the decision depended on the results of a drug test he and some other students had taken. In this moment,

he knew that he would be expelled, because he had consumed cannabis. The next day he went to school and killed his teacher.

System Safer School could have created opportunities to prevent this targeted attack at several stages in the run-up, because it includes awareness raising and involves students, parents, and the entire school staff in violence prevention.

System Safer School installs a trusted person, usually a teacher, who any member of the school community can approach about disturbing behaviors they observe, such as displaying weapons, making threats and suicide notes. This contact person is part of the threat assessment team where all information runs together. If only a single warning sign is reported, then their task is to collect more information about the incident and the behavior of the subject. The work also includes identifying and evaluating risks that might evolve in critical situations like an exclusion. In high-risk situations, they must develop protective measures while still seeking to form a stabilizing bond to the threatener.

16.3.3   Local Networks

Several common phenomena have been observed prior to school shootings or other forms of targeted violence in companies, universities, institutions, or courts:

- Different people were concerned about the later offender and were aware of risk factors, but did not know what to do.
- Nobody did systematic case research to connect the dots.
- There was no professional to monitor and care for the individual who posed a possible threat to themselves or others.

To tackle this weakness, the installation of local networks has proved to be very helpful. In towns, communities, and districts all the experts are already present (e.g., police, youth welfare services, psychologists) to manage high-risk situations. Unfortunately, at the moment different professionals do not work together in an effective network to prevent targeted violence. Threat management offers a theoretical framework and well-functioning methods to facilitate good networking. From the beginning, threat management avoided using the professional jargon of any of the involved disciplines, instead developing a clear and understandable threat assessment terminology. Therefore, all the professionals from different backgrounds working together on a case have a common language to share and bring together their specialist expertise. Joint threat assessment training including experts from different professions creates a methodological platform for all and allows joint action to be taken by different groups. Local networks should focus not only on school shootings, but also address other forms of violence such as severe forms of stalking and threats against intimate partners.

The first step is to identify which institutions should be part of the local network. Alongside police and psychiatric or psychological services, other authorities or

support services may be included. Two or three representatives from each institution should be nominated to be part of the network.

16.3.4   DyRiAS-School

DyRiAS stands for Dynamic Risk Assessment System. This software is available online and is based on scientific research and empirical data on school shootings. DyRiAS provides an assessment of the risk of a student or former student committing an act of targeted violence in schools. DyRiAS is only accessible to professionals working in the field (such as members of crisis and threat assessment teams in schools, psychologists, psychiatrists, and police officers) who must attend training before using it.

DyRiAS is only suitable for cases where students or former students show concrete warning behaviors such as threats, violent fantasies, or displaying a weapon in school. It is not allowed (or even possible) to use DyRiAS to screen all students in a class or school, which would create a high risk of stigmatizing innocuous students. This would also be totally unreliable from a scientific point of view, as the risk of targeted violence would be wrongly classified as mainly based on personality traits or biographical experiences.

DyRiAS was developed after reviewing more than 250 scientific publications on homicides, mass murder, school violence, and risk and threat assessment, as well as on the basis of our own research activities in the last decade. To validate DyRiAS, studies on German school shooters were cross-validated with samples of German threateners without any identifiable intention to attack and with international cases of targeted violence in schools. The sample of ten German school shooters and the sample of 17 school shooters from the United States, Canada, Finland, and Brazil scored in the two highest DyRiAS risk categories. A sample of 20 threateners of school shootings from Germany who did not launch or prepare an attack scored only in the two lowest categories of risk.

DyRiAS guides the user step by step through all relevant risk factors. The description of each risk factor also provides a short review of relevant scientific literature, international case studies explaining the risk dynamics, and an expert interview in video form. DyRiAS is neither a checklist nor a psychological test. It is a behavioral analysis instrument with complex statistical heuristics of risk patterns. After all necessary information has been entered, the user receives a full risk report in PDF format. With its online format, DyRiAS is always scientifically up-to-date. DyRiAS School is in operational use in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Other countries are currently testing the application of DyRiAS. In some cases, the system is used directly by school threat assessment teams, but more often it is school psychologists, psychiatrists, and police who are responsible for a whole school district that are applying DyRiAS. As the system allows case file to be sent from one user to another, it is suitable for case work within local networks where experts from different fields collaborate.

16.3.5   Case Study for DyRiAS

This case study is based on analysis of police files on a shooting at the perpetrator's former school and former workplace on February 19, 2002, in the communities of Eching and Freising in Bavaria, Germany.

The 22-year-old perpetrator went to his former workplace and killed two former supervisors. Immediately after this, he took a taxi (which he had already arranged in the morning) to his former school, where he shot the principal. While searching for one particular teacher he fired at and injured another who tried to stop him. The teacher he was looking for was off sick that day. When he realized this, he detonated a hand-grenade and committed suicide.

What had happened before the shooting? The perpetrator had wanted to be a soldier since his early childhood. He collected militaria and very often expressed his wish to join the army. In school, he had to repeat 8th grade. During this time, he changed his appearance. He shaved his hair and wore mostly dark clothes and military boots like a right-wing extremist.

His aggressive behavior got him a temporary suspension from school. In 1996, he presented a parody about particular teachers at a school ceremony. His imitation of the teacher he later wanted to shoot was very crude. He called him a gay and demonstrated the sounds he would make during sexual activities. This parody led to his final exclusion from school. The student then said in front of his class that he will come back to take revenge. In the years after his expulsion, he continued mentioning his former school and talking about plans for revenge. He also said that the teacher and principal were responsible for his situation and his failure to achieve his aims in life.

After his expulsion, he left home because he wanted to die in the war in Croatia, but when he tried to cross the border he was stopped by the police and taken home. Being without any perspective and feeling hopeless, he attended a clinic for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, followed by a social education program in Denmark. When he was asked to express his emotions there, he created a comic strip about the last 3 days of a character named Thomas. Day 1 described a "normal" day. On day 2, the protagonist was sent home without money after refusing to fill out a form for the social welfare office. On his way home, he decided to take revenge and bought a weapon. On day 3, the bird owned by the protagonist was lying dead in its cage. The fictional character Thomas armed himself and went to his former school where he killed two teachers. Then he went to the social welfare office, shooting at everyone around him. At the end, he threw a hand-grenade and was shot dead by the police.

The subject was put into psychiatric care because of the ongoing risk of endangerment to himself and others. During this stay, he mentioned that he would commit suicide at some point and blamed his former teacher for his failure in life.

The perpetrator was fascinated with weapons. On his right upper arm, he had a tattoo: "Revenge is mine." He also loved films in which the hero is a loner who takes revenge, like the movie *Taxi Driver*.

In 1999, he started his military service, where his comrades often saw him wearing a gas pistol. He told them that he had weapons at home and could make a bomb

Fig. 16.3 DyRiAS main analysis for Freising subject
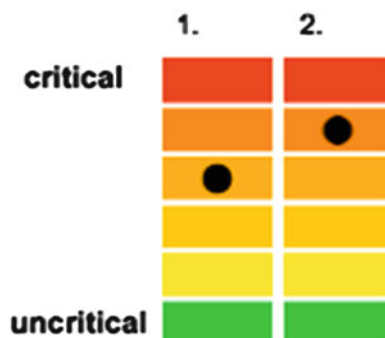
Fig. 16.4 DyRiAS analysis of situation
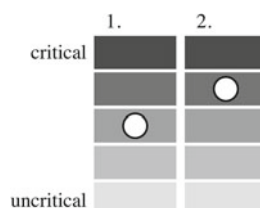
which he would use if he saw no other alternative in his life. While telling this he mentioned again that he would first kill his former teachers.

After he was expelled from military service for stealing drugs, he started working at the company where he later killed his two former supervisors. In December 2001, he was fired for repeated rule breaking.

This case may sound difficult to assess because it developed over such a long period of time. The starting point for a risk analyses with DyRiAS would have been after expulsion from school when he threatened to come back to school and take revenge. The Fig. 16.3 above show the DyRiAS analysis at two different times in this case: point 1 directly after expulsion and point 2 when he was at the social education program in Denmark, after he produced the cartoon about his internal feelings (Fig. 16.4).

Point 1: The DyRiAS result is in Sect. 3, meaning that an intermediate number of warning signs are present.

Point 2: At the time the perpetrator created the comic strip about his internal feelings, DyRiAS suggests that there is a high risk of an act of targeted violence.

Below, we present a differentiated analysis showing how the main result came about by subdividing it into three different scales. Figures 16.4, 16.5, and 16.6 continue to differentiate the two different stages.

1. Situation: This scale shows how the situation affects the person.
2. Mindset: This scale displays the internal elaboration of the external situational conditions.

Fig. 16.5 DyRiAS analysis of mindset
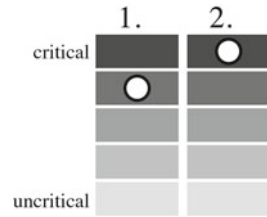
Fig. 16.6 DyRiAS analysis of behavior
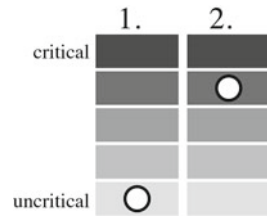
3. Behavior: This scale identifies critical behavior patterns such as preparations for a violent act.

Examining the main analysis and the three subscales, it is clear that the case became more critical and that interventions were needed at both points. This case also shows the importance of combining threat assessment tools such as DyRiAS with other preventative measures such as System Safer School and local networks. If a DyRiAS analysis had been conducted at either point, the threat manager would probably have seen the importance of intervening. A good threat manager stays tuned and works on alternatives for the threatener. Ideally, he would find an adult who manages to build a relationship to the threatener and thus takes care of him or her.

16.4 Conclusions

Today evidence-based tools and strategies exist for the prevention of targeted violence in schools. Without any doubt, threat assessment and management play a central role. It is crucial that crisis and threat assessment teams are implemented in every school and local networks are established. This strategy is cost effective and easy to implement. Above all, it will probably save lives.

On one hand, it seems to be important to have standardized training programs and concepts for networks that can be utilized by communities. With *NETWASS* and *System Safe Schools* two such evidence-based programs are already in use in Germany. However, cultural issues also play a role, sometimes making it difficult to adopt a program from another country. For example, in the United States police are much more present in schools than in most European countries, where school/police liaison has to be accomplished in other ways.

Sometimes, it is difficult to make the concept of threat assessment and management understandable for all local players. Simply written down in an instruction book the idea of threat assessment is not easy to grasp. Therefore in vivo presentations and training events show much better results in promoting this concept to a local community.

Another problem is often how to establish a local network in which different professions and organizations work together closely. This is especially important for long-term management of problematic cases. High-risk students and former students have to be monitored regularly and police, psychiatric services, school psychologists, and other organizations have to work together with schools. Therefore, case managers have to be appointed to maintain an information and intervention network in these cases. The best practical approach for establishing such networks is for the communities themselves to adopt a threat assessment process. Especially in Switzerland, this strategy has been applied successfully in cantons such as Zurich and Solothurn.

References

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2009). School Shootings in Deutschland: Aktuelle Trends zur Prävention von schwerer, zielgerichteter Gewalt an deutschen Schulen. *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie, 58*, 685–701.

Borum, R., & Verhaagen, D. (2006). *Assessing and managing violence risk in juveniles*. New York: Guilford.

Calhoun, F., & Weston, S. (2009). *Threat assessment and management strategies. Identifying the howlers and hunters*. Boca Raton: CRC.

Cornell, D. G. (2006). Student threat assessment. In E. Gerler (Ed.), *Handbook of school violence* (pp. 115–136). London: Routledge.

Cornell, D. G. (2011). A developmental perspective on the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 43–60.

Dietz, P. E. (1986). Mass, serial and sensational homicides. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 61*, 447–490.

Dill, K. E., Redding, R. E., Smith, P. K., Surette, R., & Cornell, D. G. (2011). Recurrent issues in efforts to prevent homicidal youth violence in schools: Expert opinions. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 113–128.

Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education.

Hempel, A. G., Meloy, J. R., & Richards, T. C. (1999). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 27*(2), 213–225.

Hoffmann, J. (2003). Amok—ein neuer Blick auf ein altes Phänomen. In C. Lorei (Ed.), *Polizei und Psychologie* (pp. 397–414). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hoffmann, J. (2007a). Tödliche Verzweiflung—der Weg zu zielgerichteten Gewalttaten an Schulen. In J. Hoffmann & I. Wondrak (Eds.), *Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen* (pp. 25–33). Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Hoffmann, J. (2007b). Interventionen vor Tatbeginn. In F. Robertz & R. Wickenhauer (Eds.), *Der Riss in der Tafel* (pp. 117–125). Heidelberg: Springer.

Hoffmann, J. (2011). Amok und zielgerichtete Gewalt an Schulen—Risikoeinschätzung und Prävention. In G. Deegener & W. Körner (Eds.), *Gewalt und Aggression im Kindes-und Jugendalter* (pp. 202–216). Weinheim: Beltz.

Hoffmann, J., Roshdi, K., & Robertz, F. (2009). Zielgerichtete schwere Gewalt und Amok an Schulen—Eine empirische Studie zur Prävention schwerer Gewalttaten. *Kriminalistik, 63*(4), 196–204.

Knoll, J. L. (2009). The "Pseudocommando" Mass Murderer: Part I, The Psychology of Revenge and Obliteration. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 38*, 87–94.

Leuschner, V., Bondü, R., Schroer-Hippel, M., Panno, J., Neumetzler, K., Fisch, S., et al. (2011). Prevention of homicidal violence in schools in Germany: The Berlin Leaking Project and the Networks Against School Shootings Project (NETWASS). *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 61–78.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger: A behavioral profile of school-based shootings. *Forensic Examiner, 8*, 16–18.

Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A., Gray, T., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A., & Richards, T. (2004). A comparative analysis of North American adolescent and adult mass murderers. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 22*, 291–309.

Meloy, J. R., Hoffmann, J., Guldimann, A., & James, D. (2012). A typology of warning behaviors for threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 30*, 256–279.

Meloy, J. R., & O'Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 29*(4), 513–27.

Mohandie, K. (2002). *School violence threat assessment*. San Diego: STS.

Newman, K. S. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Perseus.

Newman, K. S., & Fox, C. (2009). Repeat tragedy. Rampage shootings in American high school and college settings, 2002–2008. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1286–1308.

O'Toole, M. E. (Ed.). (1999). *The school shooter*. Quantico: FBI Academy.

Randazzo, M. R., Borum, R., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Modzeleski, W., & Pollack, W. (2006). Threat assessment in schools: Empirical support and comparison with other approaches. In S. Jimerson & M. Furlong (Eds.), *Handbook of school violence and school safety: From research to practice* (pp. 147–156). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School Shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Polizeiwissenschaft: Frankfurt am Main.

Robertz, F., & Wickenhauer, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Der Riss in der Tafel*. Heidelberg: Springer.

Ronningstam, E. F. (2005). *Identifying and understanding the narcissistic personality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roshdi, K., & Hoffmann, J. (2011). Ein Vergleich von Taten zielgerichteter Gewalt an Schulen mit und ohne Amok-Dynamik. In C. Lorei (Ed.), *Polizei und Psychologie 2009: Kongressband der Tagung Polizei und Psychologie am 27. Und 28. Oktober 2009 in Frankfurt am Main* (pp. 83–104). Polizeiwissenschaft: Frankfurt.

Scheithauer, H., Bondü, R., Meixner, S., Bull, H., & Dölitzsch, C. (2008). Sechs Jahre nach Erfurt: Das Berliner Leaking-Projekt. *Trauma & Gewalt, 2*(1), 8–19.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service/Department of Education.

Wasserman, D., & Wasserman, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Oxford textbook of suicidology and suicide prevention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 17
The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines: An Empirically Supported Violence Prevention Strategy

Dewey Cornell

School shootings are so traumatic that the fear of an attack can lead to unrealistic appraisals of risk (Cornell 2006). Fear can overwhelm facts. Even though numerous school shootings have occurred in the United States, the probability that any one of the nation's approximately 125,000 schools will experience a homicidal student attack is quite low, estimated as once every 6,000 years (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). School homicides constitute far less than 1% of the annual homicides of youth aged 5–18 in the United States (Modzeleski et al., 2008). School safety is essential, of course, but effective safety practices must be based on a realistic understanding of the problem.

There is potential danger that authorities will overreact to the possibility of school shootings with excessively punitive practices. In the United States, many schools adopted zero tolerance discipline policies, which meant that students were automatically suspended from school for even the slightest violations of school rules regarding weapons, drugs, or threats of violence (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). In many cases students have been suspended for questionable reasons, such as a 6-year-old boy who was ordered to attend a reform school for 45 days because he brought his Cub Scout camping utensil to school (Urbina, 2009). He planned to use the utensil for eating his lunch, but since it happened to include a knife along with a fork, spoon, and bottle opener, it was a violation of the school's zero tolerance policy regarding knives. In the face of public pressure, the school board modified the suspension and allowed the boy to return to school. In many cases, however, students have experienced severe consequences for similar infractions (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). School authorities need an approach that permits them to make reasonable judgments when it is evident that a student's behavior does not constitute a serious threat of violence.

D. Cornell (✉)
Curry School of Education, University of Virginia,
Charlottesville, VA, USA
e-mail: dcornell@virginia.edu

Another ill-advised strategy is to use profiles or checklists of warning signs to identify dangerous students. A federal government guide to school safety presented 16 warning signs that included items such as "history of discipline problems," "drug use and alcohol use," "feelings of being picked on and persecuted," and "excessive feelings of rejection" (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998). Many school authorities could identify multiple students in their schools who appear to meet these signs yet fail to pose a threat for violence. The federal guide recognized the limitations of a warning signs approach and cautioned: "Unfortunately, there is a real danger that early warning signs will be misinterpreted" (Dwyer et al., p. 7). They urged school authorities to refrain from using the warning signs as a basis for punishing students or excluding them from school.

In their study of school shootings, the profiling experts with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) concluded that schools should not rely on student profiling (O'Toole, 2000). As their report noted, "Trying to draw up a catalogue or 'checklist' of warning signs to detect a potential school shooter can be shortsighted, even dangerous. Such lists, publicized by the media, can end up unfairly labeling many nonviolent students as potentially dangerous" (O'Toole, p. 2). Nevertheless, there is a strong intuitive appeal to the idea that students who commit school shootings fall into a single group with identifiable characteristics.

The United States Secret Service conducted a study of school shootings and observed that over three-quarters of the student perpetrators had communicated to someone, usually a friend or classmate, that they had an interest in mounting an attack at school (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). In more than two-thirds of cases, the perpetrators felt bullied or harassed by others and were motivated to take revenge. These observations indicated that schools should focus their efforts on the identification and investigation of student threats as a violence prevention strategy.

Both the FBI (O'Toole, 2000) and Secret Service (Fein et al., 2002) reports recommended that schools adopt a threat assessment approach. Threat assessment begins with the identification and evaluation of persons who threaten to harm others, and is followed by interventions designed to reduce the risk of violence. Because threat assessment involves both assessment and intervention, the term "threat assessment" is not quite appropriate. The developing process called "threat assessment" might be described more accurately as a "threat management" approach to violence prevention (Cornell & Allen, 2011; Heilbrun, 1997; Heilbrun, Dvoskin, & Heilbrun, 2009). A key aspect of threat assessment is its emphasis on considering the context and seriousness of the student's behavior: What were the circumstances surrounding the student's actions and what did the student intend by them? If the investigation indicates that the threat is genuine, the next step would be to take action to prevent it from being carried out.

Threat assessment is used by the Secret Service to investigate persons who might pose a threat to a government official and in the business world when there is concern about workplace violence (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999). One immediate practical problem with using a threat assessment approach in schools is that students frequently make threatening statements or engage in threatening behavior. A survey of 9,487 students in grades 3 through 12 (Singer & Flannery,

2000) found that approximately one-third of primary school boys and more than half of secondary school boys reported threatening someone with physical violence in the past year. Among girls, the rates were approximately one-quarter and 40%, respectively.

Most student threats are not reported to school authorities and do not result in physical violence. A survey of 4,400 high school students (Nekvasil and Cornell 2012) found that approximately 14% reported being threatened by another student in the past 30 days. Most of the threatened students (80% of boys and 65% of girls) said that they did not tell anyone about the threat, primarily because they did not regard the threat as serious. Even among those students who thought a threat was serious, only 49% (38% of the boys and 64% of the girls) reported telling someone about the threat. When asked about the outcome of the threat, most of the threatened students (91%) reported that the threat had not been carried out. These results suggest that threats are a frequent but largely unrecognized occurrence in schools.

Nevertheless, some threats do come to the attention of school authorities. A survey of U.S. public schools conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (Neiman & DeVoe, 2009) found that school authorities recorded 20,260 student threats of physical attack involving a weapon and 461,910 threats of physical attack without a weapon in the 2007–2008 academic year. These threats involved more than two-thirds of all secondary schools and more than one-third of primary schools. Another national survey (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2010) found that approximately 7% of teachers reported being threatened with injury by a student and 4% reported being physically attacked by a student in 2007–2008.

Threats of violence can be frightening and disruptive events even if no violence occurs. Students and teachers may be troubled and distracted from schoolwork. Parents may become alarmed and keep their children home from school. In the face of great public concern, school authorities may feel compelled to invest in expensive new security equipment or hire security officers. Even with extensive security measures, schools are vulnerable to hoax threats that are intended only to be disruptive. For example, after the Columbine shooting, numerous anonymous threats were reported at schools across the United States; Pennsylvania schools recorded 354 threats in 50 days (Kostinsky, Bixler, & Kettl, 2001). As a result, threats pose a dilemma for school authorities: they do not want to over-react to threats that are not serious, but they cannot under-react when a serious threat occurs.

17.1   Development of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

The reports by the FBI (O'Toole, 2000) and Secret Service and Department of Education (Fein et al., 2002) made strong arguments for a threat assessment approach, but there was no established model or set of procedures for schools to follow. In response to this evident need, our group, the Virginia Youth Violence

Project at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, developed and field tested a threat assessment model for schools. The model was designed so that school authorities would have a standard and systematic approach for responding to student threats of violence.

Because student threat assessment was an untried practice with no established procedures, the researchers began by interviewing school principals and school psychologists about their typical responses to student threats. In 2002, we developed a set of procedures in consultation with a group of school administrators, school psychologists, and law enforcement officers. The procedures were then reviewed by a board of national experts in forensic psychology and risk assessment. They were field-tested in 35 Virginia schools for 1 year, further refined, and ultimately published in a 145-page manual, *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence* (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). This chapter provides an overview of the resulting Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, followed by a summary of research support.

17.1.1 Threat Assessment Team

We recommend that each school should have its own threat assessment team, consisting of an administrator (principal or assistant principal), a law enforcement representative (such as a school resource officer), and one or more mental health professionals (school psychologist, counselor, social worker, etc.). Of course, schools in different systems may have different staffing patterns, and some schools may not work closely with law enforcement agencies and not have officers employed in the schools. The team approach described here can be adapted for use in different countries or school systems.

A school-based team is recommended because local staff will know the students and be able to respond more quickly than an external team. Furthermore, most student threats can be resolved without an extensive process, so that use of an outside team would be inefficient and could magnify the importance of a minor incident.

The team leader is typically an administrator who has responsibility for student discipline and safety. The leader begins the threat assessment process with a triage evaluation to determine the seriousness of the threat and then either takes the limited action necessary to resolve a transient threat, or if the threat is substantive, engages more team members in a full-scale assessment and intervention. The leader has considerable flexibility to determine when to engage the team.

In more serious cases, a school psychologist or another mental health professional conducts a mental health evaluation of the student. This evaluation has two main objectives: (1) to identify mental health problems that demand immediate attention, such as psychosis or suicidality and (2) to determine why the student made the threat and make recommendations for dealing with problems or conflicts associated with the threat. Students typically make threats when they are frustrated and face a problem or situation that they cannot resolve. School counselors, psychologists, social workers, or other mental health professionals on the team can help

a troubled student resolve underlying conflicts or problems identified in the mental health assessment. It is best if the mental health professionals are staff members in the school because they will already know many of the students and staff members, and they will understand the culture of the school. In some school systems, however, the mental health services are provided by community-based professionals or staff from a central office serving all schools.

Each team should have a law enforcement representative, preferably a school resource officer who has been trained to work in schools (Clark, 2011). The school resource officer advises the team whether a student's behavior has violated the law, provides security, and can undertake criminal investigations in the most serious cases. It should be emphasized that most threat cases do not rise to the level of a criminal act and do not require criminal investigation. Some school authorities worry that law enforcement officers will be too quick to arrest a student for behaviors that ordinarily can be handled with school discipline, a trend that Kupchik (2010) has observed in many U.S. schools. This is a legitimate concern that should be addressed with law enforcement agencies before a team is established, so that there is a common understanding of roles and procedures.

17.1.2　Decision Tree

Threat assessment teams follow a seven-step decision tree that is presented in the manual with guiding principles and numerous case examples (see Fig. 17.1; Cornell & Sheras, 2006). One goal of the Guidelines was to devise a procedure that was flexible and efficient enough to be adjusted to the seriousness and complexity of the case. The first three steps of the assessment are a kind of triage phase during which the team leader determines whether the case can be resolved quickly and easily or whether it will require more extensive evaluation and intervention as a substantive threat. In the easiest and clearest cases, a threat might be resolved within an hour. In more complex cases, there may be a more comprehensive assessment of the student, interviews with witnesses as well as meetings with parents, and then the formulation of a safety plan that is administered over an extended period of time.

At step one, the team leader begins by interviewing the student who made the threat, as well as others who may have knowledge of it. The interviewer uses a standard set of questions that can be adapted to the specific situation. He or she must explore the context as well as the content of the threat. In other words, what were the circumstances in which the student made a threat, what did the student mean, and what does the student intend in making the threat? The student's account is compared to what other witnesses report and how they experienced the threat.

At step two, the threat may be identified as transient, such as an expression of anger, frustration, or even inappropriate humor. The defining feature of a transient threat is that the student does not have a sustained intent to harm someone. In some cases, behavior that appears threatening to an observer might not be a genuine threat, for example, when the student's statement was intended as a joke or a figure
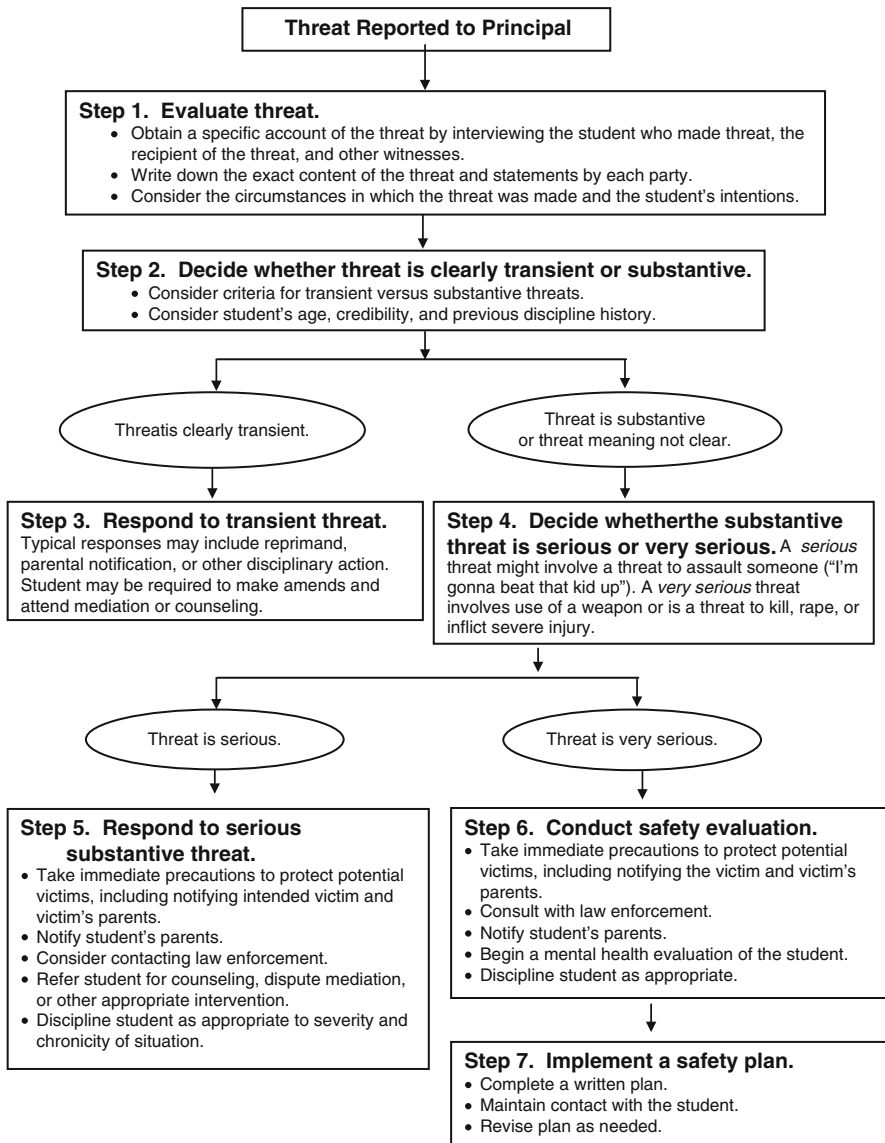
Fig. 17.1 Decision tree for student threat assessment

of speech. In such cases, the student and the school team member would seek ways to clarify the situation for all concerned parties.

At step three, transient threats are resolved if the student is able to offer an apology and explanation that makes amends for his or her behavior. In situations where there is an argument or conflict of some kind, the team may use available counseling

resources. Many schools choose to use mediation or a conflict resolution process. The student may be reprimanded and disciplined in some other way if his or her behavior violated school rules. Most threats are resolved at this step, so the process is not too burdensome and a minor incident is not treated as a major problem.

A threat that cannot be easily resolved as a transient threat is regarded as a substantive threat, which means that there is a sustained intent to harm someone beyond the immediate incident. When it is not clear whether a threat is transient or substantive, the team considers the threat to be substantive. There are some presumptive, but not necessary or sufficient, indicators that a threat is substantive. Threats are more likely to be substantive when they are more specific about who will be attacked, when the attack will occur, and how it will be carried out. Furthermore, threats are more likely to be substantive if the student has engaged in planning or preparation to carry out the threat, and if there is physical evidence of intent such as a weapon or written plan. In each case, the team must consider the totality of circumstances surrounding the threat and make reasoned judgments based on all the available information. The team should consider factors such as the student's age and capabilities, mental state, and prior history of aggression.

At step four, a substantive threat is classified as serious or very serious, based on the intended severity of injury. A serious threat is a threat to assault or fight someone. A very serious threat is a threat to kill, sexually assault, or severely injure. A threat involving the use of a weapon is generally considered a threat to severely injure, but teams must always use their judgment. For example, if a student threatens to shoot someone with a water pistol, it would not make sense to treat such a threat as very serious.

At step five, the team responds to a serious substantive threat by taking action to prevent the threat from being carried out. Immediate protective actions include cautioning the student about the consequences of carrying out the threat, providing supervision so that the threat is not carried out at school, and contacting the student's parents (or adult caretakers) so that they can assume responsibility after school. A team member should also meet with the intended victim(s) of the threat, both in an effort to resolve the underlying dispute or problem and to warn them. If the intended victim is a student, that student's parents should be contacted as well. For serious substantive threats, threat assessment ends here.

In the case of very serious substantive threats, the team takes more extensive action at step six. Typically, a mental health professional such as a school psychologist will undertake a mental health evaluation of the student. The first goal of this evaluation is to assess the student's mental state and need for immediate mental health services. For example, does the student have delusional ideas that could motivate aggressive action? Is the student so depressed or suicidal that he or she might take desperate action without concern for the consequences? A second goal is to recommend strategies addressing the problem or conflict underlying the threat. For example, is the student a victim of bullying or involved in some other peer conflict? Although the use of long-term suspension is discouraged, a short-term suspension (typically a few days) is an appropriate safety precaution until the team can complete its evaluation. The school resource officer must determine whether law enforcement action should be taken.

At step seven, the team integrates findings into a written safety plan. The plan may include a combination of mental health and counseling recommendations, findings from the law enforcement investigation, and disciplinary consequences. The safety plan is designed both to protect potential victims and to address the educational needs of the student who made the threat. These plans vary widely according to the circumstances of each case. A key feature of any plan is that it is oriented toward resolving the problem or conflict that stimulated the threatening behavior. Threats can be regarded as symptoms of a problem that a student is unable to resolve, such as bullying or intense conflicts with peers, or perhaps academic difficulties in school. In many cases the student is struggling with depression and suicidal feelings. Consequently, an effective plan will take a comprehensive, problem-solving approach.

Safety plans will include provisions for monitoring the student over a reasonable period of time and making sure that the plan is working. For example, a team member might be in regular contact with a student for several months to assess how things are going and whether efforts to address a problem with bullying have been successful. If the student has been referred for counseling or mental health services, there should be provision to share information on the student's attendance and progress. For students who are receiving special education services, there may be changes in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP; a U.S. federal requirement for students with disabilities). An IEP might include behavior support plans to help a student deal with anger or interpersonal conflict, or improve social skills.

17.1.3   Staff Training

The possibility of homicidal violence raises such concern that school authorities may believe that a threat assessment team requires extensive training and that only highly specialized experts can conduct threat assessments. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of students who make threats of violence have ordinary problems that are familiar to experienced educators and mental health professionals (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Common peer problems include bullying, jealousy and rivalry between peers, romantic disputes, racial or ethnic bias, and gang-related conflict. Students may sometimes threaten school staff members over disciplinary actions, academic requirements, and low grades. Although school-based teams should be able to deal effectively with most student threats, there may be exceptional cases that merit outside consultation with mental health professionals or law enforcement authorities. One example would be mental health consultation for cases that involve a student with unusual and severe psychological difficulties. Another example would be law enforcement consultation for a dispute between criminal gangs with a history of violence.

Teams are trained in the Virginia Guidelines in a 1-day workshop that prepares them to use a 145-page manual, *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence* (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). The workshop is divided into six

sessions. The first session covers the nature and extent of violence in schools and the rationale for using a threat assessment approach as opposed to a zero tolerance approach. The second session is a step-by-step review of the threat assessment procedure and its decision tree. The next session covers psychological factors relevant to a potentially violent student and includes case examples illustrating three primary pathways to violence: (1) violence committed for instrumental or predatory purposes by antisocial or delinquent youth; (2) reactive or hostile acts of aggression committed by youth in response to intense conflict; (3) irrational acts of violence committed by youth experiencing psychotic symptoms such as delusions or hallucinations.

The fourth session addresses legal issues and professional practice standards. There is specific attention to the limits of student confidentiality in threatening situations and the duty to take protective action in response to substantive threats. This session also covers questions about legal liability should a student commit a violent act.

In the fifth session, teams from each school are presented with three case exercises to work through and discuss. The teams develop a plan for each case and then compare plans in a group discussion. This session is especially useful for team members to see that they can work together using the guidelines, and that the teams from different schools arrive at similar conclusions. The final session reviews the steps in implementing the threat assessment model, and how students, parents, and school staff should be informed about the new approach.

Several studies have examined the effects of the workshop on participant knowledge of threat assessment principles and concepts by administering questionnaires before and after training (Allen, Cornell, Lorek, & Sheras, 2008; Cornell, Allen, & Fan 2012; Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). These studies show large training effects with similar impact across participating groups of school administrators, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers.

17.2 Threat Assessment Research

17.2.1 Virginia Field Test

The first study of the threat assessment guidelines was a field test conducted in 35 Virginia schools enrolling approximately 16,200 students (Cornell et al., 2004). In the United States, schools are generally divided into three levels: elementary schools with students from Kindergarten through grade 5, middle schools with grades 6–8, and high schools with grades 9–12. We trained a team in each school to use the threat assessment guidelines whenever a student threat was reported to school authorities. The schools recorded 188 threat cases during the 2001–2002 school year, an average of about five per school.

One goal of this study was to describe the kinds of threats reported to school authorities. The 188 threats included 77 threats to hit or beat up someone and 69

threats to kill, shoot, or stab someone, as well as 42 less specific threats (e.g., "I am going to hurt you"). There were threats from students in all grade levels, but threats appeared to peak in grades 3 and 4 of elementary school and grade 7 of middle school. Threats were reported to school authorities primarily by teachers (82 cases) and students (71), although some threats were reported by parents (14), school administrators (12), and other persons. In the majority of cases (141), the target of the threat was another student, but there were 23 cases involving threats against teachers, and eight directed at other school staff members such as principals. The remaining 17 cases were more ambiguous (e.g., "I am going to blow up the school").

The field test demonstrated that teams could take a differentiated approach to students based on the seriousness of the threat, making the process more efficient and flexible. Most threats (70%) were classified as transient threats and resolved through an explanation or apology. In most transient cases, there were disciplinary consequences and counseling. For example, a student who had an argument with a classmate might attend a mediation session to resolve the dispute. Another student who appeared to have problems with anger and self-control might incur disciplinary consequences, but also be referred for counseling. Schools were free to integrate the threat assessment model with their existing disciplinary and counseling practices.

The remaining cases (30%) were determined to be substantive threats. Because the threats were substantive, school authorities were required to take appropriate protective action to prevent them from being carried out. This might involve increasing supervision of the student, notifying his or her parents, and contacting targeted victims to warn them of the situation. In addition to protective actions, the team would formulate a plan to address the underlying conflict or problem that drove the student to make a threat. Bullying was one of the most common problems that motivated substantive threats. Threats were made by bullies or, in some cases, made by victims of bullying who wanted revenge. In other cases, the threats might involve rivalries between peers or disputes over romantic relationships, such as a break-up between a boyfriend and girlfriend.

The substantive cases were classified as serious (22%) if they involved a threat to hit or beat up someone and very serious (8%) if a threat to kill, rape, or inflict injury with a weapon was involved. Only the very serious substantive cases required a mental health assessment and development of a safety plan.

At the end of the school year, and then again the following fall, researchers conducted follow-up interviews with school principals and other school staff (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). The disciplinary consequences for the 188 cases were much less severe than if the schools had used a zero tolerance approach. Only three students were given long-term suspensions. In each of these cases, the students had accumulated more than a dozen disciplinary violations earlier in the year and school authorities concluded that it was not possible to keep them in the school. Nearly all of the students were able to return to their original school. Approximately 43% of students were described as showing improved behavior, 39% were described as about the same, and only 18% were regarded as worse in

their behavior. Remarkably, there was no report of any of the threats being carried out. Although it is possible that some minor threats might have been carried out without knowledge of the school authorities, it is certain that the most severe threats (e.g., to kill, shoot, or stab) were not carried out.

17.2.2 Memphis Field Test

A second field test was conducted in Memphis, Tennessee (Strong & Cornell, 2008). This large system of 194 schools served a predominantly (87%) African-American population in a city with a high rate of crime and poverty. Approximately 75% of Memphis students were eligible for free or reduced lunch and 29% of students had been retained at least one grade. The school system already had an established center that consulted with its schools, so the threat assessment approach was adapted for use within this system. A single team provided evaluations for cases referred from any school in the city. One consequence of this decision is that assessments were conducted only on students whose behavior was judged serious enough by the school principal to merit a suspension of four or more days.

The Memphis evaluation involved 209 cases that represented the most serious disciplinary violations committed by students in 103 schools. There were 60 (29%) threats to hit or beat up someone, 48 (23%) threats to cut or stab, 32 (15%) threats to shoot, 30 (14%) threats to kill, 14 (7%) sexual threats, and 25 (12%) other threats (such as to blow up or burn down the school). In each case, the centralized team developed an individualized plan of mental health and educational services. All but five students were able to return to school or an alternative educational placement and just three students were incarcerated. Across all sources of information, there was no report of any of the threats being carried out. In addition, the study examined student discipline referrals before and after the threat assessment for 198 students with available records. These students averaged 6.4 referrals before the threat incident and 2.9 referrals after the threat assessment, a statistically significant decline.

17.2.3 Retrospective School Climate Study

The two field-test studies found that schools could carry out a threat assessment approach with seemingly positive outcomes, but both lacked comparison groups. A third study addressed this limitation in a statewide survey of Virginia public high schools (Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009). According to the state's annual school safety audit, by 2007, 95 (34%) high schools (grades 9–12) had adopted the Virginia threat assessment guidelines, 131 (47%) schools used locally developed threat assessment procedures, and 54 (19%) reported not using a threat assessment approach. The three groups were compared retrospectively using a school climate

survey that had been administered to randomly selected samples of ninth grade students in each high school as part of the Virginia High School Safety Study (Gregory et al., 2010).

The school climate survey contained two standard scales measuring whether students had been bullied or victimized in some other way in the past 30 days, as well as a scale to measure how much bullying and teasing they observed taking place at school. There were two additional scales to measure positive aspects of school climate, including whether they were willing to ask a teacher for help if they were bullied or threatened in some way and whether their teachers cared about them and treated them with respect. The most consistent findings were that students attending schools using the Virginia threat assessment guidelines reported less bullying, expressed more willingness to seek help from teachers, and felt that teachers were more caring and respectful than did students attending other schools.

In addition, state disciplinary records indicated that schools using the Virginia guidelines had fewer long-term suspensions during the 2006–2007 school year than schools using other threat assessment approaches. This study could not demonstrate conclusively that the differences between groups were due to the implementation of the threat assessment model rather than selection effects, but there were statistical controls for a series of potentially confounding variables. These analyses controlled for the size of the school, the percentage of minority students in the school, and the percentage of low-income students in the school. They also controlled for the amount of neighborhood violent crime and the extent of security measures in the schools.

17.2.4   Prospective Quasi-Experimental Study

One limitation of the retrospective school climate study was that there was no assessment of change over time. It is possible that the schools choosing to use the Virginia threat assessment guidelines had already achieved lower levels of bullying and fewer school suspensions than the schools in the comparison group. Therefore, the next study examined a group of schools before and after implementing the Virginia threat assessment guidelines (Cornell et al., 2011). Changes in these schools were compared to changes in a comparison group of schools that did not use the threat assessment model.

The intervention sample consisted of 23 high schools that had received training in threat assessment during the same school year. These schools were part of a single large school division in a densely populated urban/suburban region of northern Virginia. The comparison group consisted of 26 high schools in three nearby school divisions that were considering whether to adopt the threat assessment guidelines, but had not done so. The two groups of schools had comparable characteristics. The 23 intervention schools enrolled an average of 1,891 students per school that included 51% with racial or ethnic minority status and 19% from low-income families eligible for reduced-price meals at school. The 26 comparison schools enrolled an average of 2,065 students per school, with 45% minority and 21% eligible for

reduced-price meals. The differences between the two groups in size and percentages of minority and low-income students were not statistically significant.

The first step in this study was to train the threat assessment teams. The central administration of the school division selected staff members in the 23 intervention schools to attend a 1-day workshop on the threat assessment guidelines. The 142 staff members consisted of 59 principals or assistant principals, 20 school psychologists, 22 social workers, 18 school security officers, and 12 others (such as other administrators). The workshop covered the rationale for threat assessment, the decision tree model, and procedures used to determine the seriousness of a student threat. The workshop emphasized resolving peer conflicts and bullying before these problems escalated into more serious acts of violence. There were case exercises demonstrating how threats could be resolved without long-term suspensions. Participants completed an anonymous pre-test evaluation form at the beginning of the training, and a post-test evaluation at the end of the workshop. Analysis of the evaluation showed large effects on the participants' knowledge of threat assessment. Almost all participants gave positive ratings of the workshop and indicated enthusiasm for implementing it (Cornell et al., 2011).

The next step in the study was to compare disciplinary outcomes in the two groups of schools from the baseline year (prior to training at the intervention schools) to the follow-up year after training. These analyses showed that the intervention schools experienced a decrease of approximately 52% in long-term suspensions, whereas the comparison schools showed no change in long-term suspensions. In addition, the intervention schools reported a decrease of 79% in bullying infractions, whereas the comparison schools reported a slight increase in bullying infractions (Cornell et al., 2011).

17.2.5 Randomized Controlled Trial

Finally, it was possible to arrange a randomized controlled study of threat assessment. In this study, a large school division agreed that 20 of its 40 schools could be randomly assigned to receive threat assessment training and 20 waited in a control group for 1 year before receiving training (Cornell et al. 2012).

The school division enrolled approximately 32,000 students in 26 elementary schools, eight middle schools, and six high schools in an urban/suburban community in eastern Virginia. Approximately 58% of the students were African-American, 31% White, 6% Hispanic, and 5% from other racial/ethnic groups. Nearly half (46%) were classified as economically disadvantaged, based on federal criteria for the free and reduced-price meal program. A baseline survey revealed that, in both intervention and control schools, students who made threats of violence were typically suspended from school (75% and 73%, respectively) and rarely referred for counseling support services (15% and 18%, respectively).

The study examined outcomes for 201 students (100 in intervention schools and 101 in control schools) who made threats of violence during one school year. The student grade levels ranged from Kindergarten to 12th grade with 89 (44%) in elementary school, 59 (29%) in middle school, and 53 (26%) in high school. Most

(73%) of the students were boys. Approximately 24% of the students were identified as white and 76% racial minority (73% African-American and 3% Hispanic).

The prevention of violence is always a fundamental goal of threat assessment, but most threats are not carried out, and severe acts of violence are so rare that it would require an extraordinarily large sample to assess intervention effects. In this study, only seven students were identified as carrying out their threat of violence, so no group comparisons were undertaken. Beyond violence prevention, the Virginia Guidelines were designed to achieve three goals that were evaluated in this study: (1) use of counseling and mental health services to resolve conflicts; (2) involvement of parents in response to the threat; and (3) return of students to school without long-term suspension or alternative school placement.

A series of logistic regression analyses were conducted to compare intervention and control students after controlling for the effects of demographic variables (student gender, school level, and race) and threat severity (transient, serious substantive, or very serious substantive). Compared with control students, students in schools using the Virginia Guidelines were approximately four times more likely to receive counseling services, based on an Odds Ratio (OR) of 3.98. Students in the intervention group were about two-and-a-half times more likely to receive a parent conference (OR = 2.57). Notably, students in the intervention group were about one-third as likely to receive long-term suspension (OR = 0.35) and one-eighth as likely to receive an alternative school placement (OR = 0.13). In sum, students receiving a threat assessment were much more likely to receive counseling services and to remain in their original school.

The researchers gathered information on the fidelity of staff implementation of the threat assessment guidelines within the 20 intervention schools. They constructed a compliance scale based on the extent to which team members at each school attended threat assessment meetings, completed documentation forms, and reported that they used the threat assessment model. Higher compliance scores were associated with greater use of counseling services (OR = 1.24) and fewer long-term suspensions (OR = 0.73). This suggests that schools that more faithfully implemented the threat assessment model were more likely to achieve the goals of greater use of counseling services and less use of long-term suspensions.

Compliance is a critical issue in any effort to change school procedures (Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003). Schools frequently adopt programs but then fail to follow their requirements (Hallfors & Godette, 2007). School authorities in the randomized controlled trial had established their own ways of dealing with student misbehavior and there was some resistance to following new procedures. It is essential that the central administration for a school system provide support and encouragement for school administrators to follow a new model.

Overall, there are some special challenges to implementing a threat assessment model. Threat assessment is not a specific curriculum or prescriptive set of procedures but a set of guidelines to assist a team in its decision-making process. Moreover, threat assessment is not a routine activity but an infrequent event that can occur unexpectedly at any time during the school year. As a result, it may take a year or more for some school team members to develop enough experience to trust the model and be comfortable in using it.

17.3   Strengths of the Threat Assessment Approach

The concluding sections of this chapter discuss several strengths of a threat assessment approach in comparison to other risk assessment strategies. The Virginia Guidelines give schools a flexible approach to student threats that can be adjusted to the seriousness of the student's behavior. There are many forms of aggressive behavior in the school-age population. Verbal aggression can range from playful teasing to arguments and abusive language, whereas physical aggression can include playful jostling or horseplay to many levels of fighting from pushing and shoving to serious attempts to hurt one another. Because student threats are a relatively common event, but rarely result in severe acts of violence, it is important that schools have a procedure to assess the seriousness of a threat rather than over-react with automatic suspension or expulsion. School authorities must always consider the context and meaning of the student's behavior. In many cases the threat is less serious than it may first appear. Research (reviewed above) indicates that schools using the Virginia Guidelines can make judgments about the seriousness of a threat that result in much lower rates of long-term suspension and fewer out-of-school placements than other schools.

Threat assessment teams are trained to encourage students to report threats of violence. In order to overcome the code of silence that affects many students, schools must educate students that there is a difference between snitching and seeking help (Brank et al., 2007). Students may be more willing to report threats when they see that school authorities are not taking a punitive, zero tolerance approach, but are instead concerned with solving problems and preventing conflicts from escalating into violence. Students are more likely to seek help in schools with a more positive and supportive climate (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010; Syvertsen, Flanagan, & Stout, 2009).

17.3.1   *Targeted Violence and Threats*

Threat assessment has broader applicability than its original conception as a procedure limited to "targeted violence," which has been defined as incidents where the targets are identifiable prior to the violent act (Reddy et al. 2001). Threat assessment was largely developed by the U.S. Secret Service to protect specific individuals, such as public officials. However, it is questionable whether threat assessment must be limited to "targeted" violence as opposed to simply "planned" violence. School shootings do not necessarily involve identified targets. Some students had threatened specific victims, but many others had no identified targets and simply intended to engage in a shooting rampage. The definition of "targeted" violence must be broadened considerably to include cases where the identifiable target was simply anyone at school. Furthermore, in cases such as the U.S. shooting in Red Lake, Minnesota (2005), and the German shooting in Winnenden (2009), the student killed individuals outside of school before or after the school attack. It is not clear what is gained by confining threat assessment to "targeted" violence when it appears useful in any case where the person has engaged in threatening behavior.

In the Virginia Guidelines, a threat is defined broadly as any expression of intent to harm someone (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). A threat can be communicated directly to the target or indirectly to third parties. Threats may be spoken or written, and increasingly they may be communicated through digital communication media such as websites or text messages. Threats can be specific ("I am going to kill you") or vague ("I am going to hurt you"). Threats also can be veiled or implied ("You better watch your back" or "You're going to be sorry"). Using abusive language or calling someone names is not considered a threat unless there is a statement expressing intent to harm.

Threats can also be expressed through behavior such as carrying a weapon, and here the presence of a threat requires more judgment. A student who brings a weapon to school is in violation of school prohibitions against weapons but may or may not intend to harm someone. Students may bring a weapon to school for a variety of reasons, such as to protect themselves, to impress others, or to make a sale. The definition of a weapon is also subject to question. In the United States, students have been suspended, arrested, or expelled from schools for bringing toy guns, water pistols, and even a one-inch plastic accessory for a military action figure that was shaped like a gun (Cornell, 2006). Threat assessment allows school authorities to make common sense judgments rather than to rely on rigid rules.

17.3.2   Leakage and Profiling

In recommending a threat assessment approach, the FBI study of school shootings (O'Toole, 2000) referred to the phenomenon of "leakage" as an important warning sign of potential violence. Leakage was defined as statements or behaviors by a student that intentionally or unintentionally reveal feelings or thoughts concerning an impending violent act. Threats would constitute a clear form of leakage, but other behaviors, such as asking friends for help obtaining a weapon, or bragging about what one is planning to do, are also forms of leakage.

The FBI report also suggests more broadly that a preoccupation with themes of violence in the student's conversations, writings, or artwork could be leakage, too. However, a critical problem with these more distal forms of leakage is that they are not as closely linked to actual preparation to carry out a violent act and may not be reliable indicators of impending violence. As the FBI report noted, many adolescents are fascinated with violence and their writings or drawings could be nothing more than a reflection of their imagination. Consequently, the FBI report emphasized that warning signs such as leakage should not be used as "a checklist to predict future violent behavior by a student who has not acted violently or threatened violence. Rather, the list should be considered only *after* a student has made some type of threat and an assessment has been developed" (O'Toole, 2000, p. 14).

One important distinction between threat assessment and profiling is that a threat assessment is triggered by the student's threatening behavior. This narrows the field of students under investigation and is based on behaviors that are initiated by the student and meaningfully linked to a possible violent attack. In contrast, a profile is

applied to a much wider group of students, and uses a collection or checklist of warning signs that may or may not be meaningfully linked to a possible violent attack. Profiles or lists of warning signs typically contain indicators that are too broad to be useful in identifying violent individuals and will generate a high rate of false positive identifications (Sewell & Mendelsohn, 2000). In contrast, a threat assessment is less reliant on a standard checklist and more concerned with the context for the student's threat. It involves a search for specific behavior that indicates planning and intention to carry out a violent act, which may vary depending on the nature of the threat.

17.3.3   Scoring Systems and Levels of Risk

Many approaches to risk assessment use a scoring system that awards points to different risk factors and then adds up the points to arrive at an overall level of risk. For example, the Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment (DTVRA) was designed to help school personnel assess student threats (Van Dyke & Schroeder, 2006). The DTVRA consists of 19 risk factors derived from a review of literature on risk factors for violence. Some of the items are conceptually linked to a threat, such as whether the student threat is detailed and whether the student has access to weapons. Other items are more general, such as whether the student has a history of drug or alcohol use or has exhibited cruelty to animals. Each item is rated as low, medium, or high and assigned a score of 1, 2, or 3, respectively. All of the items are given equal weight and are summed into a total risk score in which scores below 9 are considered low risk and scores above 14 are considered high risk. In the Dallas school system, most cases were determined to be low risk and only 3% scored as high risk. Although such a structured system can be appealing, the authors cautioned that the scoring system and cutoff points were "arbitrarily chosen by the committee without empirical validation" (Van Dyke & Schroeder, p. 608).

There are major problems with risk scoring systems for threat assessment purposes. First, many risk factors commonly identified in the literature are associated with general risk for violence at some unspecified time that could be years in the future, rather than immediate risk to carry out a specific threat. Even youth who score high on risk assessment instruments do not necessarily engage in frequent acts of severe violence. There is less research on risk factors for imminent violence, especially in student populations (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Knowing that a student falls into a high risk category does not necessarily mean the student is going to carry out the immediate threat. Risk categories are typically validated on the basis of any aggressive act over a period of years and could include minor incidents that have nothing to do with the threat.

A second problem is that the risk for violence in youth is much more situational and transitory than risk scores imply (Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2002). Risk scores, as well as classifications of risk (e.g., high, medium, low) are static designations that ignore the variability in youth behavior and adolescents' responsiveness to their immediate envi-

ronment. An adolescent who is low risk when supervised and feeling calm may be much more dangerous when angry, intoxicated, or surrounded by peers who encourage impulsive behavior. A student's level of risk rises when he or she moves from a supervised classroom into the hallway between classes, and again when he or she leaves school in the afternoon. Risk is not a fixed quality, but fluctuates over time.

Another problem with risk scores is that there is no clear threshold that indicates the need to take action. When risk is high, certainly intervention to prevent violence is warranted, but at what point is risk so low that it can be disregarded? For example, if a student threatens to kill someone, what level of risk is considered too low to merit protective action? Risk scores do not easily translate into guidance for action.

The underlying distinction is perhaps that threat assessment is concerned with prevention rather than prediction, and risk reduction rather than risk measurement (Borum et al., 2002; Heilbrun, 1997; Skeem & Monahan, 2011). Static risk scores are useful for conducting prediction research over a period of time, but less practical when it comes to immediate efforts to prevent violence. Much of the research literature is concerned with prediction using a fixed set of predictors that can be measured in a sample of subjects, ignoring individual variation and idiosyncratic factors. This simplification is necessary for statistical analyses, but unrealistic for prevention purposes because it means ignoring potentially important information that is specific to the individual case. For this reason, professional judgment is a necessary component of risk management (Borum et al., 2002).

Prevention efforts are intrinsically dynamic because they involve interventions that are designed to reduce the adolescent's risk level. They are adjusted and modified in response to the adolescent's behavior and guided by the resources available to the team and others involved in the prevention effort. This is one reason why studies find that clinical predictions of violence in real world settings are often inaccurate (Monahan et al., 2001). Furthermore, clinicians, who are concerned with prevention rather than prediction, tend to err on the side of safety and over-predict violence. The more concerned the clinicians (or team members) are about a person's potential for violence, the more concerted their effort, and if this effort is successful and violence is prevented, their efforts will not be credited by the researcher but instead regarded as a prediction failure. In this sense, the relationship between prediction and prevention can be paradoxical. A prevention success by the clinician can be regarded as a prediction failure by the researcher.

Another paradox is that low risk scores can lull the team into complacency. If resources are not mobilized because the youth seems to be "low risk," there could be unexpected changes in the youth's situation, such as provocation by peers that results in violence. In principle, a threat assessment approach can minimize this paradox by taking a problem-solving approach to every substantive threat. Intervention efforts are based on the seriousness of the problem or conflict—guided by what is needed to resolve the problem that generated the threat—rather than an unreliable and potentially misleading estimation of the level of risk.

Threat assessment should not be regarded simply as a form of risk assessment (Reddy et al., 2001). On the contrary, threat assessment is a process of investigation

followed by action to reduce risk. A team could make use of structured risk assessment instruments as a source of information in decision-making, but threat assessment remains fundamentally a process of guided professional judgment and intervention. As Reddy et al. noted, threat assessment is guided by three principles. First, there is no specific type of violent student who carries out a school attack. This means that no profile or list of warning signs can be effective. Second, threats are commonplace, but making a threat is not the same as posing a threat, which is more serious. Therefore, all threats must be investigated so that serious threats can be identified. Finally, students who carry out school attacks almost always contemplate and plan their attack before taking action. This preparation can extend for weeks or months. Consequently, threat assessment teams have an opportunity to identify and prevent violence.

17.4 Directions for Future Research

There are multiple directions for further research. There is a need for more fine-grained research on the process and outcomes of threat assessment, especially with regard to the students who make threats. How does the resolution of transient threats differ from substantive threats in process and outcome? What is the rate of violence among students who make these different types of threats in schools that use threat assessment vs. other approaches? Because the rate of violence is so low, it would be necessary to collect data from a very large sample and track numerous cases of student threats to detect group differences.

Other related questions include how students are affected by the threat assessment process and what interventions are most effective for students who make threats under different conditions or in different situations. For example, when a student is being bullied, what interventions are most useful? How does the intervention affect the student's relationship with the threatened individual and how does the intervention affect student behavior in other domains?

There is also a need for research on victims or targets of threats. How do students respond to being threatened, especially when the threat appears to be serious? When do they decide to seek help for a threat? Finally, no studies have examined outcomes for threatened individuals and whether interventions are needed to restore their feelings of safety and engagement in school.

17.5 International Use

The Virginia Guidelines can be adapted for use in countries outside of the United States and are being used in several countries. As Bondü et al. note (in this volume), the Virginia Guidelines have been used as a model for a nationwide effort to prevent school shootings in Germany. Even within the United States, the Virginia Guidelines

have been implemented with varying standards and procedures because American school systems operate largely under local government control. The state of Virginia alone has more than 130 school divisions, each with its own school board and administrative structure, so some degree of variation is inevitable.

The guidelines are intended to be flexible so that the basic principles can be applied in many different threat situations. It is most important that school authorities have the freedom to exercise their judgment in assessing the seriousness of a threat and to develop a plan that resolves the conflict or problem underlying the threat. Schools may modify team membership based on their staff composition. For example, there are many variations in the United States in the use of school psychologists, school counselors, social workers, and other professionals. Each school must determine what resources are available to build the most effective team.

The most substantial challenge may be in defining the role of law enforcement officers on threat assessment teams. This is a challenge in the United States because the development of school resource officers is relatively new and there are differing perspectives on how law enforcement officers can function in school settings (Clark, 2011). Nevertheless, there is broad agreement that in the most serious cases, law enforcement involvement is essential.

17.6 Conclusion

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines provide schools with a flexible, practical, and effective response to student threats of violence. Field tests and controlled studies demonstrate that school-based teams can be trained to conduct threat assessments that distinguish serious, substantive threats from less serious, transient threats. Using a seven-step decision tree, schools are able to respond to student conflicts, take necessary safety precautions, and administer appropriate disciplinary consequences that are calibrated to the seriousness of the situation. Threat assessment provides schools with a much-needed alternative to zero tolerance discipline and leads to substantial reductions in the use of long-term suspensions. Threat assessment also appears to have a beneficial impact on school climate, with associated reductions in bullying and greater willingness among students to seek help from school authorities. In conclusion, the Virginia Guidelines can be a valuable component of a comprehensive approach to school safety.

References

Allen, K., Cornell, D., Lorek, E., & Sheras, P. (2008). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 19*, 319–332. doi: 10.1080/09243450802332184

American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 63*, 852–862. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852.

Borum, R., Bartel, P., & Forth, A. (2002). *Manual for the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)*. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher, 39*, 27–37. doi: 10.3102/0013189X09357620.

Borum, R., Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., & Berglund, J. (1999). Threat assessment: Defining an approach for evaluating risk of targeted violence. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 17*, 323–337.

Brank, E. M., Woolard, J. L., Brown, V. E., Fondacaro, M., Luescher, J. L., Chinn, R. G., et al. (2007). Will they tell? Weapons reporting by middle-school youth. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 5*, 125–146.

Clark, S. (2011). The role of law enforcement in schools: The Virginia experience—A practitioner report. *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 89–102.

Cornell, D. (2006). *School violence: Fears versus facts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Cornell, D., & Allen, K. (2011). Development, evaluation, and future directions of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *Journal of School Violence, 10*, 88–106.

Cornell, D., Allen, K., & Fan, X. (2012). A randomized controlled study of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in grades K-12. *School Psychology Review, 41*, 100–115.

Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2011). Reductions in long-term suspensions following adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 95*, 175–194.

Cornell, D., & Sheras, P. (2006). *Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly, 24*, 119–129. doi: 10.1037/a0016182.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Kaplan, S., McConville, D., Posey, J., Levy-Elkon, A., et al. (2004). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 527–546.

Dusenbury, L., Brannigan, R., Falco, M., & Hansen, W. (2003). A review of research on fidelity of implementation: Implications for drug abuse prevention in school settings. *Health Education Research, 18*, 237–256.

Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Eliot, M., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2010). Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence. *Journal of School Psychology, 48*, 533–553.

Fein, R. A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W. S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center.

Gregory, A., Cornell, D., Fan, X., Sheras, P., Shih, T., & Huang, F. (2010). Authoritative school discipline: High school practices associated with lower student bullying and victimization. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*, 483–496.

Hallfors, D., & Godette, D. (2007). Will the principles of effectiveness improve prevention practice? Early findings from a diffusion study. *Health Education Research, 17*, 461–470.

Heilbrun, K. (1997). Prediction versus management models relevant to risk assessment: The importance of legal decision-making context. *Law and Human Behavior, 21*, 347–359.

Heilbrun, K., Dvoskin, J., & Heilbrun, A. (2009). Toward preventing future tragedies: Mass killings on college campuses, public health, and threat/risk assessment. *Psychological Injury and Law, 2*, 93–99.

Kostinsky, S., Bixler, E., & Kettl, P. (2001). Threats of school violence in Pennsylvania after media coverage of the Columbine High School massacre. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 155*, 994–1001. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/.

Kupchik, A. (2010). *Homeroom security: School discipline in an age of fear*. New York: New York University Press.

Modzeleski, W., Feucht, T., Rand, M., Hall, J., Simon, T., Butler, L., et al. (2008). School-associated student homicides—United States, 1992–2006. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 57*(2), 33–36.

Monahan, J., Steadman, H., Silver, E., Appelbaum, P., Robbins, P., Mulvey, E., et al. (2001). *Rethinking risk assessment: The MacArthur study of mental disorder and violence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mulvey, E. P., & Cauffman, E. (2001). The inherent limits of predicting school violence. *American Psychologist, 56*, 797–802.

Neiman, S., & DeVoe, J. F. (2009). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in U.S. public schools: Findings from the school survey on crime and safety: 2007–08*, NCES 2009-326. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Nekvasil, E., & Cornell, D. (2012). Student reports of peer threats of violence: Prevalence and outcomes. *Journal of School Violence, 11*, 357–375.

O'Toole, M. E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Reddy, M., Borum, R., Berglund, J., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: Comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools, 38*, 157–172.

Robers, S., Zhang, J., & Truman, J. (2010). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2010*, NCES 2011-002/NCJ 230812. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

Sewell, K. W., & Mendelsohn, M. (2000). Profiling potentially violent youth: Statistical and conceptual problems. *Children's Services: Social Policy, Research, and Practice, 3*, 147–169.

Singer, M., & Flannery, D. (2000). The relationship between children's threats of violence and violent behaviors. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 154*, 785–790. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10922274.

Skeem, J., & Monahan, J. (2011). Current directions in violence risk assessment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*, 38–42. http://cdp.sagepub.com/content/20/1/38.

Skiba, R. J., & Peterson, R. (1999). The dark side of zero-tolerance: Can punishment lead to safe schools? *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*, 372–382.

Strong, K., & Cornell, D. (2008). Student threat assessment in Memphis City Schools: A descriptive report. *Behavioral Disorders, 34*, 42–54.

Syvertsen, A. K., Flanagan, C. A., & Stout, M. D. (2009). Code of silence: Students' perceptions of school climate and willingness to intervene in a peer's dangerous plan. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*, 219–232. doi: 10.1037/a0013246.

Urbina, I. (2009). It's a fork, it's a spoon, it's a … weapon? *New York Times*. Retrieved October 12 from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/12/education/12discipline.html.

Van Dyke, R., & Schroeder, J. (2006). Implementation of the Dallas threat of violence risk assessment. In S. R. Jimerson & M. J. Furlong (Eds.), *The handbook of school violence and school safety* (pp. 603–616). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

Chapter 18
Indicated Prevention of Severe Targeted School Violence: NETWorks Against School Shootings (NETWASS)

Vincenz Leuschner, Miriam Schroer-Hippel, Rebecca Bondü, and Herbert Scheithauer

Between 1999 and 2012, Germany experienced 12 incidents of homicidal violence targeting schools, resulting in the deaths of 20 teachers and 16 students (Leuschner et al., 2011). This means there have been more cases in Germany than in any country other than the United States (with more than 60 cases since 2001). In addition, German schools are confronted with hundreds of threats of severe school violence. In 2009, police recorded 231 rampage threats to schools in the federal state of Baden-Wurttemberg (Ziehfreund, 2010), 223 in Hesse (Bannenberg, 2011), and 136 in Berlin (Der Polizeipräsident in Berlin (DPiB), 2011). In response, all federal states have implemented emergency response plans designed to guide staff and students. Although such plans are important and necessary, emergency response by definition cannot prevent violent acts like school shootings. In order to promote prevention at an earlier stage, we developed the NETWASS program (Networks Against School Shootings) to enhance staff awareness and attentiveness, and increase their confidence in handling a student's development towards acts of severe targeted school violence. In terms of the Institute of Medicine model of prevention (universal, selected, indicated), NETWASS is an indicated prevention program,

V. Leuschner (✉) • M. Schroer-Hippel • H. Scheithauer
Department of Educational Science and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin,
Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Germany
e-mail: vincenz.leuschner@fu-berlin.de; miriam.schroer@fu-berlin.de;
herbert.scheithauer.fu-berlin.de

R. Bondü
Department of Psychology, University of Potsdam,
Potsdam, Germany
e-mail: rebecca.bondue@uni-potsdam.de

which addresses populations identified on the basis of initiation behavior and individual risk factors (Gordon, 1987; Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994).

In the present chapter, we describe the theoretical framework of NETWASS, putting the program into the context of a developmental perspective on school shootings, grounded in contemporary empirical research. Then, we discuss structural problems of violence prevention in schools, which are important for the NETWASS implementation strategy. The third section describes the different stages of the NETWASS model of crisis prevention. Section four gives an introduction to the evaluation design. We present preliminary data about the situation in schools regarding teachers' self-assessment of agency and fear of school shootings, and critical incidents at schools as reported by school principals and teachers before they started the training. Finally, we report selected results on how well schools implement NETWASS and discuss what kind of critical incidents were reported within a time period of 7 months after program implementation.

18.1 Adolescents on a Pathway to Severe Targeted School Violence

Research into the phenomenon of severe targeted school violence, especially school shootings, has produced three central insights that represent the theoretical foundation of NETWASS. The first is that such offences are not spontaneous, affect-driven acts resulting directly from the present situation, but involve critical long-term developments in the later perpetrator (O'Toole, 1999; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Although these critical developments are not yet properly understood, several developmental models and offender typologies suggested during recent years indicate multiple developmental pathways towards an offense (Böckler & Seeger, 2010; Bondü, 2012; Cornell & Sheras, 2006; Langman, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2009). All authors conclude that a developmental pathway toward a violent act such as a school shooting is accompanied by stressful events which are closely linked to the motives for the violent acts (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2009). Given the offenders' age, these stressful events are mainly experienced during adolescence and may include rejection by peers, the subjective impression of having been rejected, disciplinary actions by school authorities, loss of attachment figures, or the experience of unjustified teacher behavior (Kidd & Meyer, 2002; Leary et al., 2003). Additionally, previous research suggests that later perpetrators lacked appropriate problem-solving and coping strategies, impeding coping with these experiences of rejection or loss. Thus, such events cause feelings of "social marginalization" (Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002) or "invasion of identity" (Böckler & Seeger, 2010).

Research findings support the thesis that the pathway to an act of severe targeted violence is experienced in terms of what crisis theory (Caplan, 1961) calls a process of life crisis, characterized by stressful events, which represent threats to identity and

well-being. Due to misinterpretation of stressors or lack of ability to cope adequately with them, the crisis state is characterized by the fundamental breakdown of primary and secondary appraisal where rational problem-solving becomes impossible and the later perpetrators have great difficulties managing subjective feelings and frustrations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The probability of experiencing such a crisis increases when the individual is highly vulnerable, for example because of emotional disturbances or mental disorders (e.g. narcissistic personality disorder or symptoms). This argument can also be illustrated by research findings on school shootings: Bondü (2012) reports evidence of heightened vulnerability among seven German offenders, who displayed characteristics like low self-awareness, introversion, dysfunctional coping, social instability, and poor conflict-resolution skills, originating from and interacting with mental health problems in certain cases. Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, and Roth (2004) argue that "individual vulnerabilities" are one of five necessary factors for a school shooting (along with marginality, cultural scripts, failure of surveillance systems, and access to guns) which aggravate the impact of social isolation. In his analysis of ten American cases, Langman (2009) reports that all of the perpetrators showed individual problems and could be assigned to one of three types: traumatized, psychotic, or psychopathic.

Because of their lack of coping skills, perpetrators choose inappropriate ways to deal with their situation and express their feelings of despair, revenge, and anger. Cultural scripts such as past school shootings, media violence, and notions of masculinity and whiteness provide powerful—and inappropriate—"problem-solving" models. Former school shooters and avenger figures in comics, films, and computer games negotiate ego-weakness, show virility, and exhibit a godlike power of decision over life and death, and are attractive role models for these adolescents. Such cultural scripts serve a foil for identification and are central to fantasies, as demonstrated by numerous perpetrator's writings, internet presentations, and diaries (Gaertner, 2009; Gasser, Creuzfeldt, Näher, Rainer, & Wickler, 2004). In this manner, painful experiences and crises lead to—or at least reinforce—plans for violence, if the individual lacks adequate problem-solving skills for his or her situation. There is some evidence that the actual realization of an offence is also facilitated by stressful events. Bondü (2012) shows that most of the seven German perpetrators she studied had experienced loss (e.g. of attachment figures, of future perspectives because of suspension) shortly before committing the violent act. Accordingly, we identify two kinds of stressful events on the developmental pathway toward a violent act, differentiated by their proximity: early events are causes for feelings of social marginalization or invasion of identity, while late events are "flashpoints" for concrete realization of an offense. This heuristic description of a developmental pathway illustrates that the student's development towards an offense against his or her school is accompanied or initiated by personal crisis. The crisis may be triggered by a multitude of different events, where there is evidence that spectacular acts of violence against students, school staff, etc. can be interpreted as the perpetrators' way of "dealing" with the crisis.

But how do we detect a student's critical development toward severe violent acts? The answer to this question revolves around a second insight from contemporary research. Retrospective studies of school shootings show that in most cases

perpetrators engaged in "conspicuous" behaviors that pointed toward the planning of an act of violence and/or exhibited so-called leaking, in the form of written, spoken, or pictorial announcements of violent intentions (direct leaking) or communication of violent fantasies or an intense interest in previous school shootings, weapons, and death (indirect leaking; Heubrock, Hayer, Rusch, & Scheithauer, 2005; O'Toole, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Leaking, generally repeated, has been observed prior to every school shooting in Germany analyzed to date (Bondü, 2012) and in most international cases (O'Toole, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002). It did not pass undetected, but caused others to be concerned (Bondü, 2012). Therefore, identifying leaking is the most promising approach for prevention efforts. Because leaking is a "construct," usually based on retrospective analysis, it cannot be used as reliable predictor for school shootings. However, leaking can indicate a personal crisis or critical psychosocial/emotional development and thus represents a possibility for detecting students who need attention. Anyway, as results from the Berlin Leaking Project demonstrate, not all of the students who showed conspicuous behavior in terms of leaking would or could have ever realized an act of targeted school violence (Bondü et al. in press).

The third insight of school shooting research is that such acts cannot be explained by "single causes" but rather by multiple factors. There is a broad scientific consensus that school shootings result from complex interactions of psychological, sociocultural, structural, and situational risk factors (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011; Newman et al., 2004). Typical risk factors include peer rejection, negative experiences with teachers, fantasies of violence and revenge, lack of parental control, mental abnormalities, suicidal tendencies, extensive consumption of violent media, and easy access to weapons (Leuschner & Scheithauer 2012). These factors are not sufficient conditions for school shootings, in the sense of "causal risk factors," but can usually be found in various combinations in retrospect. So, while there is no consistent perpetrator profile for school shooters, considering these (psychosocial) risk factors in combination with leaking behavior offers a promising approach (Bondü, 2012).

What did we derive from international research for the NETWASS program? On the basis of the first insight—preoffense developmental pathways—NETWASS follows a developmental approach recognizing severe targeted school violence, especially school shootings, as an extreme endpoint of a critical, individual development trajectory, a stepwise process moving towards violence that can be interpreted as the expression of a personal psychosocial crisis. If school staff become aware of a student's personal crisis and intervene, a critical development towards violence may be stopped and thus an act of severe targeted school violence may be prevented. For this reason the NETWASS project offers a crisis prevention model to help teachers to intervene early.

The second insight, that leaking represents observable behavior relating to violence as an individual strategy for dealing with life events or crises, may be observed by school staff, and is much more specific than general risk profiles, makes leaking the central starting point for the NETWASS prevention approach.

The third insight—that school shootings have multiple causes—is reflected in the NETWASS approach by combining the detection of leaking behavior with an

assessment of risk factors in a dynamic understanding of the student's individual development. This strategy reduces false positives and false negatives. If school officials follow up signs of leaking, for example by considering further information about the student supplied by other teachers, and initiate suitable crisis (pre-)intervention measures, a critical development towards a crisis may be averted. Thus, while severe targeted school violence cannot be predicted with great accuracy, it may still be prevented. Sensitizing school staff to leaking behavior and critical developments in students creates the possibility of early intervention and flexible reaction in individual cases while simultaneously avoiding hysteria and stigmatization by underlining the unlikelihood of school shootings and drawing teachers' attention to students in crisis.

18.2   Structural Problems of Prevention in Schools

For the development and implementation of effective prevention at the school level, scientific findings on individual developmental pathway (risk factors and leaking) are a basic but insufficient requirement. Knowledge must also be transformed into "practical frameworks" that can in fact be implemented by school staff and others. Thus, it is necessary to analyze the organizational structure of schools and other relevant institutions and the behavior of responsible individuals. Several structural problems concerning the handling of threats of violence and the detection of psychosocial risk factors at the school level must be taken into account. In their case study of two school shootings, Fox and Harding (2005) found that loss of information within the school system caused by "organizational deviance" was one reason why school staff often failed to recognize leaking behavior or other indications of emotional trouble prior to acts of violence. Organizational deviance includes institutional memory loss and task segregation, which lead to structural secrecy and fragmentation of information across individuals within schools and across schools within school systems. From the experience of NETWASS implementation in Germany, we can add the problem of information transfer between schools and the wider network of relevant institutions, such as police, school psychologists, and youth welfare departments. Effective prevention approaches must ensure that no information is lost within schools or the wider social support system. This implies the need to establish effective organizational prevention structures within schools to guarantee information flow and assign responsibilities.

A second problem is school staff's lack of knowledge about contemporary youth culture, normative youth development, and dynamic group processes. Our research in German schools shows that teachers have only marginal knowledge of these issues and may have problems distinguishing critical developments from expressions of youth culture or specific lifestyles (Leuschner et al., 2011). If teachers do not know about first-person shooters or popular cultural scripts among youth (e.g. music and films that glorify violence), they have no possibility to detect leaking. For this reason, prevention approaches must take up the challenge of expanding not only

specific knowledge about leaking and risk factors but also general knowledge about youth culture and normative youth development.

As already mentioned, research shows that in a large majority of cases later offenders directed threats and leaking towards peers. The transmission of this information to teachers or other officials enhances the likelihood of preventing a violent act (Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Unfortunately, adolescents often avoid speaking about peers' problems or conspicuous behavior to school staff or other adults. This has been termed the "code of silence" (Fein et al., 2002). Prevention of severe targeted school violence thus requires efforts to unlock the code of silence, for example by fostering a good school climate and establishing trusting relationships between staff and students.

Finally, there are structural problems of response. Even if school staff are able to detect indicators for critical developments, they need external support to react adequately. Often schools possess only limited capacity for dealing with a student's crises or threats because of lacking pedagogical knowledge, time, and internal social support. Only a few schools in Germany have their own social worker or school psychologist. These problems often lead to deficiencies in response strategies. In addition, cooperation between schools and social support agencies is often underdeveloped or deficient due to staffing shortages, data protection issues, or inadequate communication. Therefore, effective violence prevention means embedding schools within a wider network of social support agencies, facilitating strategies to link schools together and encouraging them to establish professional networks.

18.3   The Networks Against School Shootings Prevention Model

To find out how prevention of severe targeted school violence could work at the school level, we conducted a pilot study as part of the Berlin Leaking Project, evaluating training for teachers to identify and report leaking behavior among students in eight schools in Berlin (Bondü & Scheithauer, unpublished manuscript). In each school, a 30–60-min information meeting was conducted. introducing the project to teachers and informing them about leaking, risk factors for school shootings, and emergency responses. They were asked to choose a "leaking appointee" from their department to function as a contact person for teachers who witness leaking or threats and as a coordinator for collecting information about leaking. Teachers were asked to report leaking incidents during a 6–9 month period. The participating teachers completed a questionnaire after the information meeting (t1) and 6–9 months later at the end of the reporting period (t2). Most teachers evaluated the information meeting positively. They reported feeling less worried and having a broader repertoire of reactions to leaking and greater knowledge of emergency responses. After some initial skepticism, teachers accepted the idea of having a leaking appointee at their school (t1: $M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.97$; t2: $M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.09$; $t78 = -5.52$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.08$; five-point scale with $1 = very\ bad$ to $5 = very\ good$). Despite these results, teachers also reported feelings of insecurity about their ability to assess leaking and expressed a strong wish for further support from the police and

school psychologists. The pilot study concluded that teachers had little knowledge of leaking and other risk factors, but were open and receptive to instruction in a brief training session. It also seemed that they responded best to interactive training sessions accompanied by practical examples.

Based on these experiences and the international research findings on school shootings and threat assessment (Reddy et al., 2001), as well as an analysis of the legal and administrative conditions applying to German schools, the NETWASS project was established to continue and expand the work of the Berlin Leaking Project and develop a prevention model. The NETWASS crisis prevention model combines the advantages of the threat assessment approach (Cornell et al., 2004; Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, & Fan, 2009) with a more general perspective of crisis prevention and crisis intervention in schools. The central goal is not merely to deal with threats but to help students in crisis. The NETWASS crisis prevention model provides a developmental perspective and an organizational structure for effective school-based crisis prevention. The comprehensive goals of the program are to protect students and staff against severe targeted school violence, to deal with threats and leaking, and to improve the security situation in German schools.

For several reasons it did not seem pertinent to copy U.S. threat assessment approaches (Cornell & Sheras, 2006) one to one in German schools. First of all, it appeared difficult to implement threat assessment without generating negative conceptions of "student as threat." Teachers are very sensitive and critical towards security measures that create any outward impression of reducing students to potential security risks. Instead, NETWASS strives to avoid stigmatization and hypersensitivity by focusing on identifying crises and initiating help. Formal emergency guidelines and legal considerations place tight constraints on internal evaluations of the seriousness of student behavior (especially in cases of direct threats of violence, suicide, or rampage, or possession of weapons). The legal framework requires the development of a threat assessment/crisis prevention system specific to the situation at schools in different German states (in Germany, the federal states rather than the state government are responsible for education).

18.3.1   The NETWASS Crisis Prevention Model

The main objective of the NETWASS prevention model is the early indicated prevention of school shootings and severe targeted school violence, addressing threats and leaking behavior as indicators of a critical development towards violence. This may mean threats expressed in words or gestures or incidents of violence against others or self (including special interest in violent cultural scripts). Risk factors for school shootings identified and discussed in relevant studies (e.g. bullying, use of violent media content, mental stress) are also considered. However, as the psychosocial risk factors for school shootings have a broad scope and cover general problem behaviors of adolescence, the NETWASS prevention model encounters not only critical developments specific for violent behavior, but also critical developments of students in general. Combining behavior assessment with an assessment of
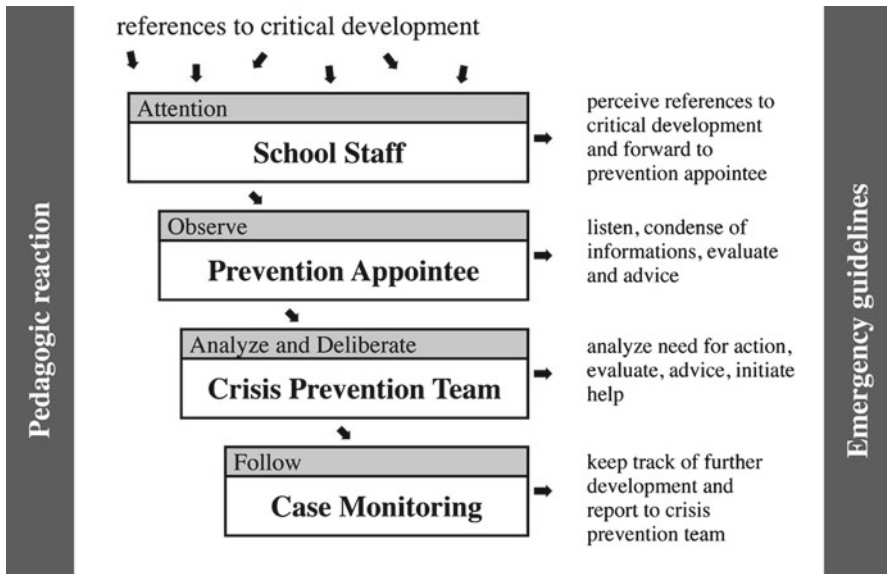
Fig. 18.1 NETWASS crisis prevention model. *Source*: Panno et al. (2010), p. 30, translated

psychosocial risk factors is a productive strategy for crisis prevention and intervention. The core approach of the NETWASS prevention model is to enhance teachers' awareness of and attentiveness to signs of leaking behavior, threats, and risk factors, and to strengthen the sense of responsibility among teachers and students (Leuschner et al., 2011). Secondary school teachers in particular can learn to differentiate relevant indicators from unproblematic situations and behaviors. Relevant indicators for student crisis should be bundled and discussed in one central place within the school so as to be able to initiate action and support for students at risk. The prevention model works like a filter in which information is collected and centralized, with only the most serious cases passed on for consideration by a crisis prevention team. Altogether the prevention model divides into four process steps, which are described below (Fig. 18.1).

At every step it is possible to initiate a standard pedagogic response or an immediate safety measure according to the needs of the case.

18.3.1.1 Step 1: Awareness—Sensitizing School Staff for Warning Signs

The crisis prevention procedure starts when a member of staff becomes aware of leaking or other indicators of critical developments, including reports and observations by other students. Students also may observe leaking, so the NETWASS project encourages teachers to foster an atmosphere of trust between students and staff. Students are not be asked to observe their peers or to "snitch," but encouraged to share concerns and seek help for students who seem to be troubled.

At the first step all members of school staff are asked to report all warning signs (leaking and certain risk factors) they become aware of that are not clearly explainable by the concrete situation to a central crisis prevention appointee (see below). Staff are asked to consider one central question in particular: Can the observed or reported conspicuous behavior (leaking, threats) or situation be explained by the actual situation and, if not, does it contain signs of critical development or individual crisis? A fight following a verbal insult would be an example of a "situational" explanation. In such cases, the teacher intervenes to bring about a pedagogical resolution that is accepted by students. Nor do teachers need to report incidents without sustained intention to harm (e.g. symbolic "shooting" while playing cops and robbers), misunderstood humor (e.g. "I'm gonna kill you" said as a joke), or situational expression of anger if followed by an apology (e.g. spoken threat after a defeat in a soccer game).

In any other case, information should be reported to the crisis prevention appointee. If in doubt, teachers should report their observations and thoughts to the crisis prevention appointee. As well as observing facts, school staff are also asked to trust their "gut feeling": their acquired professional perception that in combination with training allows them to identify maladaptive developments and behaviors. Situations which cause bad feelings or anxiety should also be taken seriously, as should situations where teachers are doubtful because their information is incomplete or based on rumor.

There are several reasons why it is important that the school's internal reporting should be in writing. First, writing down observations requires teachers to find time for reflection within stressful working day and fosters serious answers to the central question, avoiding hasty conclusions and possible stigmatizations. Second, written reports can function as emotional relief and as a formal safeguard. Finally, written reports are important for internal bundling of information about critical developments. In order to prevent information loss and task segregation it is very important that the crisis prevention appointee collects and merges all documents. The NETWASS project offers reporting templates that can be adapted to specific requirements.

The NETWASS model differs from some other threat assessment approaches in that teachers are asked to consider not only threats but also other forms of conspicuous behavior that could be signs of leaking, such as intensive preoccupation with violence, weapons, or past school shootings (Fein et al., 2002). Additionally, teachers should be aware of a coincidence of several risk factors such as social isolation, rejection, or experiences of loss.

18.3.1.2 Step 2: Overview—Crisis Prevention Appointee

Building on the Virginia Model for Student Threat Assessment (Cornell & Sheras, 2006) and the experience with "leaking appointees" in the Berlin Leaking project, the NETWASS crisis prevention model asks schools to nominate a central contact person, the "crisis prevention appointee." This responsibility is formally held by the school principal, but may be delegated to a specially trained teacher or school social worker.

The crisis prevention appointee should be a person that is accepted by the entire school staff as well as the students, and should ideally be provided with additional time for this function. Schools are recommended to appoint at least two crisis prevention appointees to allow for absence and illness and to create opportunities for exchange and deliberation. Our experience shows that larger schools tend to nominate more than two prevention appointees, for example one per department.

The crisis prevention appointee functions as the main contact person for all staff members who notice leakage or risk factors or would like to share concerns about a critical development in a student. The main objective of having a central contact person is to bundle information within the school and counteract "organizational deviance" (Fox & Harding, 2005). The crisis prevention appointee has an information advantage compared to other staff members who always have only selective information about the situation of a student.

The prevention appointee is thus able to consider not only single pieces of information, but the totality of observations, and may therefore identify the necessity for urgent intervention or the collection of further information (Fox & Harding, 2005; Vossekuil et al., 2002). To prepare such a decision the crisis prevention appointee is asked to collate the existing information about any student who comes to his or her attention, such as reports, class register entries, and student files.

Once the prevention appointee has been approached by a concerned colleague, he or she will look for a near-term opportunity for a closer discussion of the concern. This structured conversation should follow a simple interview guide, starting out with the question, what caused the colleague's concern, followed by questions about the student's family, school performance, and social situation among peers, leisure activities, friends, and characteristics. Here, additional information is systematically collected in a concerted exchange about the student's situation. Possible misunderstandings and misinterpretations may therefore be resolved. Additionally, the member of school staff who reported the incident can be disburdened, because she or he knows that the report is taken seriously. After the consultation, the crisis prevention appointee must decide how to proceed. If the case cannot be explained by the concrete situation on consideration of all additional information, or the crisis prevention appointee is in doubt or needs more information, he or she must call the crisis prevention team into action. It is strongly recommended that schools provide supervision possibilities for the crisis prevention appointee.

18.3.1.3   Step 3: Consultation and Threat Assessment—The Crisis Prevention Team

The crisis prevention team is the heart of the NETWASS crisis prevention model. It consists of the crisis prevention appointee, the school principal, other members of staff who have received NETWASS training, and possibly the homeroom teacher, a social worker, or other staff who know the student well. Forming a multidisciplinary team (teachers, school social worker, school psychologists) creates heterogeneity, reflects different perspectives, and advances the deliberation process. As police in

Germany are obliged to file a charge as soon as they become aware of any statutory offence, schools may be reluctant to notify a law enforcement representative immediately. As the experience from our pilot study and the data presented below show, schools are very reluctant to invite any external partners to the first consultation on a critical development in a student. The NETWASS approach encourages schools to invite a law enforcement professional and other relevant partners to the crisis prevention team when needed, but leaves it up to the principal to decide whether to involve outside instances immediately or later in the process (except for cases that require immediate police action under state emergency guidelines). School psychologists can also be members of the crisis prevention team, but they may not be able to participate in all cases because of their responsibility for multiple schools. Some German states, for example Berlin, have school psychologists with special expertise in violence prevention and conflict management who can support crisis prevention efforts. For this reason, we leave it to the school and the school psychologist to determine when to involve them in the team.

The crisis prevention team discusses and evaluates all indications and additional information in three steps:

1. Firstly, a threat assessment to evaluate the probability of a violent act based on 11 questions developed by the U.S. secret service (Fein et al., 2002). These include: What are the student's motive(s) and goals? Have there been any communication suggesting ideas or intentions to attack? Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence? Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?
2. After the threat assessment, the crisis prevention team should evaluate the overall situation of the student in relation to further risk factors, guided by the central question: Is the student in a critical development phase or an individual crisis? All risk factors known from research on school shootings (see Sect. 18.1) should be considered (e.g. rejection by peers, suicidal tendencies, extensive consumption of violent media content).
3. Finally, the crisis prevention team gathers all information about protective factors. Given that research on school shootings and threats of violence says little about protective factors in relation to the developmental pathway to severe targeted school violence, the team should use general protective factors from youth violence research, for instance a positive relationship to an adult, integration in school and leisure time activities, good class climate, self-efficacy, and compliance with norms (Scheithauer, Rosenbach, & Niebank, 2008).

It is obvious that the NETWASS prevention model focuses not only on the assessment of threats and leaking, but also on the general overall psychosocial situation. This perspective also allows schools to use the model for cases where a threat of violence is not obvious but an individual crisis of a student can be detected.

As a structural guideline for evaluating the situation, the crisis prevention team can use a documentation form to list the answers to threat assessment questions and all risk and protective factors. Following this "evaluation," the crisis prevention team chooses appropriate interventions. Mirroring the three steps of assessment, the

team has to identify measures that will end the threatening situation, minimize the risk factors, and maximize the protective factors. The team should find an adequate measure for every factor identified. Which measures are adequate depends on the individual case and available school resources. Possible measures vary from a parent–teacher interview through anti-bullying-training with the entire class to a referral to a psychotherapist or the involvement of police.

After initiating support for the student, and in many cases for his or her family as well, the school has the task of monitoring the process. The last decision within the consultation process is to appoint one or more staff members to monitor the case. Throughout the whole evaluation process it is important that all decisions be made by the team where possible, even if the team leader has formal authority (e.g. in case of disagreement). Furthermore, all legal provisions concerning documentation of information about students, data protection, and duty to inform parents must be respected. Responsible handling of data must be ensured to avoid stigmatization.

In order to find effective measures in individual cases, the support of a professional network in the regional environment is necessary. Every school should search for reliable partners within the community. Thus, another part of the NETWASS approach is to initiate regional professional networks of school psychologists, law enforcement personnel, youth welfare officers, and mental health professionals. During the NETWASS training, schools are encouraged to invite all professional partners to join the school's internal crisis prevention team when necessary. In addition to the school-specific local networks, a phone help-line (TEBESKO) providing schools with contacts for professional advice was launched in December 2011 as a pilot project in Berlin.[1]

18.3.1.4   Step 4: Case Monitoring

Case monitoring is the fourth and last step of the NETWASS procedure. As the crisis prevention model focuses not only on preventing an immediate threat but also takes into account underlying critical developments and individual crises, and supports teachers in initiating appropriate intervention measures, permanent case monitoring is necessary (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). It must be ensured that the actions suggested by the team are effective and a critical development is averted. A feedback should be given to the crisis prevention team whether measures have started, were rejected, canceled, or ended, or whether another important event occurred, which requires a new assessment by the team. The task of monitoring the case should be taken on by a staff member, who can contact the student easily and has a good relationship to him or her. This can be for example the homeroom teacher, but also other persons, such as the school social worker or school counselor. In some

---

[1]In cooperation with Accident Insurance Berlin (UKB), Berlin Emergency Service for Child Protection (BNK), and the Institute for Work and Health (IAG) of the German Statutory Accident Insurance (DGUV). Early experience shows that the phone help-line is well accepted by school staff and parents.

cases it might be necessary to appoint several persons for monitoring the course of development, because the follow-up on measures may implicate different tasks in everyday life. Case monitoring ends, when the crisis prevention team decides that the critical development of the student is averted.

18.4   Evaluation Study

In the following section we describe how the NETWASS prevention model will be evaluated and present descriptive results about the pretraining situation and implementation process in the participating schools.

By 2011, the NETWASS training program had been implemented in 108 schools in Germany. Participating schools in three federal states (Berlin, Brandenburg, and Baden-Württemberg) were randomly allocated to four intervention-implementation conditions in a comparative quasi-experimental design:

- In the "direct condition," a crisis prevention team consisting of 3–12 people completed 2-day training. Teaching and management staff received 1 h of training. In both cases training was provided by psychologists from the NETWASS team.
- In the "multiplier condition," the crisis team was instructed either by school psychologists or by police officers who had themselves received specific NETWASS-multiplier training. In contrast to the direct condition, school staff were instructed by the school principal or another member of the crisis prevention team.
- The "information brochure" condition consisted of a 2-h briefing to introduce an information brochure to the school staff and the crisis prevention team. While the brochure included the same information as presented in the three training conditions, separate training for the team was not included.
- A "blended learning tool," which is subject to a separate evaluation study, was introduced to another group of schools. The blended learning tool consists of online training for all staff (including the same information as the face-to-face training) and modified face-to-face training for the crisis prevention team.

All of the participating schools were provided with regular telephone support over a 7-month period following the training. This implementation design allows for a comparison of different commonly practiced training methods. The prospective, longitudinal evaluation comprised three points of measurement (pretraining, posttraining, and 7-month follow-up) utilizing separate questionnaires for principals, staff, and crisis prevention team members. The questionnaires included vignettes presenting cases of threat and critical development, options for action, and a self-assessment. In a multimethod design, qualitative interviews with the crisis prevention teams were conducted at the 7-month follow-up. Additionally, participating schools were requested to document all cases addressed using the crisis prevention model (event sampling design). Finally, protocols of the implementation process and case management were made available for qualitative analyses.

18.4.1 Sample

The 108 participating schools were recruited in three federal states of Germany, with Berlin being urban, Brandenburg mainly rural, and Baden-Württemberg combining both characteristics. Within each state, six school districts were selected, to represent rural and urban areas, eastern (former GDR) and western settings, and different socioeconomic contexts (average income, unemployment, gross domestic income, educational measures). As Germany's federal school system consists of numerous school types, four aggregated types were considered: primary schools (up to fourth or sixth grade); "secondary schools" (*Hauptschule* and *Realschule* preparing students mainly for nonuniversity professions); *Gymnasium* (students for university education); and "vocational schools" (2–3-year practical nonacademic training for students from the age of 16). Invitations to the NETWASS training were sent to all schools included in these four types, except for primary schools, where, due to the large numbers, only a random sample was invited.

The final sample consisted of 108 schools—35 were in Berlin, 30 in Brandenburg, 42 in Baden-Württemberg, and one European School in Bavaria. The school types were 29 primary schools, 30 secondary schools, 31 *Gymnasiums*, and 18 vocational schools. Direct training was conducted at 32 schools, 37 schools were instructed by external trainers, seven by blended learning and the information brochure was implemented in 29 schools. Before main program implementation three schools had been trained and evaluated during a separate pilot study.

Because data collection is still in progress at the time of writing, we can only present preliminary results from the first point of measurement (t1), to demonstrate the pretraining situation, and describe the implementation process. The following results refer to quantitative data we collected at 98 schools (excluding three pilot schools and seven blended learning schools) where staff completed questionnaires at the first measurement point (pretraining) and qualitative data collected at 82 schools (including the three pilot schools). The qualitative data consists of phone interviews with crisis prevention officers during the implementation phase, case documentations prepared by the schools, and expert interviews.

18.5 Preliminary Results

18.5.1 Self-Assessment of Fear and Confidence

In order to record the situation in schools before training and detect possible problems of a special crisis prevention system, we asked school staff about their fear of school shootings, their professional confidence, and the perceived number of violent incidents.

At first point of measurement, staff ($n = 3,509$) were asked whether they feared a case similar to the Erfurt school shooting occurring at their school. Most of the staff

stated they had little or no fear. On a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (from *no fear* to *very strong fear*), 69% reported having no or little fear, 22% reported an intermediate level of fear, 6% some fear, and 2% very strong fear.

Before the NETWASS training, staff were presented with the following vignette:

> A student says to his friend, "Next Monday something terrible is going to happen to the teacher Ms. X, I will make sure of that." The friend has reported this to you, as you are his homeroom teacher. How well can you assess the seriousness of this threat?

On a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*), 32.8% said they would feel hardly or not at all competent to assess the seriousness of such an unspecific threat against a colleague, 38.4% rated their competence as average, and 28.9% said they were capable of assessing the situation well or very well (SD = 1.02, n = 2,471). The members of the crisis prevention teams—many of whom are social workers or teachers with training in violence prevention—felt slightly more confident about assessing threats. However, prior to the training, 28.7% of them felt hardly or not at all competent to assess a threat (9.4% *not at all*, 19.3% *not well*, 39.0% *average*, 27.4% *well*, 4.9% *very well*) (SD = 1.01, n = 467). Altogether, crisis prevention team members and school staff in general feel averagely capable of assessing an unspecific threat made by a student, with a wide variance. Staff were also asked whether they felt those responsible at their school would know what to do in the event of a threat of a school shooting or other forms of severe violence at their school. Here, 20.4% said those in charge would hardly or not at all know what to do, while 31.6% said their ability was average (n = 3456). This shows that in the eyes of a large proportion of teachers, the ability of their schools to handle threats could be improved.

Before starting the training, teachers were asked to report incidents of violence or risk factors during the previous 12 months (n = 3560). A large proportion of teachers had been confronted with a considerable number of different forms of violence, threats, and risk factors. Bullying had been observed by 86.0%, while 66.7% reported having been worried about sudden changes of behavior in a student. Serious physical fights had been observed by 42.5%. Suicidal thoughts of students had been witnessed by 23.3%, and 14.2% of teachers had overheard a student openly threaten to kill another student. Moreover, 13.1% had been personally threatened with violence by a student, while 6.8% reported that a student had actually used violence against them. Altogether 9.2% said they had heard a student threaten a school shooting. Interestingly, the information given by principals differs from those given by teachers and other staff. More principals reported about having been worried about a sudden change in behavior (79.5%, n = 73), and more had witnessed serious physical fights (56.8%, n = 74), suicidal thoughts of students (51.4%, n = 74), or a student threatening to kill a peer (32.4%, n = 74). Fewer principals reported having been threatened with violence personally (6.8%, n = 74), having been attacked by a student (2.7%, n = 75), or having heard threats of a school shooting (7.6%, n = 74). Looking at schools as a whole, the gap between teachers' and principals' reports becomes larger. At 76 schools, at least one teacher had observed a student's threat of a school shooting, but at only 65 did the principal report having witnessed such a threat.

18.5.2 Implementation Process

The preliminary results of the implementation study show that within 7 months after training, 86 of 98 participating schools (88%) had installed a crisis prevention team and a crisis prevention officer. The teams usually consisted of the principal, sometimes a deputy, a school social worker if available, and teachers. Some of them had other special functions within the school; many had training in violence prevention and counseling. Some schools appointed nonteaching staff to the team, such as the secretary or, more rarely, external persons, such as educators working for partners or other institutions. At 40 of 98 schools, the team reported they had carried out one or more consultations on students who had shown direct or indirect leaking or other behavior causing serious concern. At 13 schools, the crisis prevention officer had been addressed by a teacher, but the problem had been situationally explainable and was dealt with without a team consultation, usually done by the homeroom teacher in cooperation with the principal, and, where available, the social worker. At a number of schools first experiences with the NETWASS prevention program were documented. There are differences in the way schools adopt the program. Some schools use the NETWASS structure strictly for cases of leaking and risk factors; others have opened it for handling other concerns, such as drug abuse. There are various obstacles to schools implementing the model, one a serious lack of time resources.

The preliminary results show that about 104 cases have been reported to the NETWASS team to date, either in documentations, in phone consultations, or in interviews. In at least 39 cases direct leaking was documented, such as direct threats against the school or against peers, showing a weapon, or placing a list of names along with a threat on an internet platform. Most of the 22 reported cases of indirect leaking were suicidal thoughts of students. An occurrence of direct leaking in combination with risk factors was reported in 19 cases.

18.6 Discussion and Further Perspectives

The large number of staff with no or little fear of a school shooting at their school suggests that teachers and other staff are well aware that the probability of experiencing a school shooting is generally very low. However, at the same time, considerable numbers state some or even great fear. This supports the idea of addressing the topic and providing prevention measures. To reach both groups, the often dramatic tone of media representations must be replaced by a matter-of-factly, qualified approach fitting the actual competences and responsibilities of school staff.

Our results on the confidence of school staff about assessing threats suggest that there is room for improvement. Furthermore, it is possible that school staff still overestimate their ability to assess unspecific threats. Bondü (2012) showed that detailed information, such as where a shooting was going to happen, time, weapons, or names of possible victims, was given in advance by some (but not all) perpetrators.

In her analysis of seven school shooting cases in Germany, she found 87 detailed leaking events. Bondü therefore suggests that further criteria beneath the level of details need to be taken into account to judge the seriousness of leaking appropriately, (2012). With regard to prevention, teachers must therefore be encouraged to take unspecific threats very seriously, as well as leaking. This argument is supported by analyses of case reports of German school shootings. Bondü (2012) found that the perpetrators showed leaking repeatedly, along with many other risk factors, but rarely used direct threats. Also, the vast majority of leaking events in German cases was directed toward friends and other students, and was rarely reported to teachers or other authority figures. However, in one case, where students turned to teachers and reported their knowledge, it was possible to prevent severe harm. This supports the argument that if school staff are informed about leaking and there is no situational explanation, it is highly recommendable, as suggested in the NETWASS procedure, to look for further risk factors. This supports the main idea of the NETWASS training: to increase awareness of school staff about how relevant such leaking may be and how important it is to pass this information on in order to allow the crisis prevention team to systematically bundle specific information about the student. The assessment of school staff on how well the people in charge at their school know what to do in case of a threat of a school shooting also suggests that a considerable number of staff would like their leadership to improve their skills.

The results concerning the occurrence of violent incidents confirm that many school staff are confronted with significant cases of various forms violence, including the threat and actual use of direct violence against teachers and other staff. The different accounts of teachers and principals concerning threats of a school shooting call for further discussion. It is of course possible that teachers overestimate the number of threats of school shootings. On the other hand, qualitative data suggests that principals might have reasons to not report threats of severe violence to outsiders: they could be more hesitant to report such a threat to outsiders in a questionnaire, or felt that not all threats were relevant to report, or perhaps some principals did not know about threats observed by their staff. This underlines the importance of avoiding the loss of information within schools, of encouraging teachers to report such cases, and of appointing a person to whom they should report. It also gives support to the practice of providing schools with the option of an internal crisis prevention system, allowing them to first deal with threats internally, as there seems to be resistance to giving information to outside instances.

Finally, preliminary analysis of the implementation of the NETWASS program by the schools shows that a vast majority (88%) decided to implement the NETWASS crisis prevention system and that most of them use the system to detect students in critical development situations. The fact that within a 7-month period after the training 19 high-risk cases were discussed in crisis prevention teams demonstrates that the NETWASS structure is a functional measure for detecting relevant cases and providing help for students. The cases reported by schools should be understood in the light of a developmental perspective in the prevention of school shootings. Schools report a small number of cases of students with critical developments. This

means that the school staff are able to identify these developments and case consultation seems to be a viable method for dealing with these cases. This means that the developmental approach is a viable way to give schools an instrument to recognize indications of possible critical developments and take action to prevent an escalation towards a serious crisis or severe school violence. But details on the implementation practice at schools and the assessment of the NETWASS structure by teachers will have to await completion of the study.

References

Bannenberg, B. (2011). Umgang mit Amokdrohungen an Schulen. *Zeitschrift für Internationale Strafrechtsdogmatik, 5*, 300–317.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Bondü, R. (2012). School Shootings in Deutschland: Internationaler Vergleich, Warnsignale, Risikofaktoren, Entwicklungsverläufe. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Education and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin: http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/FUDISS_derivate_000000011902/Bondue_Dissertation_SchoolShootings_vollstaendig_fin.pdf;jsessionid=D65789033C8191D673B196E7516A4910?hosts.

Bondü, R., Leuschner, V., Lippok, A., Scholl, J., & Scheithauer, H. (in press). Leaking-Phänomene und Ankündigungen von Gewalt—Nutzen für die Prävention von schwerer, zielgerichteter Gewalt an Schulen. Befunde aus dem Berliner Leaking-Projekt und dem Projekt NETWASS. In J. Hoffmann & K. Roshdi (Eds.), *Schwere Schulgewalt, Jugend-und Erwachsenenamok—Täterpsychologie—Psychiatrische Aspekte—Risikoanalyse—Bedrohungsmanagement*. Schattauer.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2009). School Shootings in Deutschland: Aktuelle Trends zur Prävention von schwerer zielgerichteter Gewalt an deutschen Schulen. *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie, 58*, 685–701.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (2011). Explaining and preventing school shootings—chances and difficulties of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 295–314). New York: Springer.

Bondü, R., & Scheithauer, H. (unpublished manuscript). *Treating leaking and threat with murder by students : Pilot study of a short intervention in German schools.* Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

Caplan, G. (1961). *An approach to community mental health*. New York: Grune & Stratton.

Cornell, D., & Sheras, P. (2006). *Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia threat assessment guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly, 24*, 119–129.

Cornell, D., Sheras, P. L., Kaplan, S., McConville, D., Douglass, J., Elkon, A., et al. (2004). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 527–546.

Daniels, J. A., Bradley, M. C., & Hays, M. (2007). The impact of school violence on school personnel: Implications for psychologists. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 38*, 652–659.

Der Polizeipräsident in Berlin (DPiB). (2011). *Polizeiliche Maßnahmen in Gefahrensituationen (Amoktaten und -drohungen)*. Unpublished presentation, Berlin.

Fein, R. A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W. S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education.

Fox, C., & Harding, D. J. (2005). School shootings as organizational deviance. *Sociology of Education, 78*, 69–97.

Gaertner, J. (2009). *Ich bin voller Hass—und das liebe ich: Dokumentarischer Roman aus den Original Dokumenten zum Massaker an der Columbine Highschool*. Berlin: Eichborn.

Gasser, K. H., Creuzfeldt, M., Näher, M., Rainer, R., & Wickler, P. (2004). *Bericht der Kommission Gutenberg Gymnasium*. Erfurt: Freistaat Thüringen.

Gordon, R. (1987). An operational classification of disease prevention. In J. Steinberg & M. Silverman (Eds.), *Preventing mental disorders: A research perspective* (pp. 20–26). Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Mental Health.

Harding, D. J., Fox, C., & Mehta, J. D. (2002). Studying rare events through qualitative case studies: Lessons from a study of rampage school shootings. *Sociological Methods & Research, 31*, 174–217.

Heubrock, D., Hayer, T., Rusch, S., & Scheithauer, H. (2005). Prävention von schwerer zielgerichteter Gewalt an Schulen—Rechtspsychologische und kriminalpräventive Ansätze. *Polizei & Wissenschaft, 6*, 43–57.

Kidd, S. T., & Meyer, C. L. (2002) Similarities of school shootings in rural and small town communities. *Journal of Rural Community Psychology, E5*(1) http://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/sopp/3.

Langman, P. (2009). Rampage school shooters: A typology. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 14*(1), 79–86.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.

Leary, L. M., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Philips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*, 202–214.

Leuschner, V., Bondü, R., Schroer-Hippel, M., Panno, J., Neumetzler, K., Fisch, S., et al. (2011). Prevention of homicidal violence in schools in Germany: The Berlin Leaking Project and the Networks Against School Shootings project (NETWASS). *New Directions for Youth Development, 129*, 61–78.

Leuschner, V., & Scheithauer, H. (2012). Wissenschaftlich begründete Prävention schwerer, zielgerichteter Schulgewalt. *Forensische Psychiatrie, Psychologie, Kriminologie, 6*, 128–135.

Levin, J., & Madfis, E. (2009). Mass murder at school and cumulative strain: A sequential model. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*, 1227–1245.

Mrazek, P. J., & Haggerty, R. J. (1994). *Institute of Medicine (IOM), Reducing risks for mental disorders: Frontiers for preventive intervention research*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Newman, K., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Perseus.

O'Toole, M. E. (1999). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Panno, J., Sommer, F., Neumetzler, K., Fisch, S., Scholl, J., Lippok, A., et al. (2010). *Netzwerke zur Prävention schwerer Schulgewalt etablieren: Leitfaden für Schulen*. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

Reddy, M., Borum, R., Berglund, J., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: Comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools, 38*, 157–170.

Scheithauer, H., Rosenbach, C., & Niebank, K. (2008). *Gelingensbedingungen für die Prävention von interpersonaler Gewalt im Kindes- und Jugendalter: Expertise zur Vorlage bei der Stiftung Deutsches Forum für Kriminalprävention* (2nd ed.). Bonn: DVK.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the*

United States. Washington, DC: United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education.

Ziehfreund, B. (2010). Nach der Tat ist vor der Tat! Eine Aufarbeitung des Amoklaufs von Winnenden und Wendlingen am 11. März 2009. *Kriminalistik, 3*, 145–152.

Chapter 19
Averted School Shootings

Jeffrey A. Daniels and Jonathan W. Page

19.1   Averted School Shootings

As the need for this volume demonstrates, school violence is a worldwide problem. Initially thought to be a problem only for the United States of America (due to the widespread lethal school rampages of the mid- to late 1990s), this myth has since been dispelled by similar incidents on all continents (Ohsako, 1997). There were 655 violent deaths at U.S. schools between 1992 and 2010 ($M = 36.4$ per year), a figure that includes school shootings, suicides, and other forms of violence (see Table 19.1). Although school shootings are a relatively rare phenomenon (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007), accounting for about 30 deaths in the last 30 years in the United States (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004), when such rampages do occur, they are heavily reported by the media because of the vulnerability of children and the horror of the events.

After the incident at Columbine High School, the public, the authorities, and school officials demanded to know who could do such a thing and what could have stopped it. As a result of Columbine, a number of security changes have been put in place including greater police presence (in the form of school resource officers), staff hallway monitoring, video surveillance, identification badges, locked doors, and more metal detectors. Administration policies have changed also, with adoption of antibullying initiatives, zero tolerance policies, and, in some states, required reporting of suspicious behavior/mental illness. In addition, researchers started to focus on understanding the people who committed these crimes as well as the environment in which they were committed.

J.A. Daniels (✉) • J.W. Page
Department of Counseling, Rehabilitation Counseling and Counseling Psychology,
West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA
e-mail: Jeffrey.Daniels@mail.wvu.edu; jonathan.page@mail.wvu.edu

Table 19.1 School-associated violent deaths of students, staff, and nonstudents, 1992–2010

Year	Homicides
1992–1993	47
1993–1994	38
1994–1995	39
1995–1996	46
1996–1997	45
1997–1998	47
1998–1999	38
1999–2000	26
2000–2001	26
2001–2002	27
2002–2003	25
2003–2004	37
2004–2005	40
2005–2006	37
2006–2007	48
2007–2008	38
2008–2009	26
2009–2010	25
Total	*655*

Compiled by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2011)

19.2 Overview of Lethal School Violence

It is important to note that several different terms have been used in the literature to describe the school shooting phenomenon. According to Daniels and Bradley (2011, p. 3), lethal school violence involves one or more fatalities that happen "in school, on school property, at school sponsored activities, or to a member of the school community on his or her commute to or from school." Lethal school violence may include suicide, domestic murder/suicide of a member of the school community while at school, gang-related deaths, barricaded captive situations, and rampage school shootings (Daniels & Bradley). One form of lethal school violence has been termed the *rampage school shooting* or simply a *school shooting*. According to Newman et al. (2004), "Rampage shootings are defined by the fact that they involve attacks on multiple parties, selected almost at random" (pp. 14–15). This type of school violence is most similar to the particular type of mass murder known as "civilian massacre" defined by Cantor, Mullen, and Alpers (2000) in their review of seven cases from Australia, New Zealand, and Britain. These individuals engaged in the indiscriminate killing of mostly random victims. Cantor et al. found that all seven of these male perpetrators were socially unsuccessful, self-absorbed, and resentful. They also tended to

be egocentric, rigid, obsessional, and narcissistic, as well as being obsessed with guns and having a "lone wolf" mentality. However, it is important to note that all mass murderers, spree killers, and school shooters fit this profile.

19.2.1 Prevalence of School Shootings

School shootings are statistically rare, accounting for less than 1% of adolescent homicides per year. Indeed, in 1999, the year of the Columbine shooting, less than 0.1% of youth deaths occurred in school shootings in the U.S. (Cornell, 2006). Despite these data, when a school shooting does happen, it has an immediate national impact. Table 19.1 presents the numbers of students, nonstudents, and teachers killed in primary and secondary school-associated homicides in the United States from 1992 to 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2011).

19.2.2 Effects of School Shootings

The aftereffects of a school shooting are widespread and long-lasting. In some way, everyone in a community is impacted by such an event. On a micro level, every member of a school is affected by a shooting. Daniels and Page (2012) describe the impact on direct and indirect victims of school captive-taking events. Direct victims are those immediately "in the line of fire": those in the building who are threatened or injured during the melee. Indirect victims are those not in the immediate vicinity of the shooting, friends and relatives of the victims, and others in the community who are negatively impacted.

The psychological effects of a rampage school shooting have been well documented (Ardis, 2004; Fox, Roth, & Newman, 2003; Larkin, 2007; Nims, 2000; Sullivan & Guerette, 2003). Fear and anxiety are commonly reported, both in the immediacy of the event, and longer term, among direct and indirect victims alike. In addition, many people experience depression, social withdrawal, and even family problems in the aftermath of a school shooting (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). In the short term, many will experience acute stress disorder (ASD), and over time, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop.

The psychological trauma caused by a school shooting also has behavioral consequences. For some students, there is a decrease in attendance for weeks or even months. Academic performance may also be negatively impacted by a school shooting. This may be linked to decreases in attendance, but is likely due to the students' struggles with fears and anxieties.

On a larger scale, Eric Harris, one of the shooters at Columbine High School, achieved his desired level of infamy; sadly, he also achieved, in a way he had not anticipated, his desired goal for a worldwide revolution. How so? His actions, along with those of his

accomplice Dylan Klebold, changed how we think about and establish school security worldwide. They, among others, were responsible for the need of such a volume as this, and for people to dedicate their careers to making schools safer.

19.3 Research Review

19.3.1 Mass Murder and Profiling

As we think about classifying the type of crime rampage school shootings represent, we first turn our attention to other, similar events. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's definition of mass murder is: "a number of murders (four or more) occurring during the same incident, with no distinctive time period between the murders" (2012, p. 8). Thus, some of the more deadly school rampages may be classified as mass murder. For years, researchers have studied the psychological characteristics of mass murderers using both deductive and inductive profiling. Some investigators have tried to apply the same techniques to school shooters.

Deductive profiling avoids generalizations and focuses on a specific incident. This method dissects the offender's actions before, during, and after the crime (Turvey, 1998), all in an attempt to discover what might have led to the event in question and how the offender reacted during and after the crime. Hopefully, a clear picture of the mind in motion emerges. The disadvantage of this method, however, is that it is event specific by design. While the findings add to the knowledge base, deductive profiling does not seek to predict and, because of this lack of generalizability, is useful only after a crime has been committed.

In contrast, inductive profiling looks at a crime as one action among many similar actions. It assumes that when an offender commits a particular crime, his or her motives, characteristics, and traits will be similar to those of others who commit similar crimes (Turvey, 2008). Inductive profiling seeks to identify these general motivations, characteristics, and traits. The great benefit of this method is that it can be used to predict who might be likely to commit such a crime. The disadvantage of inductive profiling is that because it seeks to generalize, it can lead to the mislabeling of non-criminal-minded individuals (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).

Overall, neither deductive nor inductive methods have yielded a valid profile of "the school shooter." However, some progress has been made on another front. Holmes and Holmes (1992) suggested that mass murder should be classified along six dimensions: motivation, anticipated gain, victim selection, victim relationship, traits, and spatial mobility. Since many of the high-profile school rampages may be classified as mass murder, the perpetrators could perhaps be similarly classified. At this time, no such research has been conducted to validate this typology among rampage school shooters. However, this classification system is fairly consistent with recent research on the historical, dispositional, and clinical traits encountered in violence risk assessment.

19.3.2 Juvenile Risk Assessment

Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) looked at juvenile violence and juvenile risk assessment with respect to nine adolescent mass murder cases, focusing primarily on five domains: individual factors, family factors, school and peer factors, situational and attack-related factors, and societal and environmental factors. However, as stated previously we must not expect these characteristics to offer an actionable profile of a potential school shooter; instead they should be used to better understand people who have committed such a crime and look for common traits that are prevalent.

Individual factors. The individual factors found in adolescents who commit mass murder include uncontrollable rage, blaming others, depression, threatening others, and developing a detailed plan (Verlinden et al., 2000). Eric Harris, one of the perpetrators of the Columbine rampage, exhibited yet another individual factor not mentioned by Verlinden et al.: feelings of superiority. He believed he had a right to kill people who were inferior to him (Cullen, 2009), writing in his journal, "I feel like GOD and I wish I was, having everyone being OFFICIALLY lower than me" (4/12/98) and, "but before I leave this worthless place, I will kill whoever I deem unfit for anything at all. especially life" (4/21/98).

Family factors. The family factors linked to adolescent mass murderers included a lack of parental supervision and troubled family relationships, usually revolving around divorce or separation (Verlinden et al., 2000). Dysfunctional families are not uncommon for people who commit crimes, and a lack of supervision combined with a lack of support can result in individuals acting out violently. However, since many school shooters (such as Eric Harris and Thurston High School shooter Kip Kinkel) were reportedly from functional two-parent homes, familial dysfunction may contribute to instances of aggression but is not a necessary factor in fueling future violence.

School and peer factors. The school and peer factors defined by Verlinden et al. (2000) included school isolation and rejection by peers as well as the identification with an outcast group. O'Toole (2000) also found that a tolerance for disrespectful behavior was a common theme among schools in which a rampage shooting occurred.

Situational and attack factors. Situational and attack-related factors (which are the most important with respect to the act itself) were indicative of a decline in functioning (such as poor school attendance or grades) and a recent loss, stress, or humiliation. Additionally, making threats and discussing plans tended to be a common practice for these perpetrators (Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2000); these acts were planned rather than impulsive. The often-heard impulsivity myth may have arisen because many of these individuals experienced a "stressor" or a traumatic event—break-up of an intimate relationship, divorce in the family, loss of a loved one—that closely preceded their attack (Cornell, 2006). Although they had ideations long before the stressor, this event may have been a catalyst helping to propel them into action.

Societal and environmental factors. Societal and environmental factors can be important contributors to school shootings. Bullying, for example, has long been asso-

ciated with violence as well as with emotional problems (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1992). And with the ubiquitous presence of internet sites, text messaging, and other nondirect means of communication, there are more opportunities to bully and be bullied; no longer can adolescents avoid bullying by avoiding direct encounters.

Underscoring the important role that bullying can play, Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) found that 75% of school offenders reported feeling persecuted, bullied, or threatened by others. Several attackers claimed to have been bullied, even tormented, for quite some time and cited bullying as a significant factor in their decision to kill. Other studies have shown that those who ultimately went on a rampage were bullies themselves (Larkin, 2007). As an example, Eric Harris claimed that he was the victim of bullying, although the extent to which his experiences were significantly different than most students in his school remains a question (Cullen, 2009; Larkin, 2007). Indeed, there is some evidence that he also engaged in bullying. In his journal he wrote (Shepard n.d.):

> Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, and how […] weak I am […]
> Well, I will get you all back: ultimate […] revenge here. You people could have shown more
> respect, treated me better, asked for my knowledge or guidance more, treated me more like
> senior, and maybe I wouldn't have been as ready to tear your […] heads off . . . That's where
> a lot of my hate grows from (11/12/1998).

Bullying may not be the primary reason why a person commits such a crime, but it should be regarded as a very important contributing factor (Daniels, 2011).

To further add support to these individual factors, Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, and Gray (2001) studied 34 adolescents who had committed 27 mass murders (some incidents were committed by more than one person), many on school grounds, between 1958 and 1999. They found that the majority were loners and some abused alcohol and drugs. Half of the offenders had been bullied by others and had a history of violence. One quarter had a psychiatric history, but only two were actually psychotic at the time of the crime. Depression and antisocial behavior were very common, and there was usually a precipitating event prior to the act itself, such as a loss of love or failure at school. Most of these offenders made threats to a third party, but only half of them threatened the actual targets.

McGee and DeBernardo (1999) pursued a different approach in studying adolescent mass murderers, using deductive criminal profiling on 14 cases involving young killers to construct a profile of what they called the "classroom avenger." As was found in the juvenile risk assessments discussed earlier, the classroom avengers in these cases reported that they had been rejected, humiliated, or bullied by classmates or peers. These findings need to be replicated.

Demographic and dispositional factors. McGee and DeBernardo (1999) identified several key factors that are important in defining the typical classroom avenger. The first is demographics and disposition. They found that, in general, a classroom avenger was a physically healthy, blue collar or middle class Caucasian male around 16 years old. He more than likely lived in a rural community with a population of less than 50,000. The family situation was usually dysfunctional, with divorce and friction between the parents being common. Presumably because of this, the parents were at risk of being the avenger's first victims. The child, and often the family too, showed a prevailing sense of

hidden anger; the child's anger was sometimes directed toward the parents with whom there was usually a power struggle. If the child was disciplined, the punishment was overly harsh. All 14 of the children studied were familiar with guns and had a keen interest in them (McGee & DeBernardo).

Historical factors. There were no signs of severe physical handicap in any of these 14 individuals, although certain developmental milestones (such as crawling) could have been delayed (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999). Their IQ was in the average to above-average range, with no evidence of brain disorders or severe mental retardation. There was usually an early history of inadequate bonding and social problems; as a result, these children were usually described as "unaffectionate." They tended to be introverted loners with few close friends. The friends they did have could be described as "outsiders." They were intolerant of others and were usually bored by the typical pastimes that children their age find interesting, such as clubs and sports (McGee & DeBernardo).

Signs of psychotic mental disorders and hallucinations were absent among the classroom avengers studied by McGee and DeBernardo (1999). As mentioned earlier, their cognitive style was rigid and inflexible, and their mood was usually depressed, although this would often be hard for other people to notice as an indicator because these so-called classroom avengers often show no signs of being troubled. Obvious signs (like insomnia, weight loss, and crying spells) may have been replaced with manifested anger and resentment towards parents or peers. These individuals usually exhibited the acting-out symptoms of depression, such as temper outbursts, violence, vandalism, insulting others, and excessive risk taking. While not showing overt signs of psychotic paranoia, they were often overly sensitive to criticism and rejection and were often viewed by their peers as inept and "weird." They projected their faults and failures onto others, which increased their anger.

Although vengeance was the primary motive for these adolescents, achieving notoriety was also important. They fantasized about killing and often mentioned it to the few friends they had. Some of these killers drew up a hit list that included those who had teased them (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999), while others had so much hatred for society in general that they chose any target that was available.

The murders they committed were planned and included creative elements. For example, during the Jonesboro, Arkansas shooting, 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden pulled their school's fire alarm and shot at students and teachers as they exited the building, killing five and injuring ten. Such elements showed a higher level of sophistication than an apparent "outburst" of rage. McGee and DeBernardo (1999) believe that the prototype, if you will, of a classroom avenger consists of an Axis I psychiatric disorder of atypical depression and an Axis II disorder of mixed personality disorder with paranoid, antisocial, and narcissistic features.

Contextual features of the classroom. The last issue that McGee and DeBernardo (1999) assessed was the classroom avenger's contextual factors. In general, they found these particular killers to be overly influenced by outside sources such as books, videos, or material about previous similar crimes. Usually they kept a journal or internet blog where they stated their intentions prior to the act. The attack itself was usually directly preceded by a warning such as "tomorrow is the big day." When taken in context with

the other descriptors described earlier, these threats should have not been taken lightly. The perpetrator was likely to have been exposed to multiple psychosocial stressors such as the loss of a girlfriend or a bullying incident within the 2 weeks prior to the incident.

19.3.3   The School Climate

Investigations into school shootings have found similarities in the school climate among schools that suffered a shooting. For example, it appears that the whole school environment, including the administration, teachers, and students, was generally in denial that students could pose a serious threat of violent behavior toward the school community (Daniels et al., 2010; O'Toole, 2000). Numerous red flags were ignored, violent tendencies and threats went unreported, and little was done to discourage bullying and victimization.

Reacting to a perceived permissive environment in the aftermath of violence, many schools adopted zero tolerance policies, with overall results being ineffective (American Psychological Association, 2008). Heightened security measures such as video surveillance, metal detectors, and ID badges have yielded mixed results. In contrast, antibullying policies seem to have been more effective (Daniels & Bradley, 2011), as has the presence of skilled school resource officers (Johnson, 1999; May, Fessel, & Means, 2004).

19.4   Averted School Shootings

We begin this section with a bit of a conundrum. Conducting research on events that were averted is conducting research on nonevents. We are attempting to study something that *might* have happened, but did not. Therefore, (with rare exceptions) we can never be certain that the event would have in fact taken place. Hence, interpretation of findings of such nonevents becomes challenging. With that being said, my (JD) students and I have been studying averted school shootings and believe that we can carefully choose which averted shootings to study using the sampling strategy of selective sampling in qualitative research. Specifically, we chose incidents in which there was sufficient evidence that a shooting was imminent to bring a conviction. Incidents without this level of evidence were not included in our qualitative study (Daniels et al., 2010).

19.4.1   Content Analysis of new Reports

As we began our studies of averted school shootings in 2004, our first task was to develop a database of such events. The database included news articles about averted school shootings in the United States from October 2001 through October 2004.

From the database we later selected participants for a qualitative study in which we conducted on-site interviews of school personnel and police officers who were involved with discovering and thwarting the plots (Daniels et al., 2010). Internet searches of the *Lexis/Nexis Academic* database of news sources from the U.S. and around the world revealed 30 averted shooting plots for the time period. We (Daniels et al., 2007) then conducted a content analysis of these news articles, specifically searching for information about:

- Plot details
- How the plot was discovered
- Steps taken by the school once the plot was discovered
- Steps taken by the police once the plot was discovered
- The final legal outcomes of the investigation (when available).

We found little difference between averted plots and the plots that were successfully carried out, as described in studies of school shootings (O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

19.4.1.1 Details of the Plots

Our results identify six main categories of plot: characteristics of the suspect, intended victims, communication and recruitment, planning, weapons, and motives.

Characteristics of the suspect. Supporting earlier results (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002), Daniels et al. (2007) found that the vast majority of plotters were male, Caucasian, and of high school age.

Intended victims. Some of the plotters had drawn up a "hit list" or a specific plan to kill a specific type of student, such as athletes (Daniels et al., 2007). However, this was not always the case; one individual merely planned to kill as many people as possible.

Communication and recruitment. As O'Toole (2000) pointed out, school shooters are likely to have told people about their intentions. We (Daniels et al., 2007) found support for this finding and discovered that the majority of the plotters communicated their plans to others, typically through emails, Facebook, or face-to-face conversation. Often, these threats were not taken seriously (Swezey & Thorp, 2010), and the individuals hearing these comments tended not to take them seriously.

Planning. This aspect of the plot is the most diverse among the scenarios. Some of the shooters planned in great detail using maps and floor plans of the school, hit lists, and diversionary tactics. Others simply intended to go in shooting, killing indiscriminately. Other plans focused on detonating explosives in order to maximize casualties.

Weapons. In some plots the students had acquired weapons or were attempting to get them. These included knives, guns, bombs, and swords. Although more challenging to acquire, guns are the top choice of potential plotters. Bombs are easy to

make, with detailed instructions found by a simple internet search. The easiest weapons to obtain are knives and swords.

Motives. The most frequently cited motive was retaliation for being bullied (Daniels et al., 2007). Other motives included anger at a particular administrator or teacher, retaliation for being rejected, and, in one incident, retaliation after being caught in a cheating scandal.

19.4.1.2 Discovering the Plot

The actual discovery of an impending tragedy was the one area of significant difference between cases of successful and averted school rampages. Again, six categories emerged: other students coming forward; alert administrators; police receiving a tip-off; police, parents, or teachers finding notes or intercepting emails; staff overhearing rumors; and specific threats being made. The vast majority of these plots were foiled because other students came forward, thus breaking the code of silence. Additionally, a number of cases were averted when the school and/or police received tips, often anonymous. These findings support those from other research showing that plotters discuss their plans and that the alertness of classmates and others, plus their willingness to come forward, is paramount.

19.4.2 Qualitative Study

Using cases identified in the database described earlier, we then conducted a qualitative study of averted school shootings by interviewing school personnel and law enforcement officers directly involved in the events (Daniels et al., 2010). We interviewed 12 school employees and police officers/school resource officers at four U.S. schools at which a plotted school shooting had been discovered and thwarted. One audio recording was inaudible, so analyses included data from 11 participants. Through the use of Consensual Qualitative Research methodology (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), six primary domains emerged, with an additional "Other" for data that did not fit into any other domain. We now briefly describe each domain, including definitions and constituent elements. Note that because this was a qualitative study, there is no comparison group of either individuals involved in a shooting or individuals from schools at which there was no shooting or discovered plot.

School conditions. The most commonly described issue in averted school shootings is what we describe as school conditions. These are conditions that the school had employed "to ensure safety and promote optimal learning" before an incident occurred (Daniels et al., 2010, p. 76). Specific elements of school conditions included breaking the code of silence, preventive efforts, watchfulness/maintaining a physical presence, treating all students with dignity and respect, establishing meaningful relationships with all students, following established disciplinary procedures, and encouraging school–community collaboration.

Intervention. Interventions are, by definition, what people do after they become aware of a plot. Core activities included incident discovery, search and seizure, maintaining order in the school, de-escalation, notifying other school authorities, interviewing suspects, interactions with others in the community, and provision of mental health services.

Crisis planning. This concerns participants' "discussions about the need/importance of preparation" before a crisis occurs (Daniels et al., 2010, p. 76). Core elements included training and practice, adherence to policies and procedures, and the importance of school–community relationships.

Interpersonal relationships. This domain concerns efforts made by school staff to form trusting relationships with specific students. Issues such as establishing trust, preventing problems through rapport, treating students with respect and compassion, accentuating student strengths, and developing personal relationships with students are represented in this domain.

Prevention efforts. Participants' statements about efforts within the school to prevent violence, such as antibullying programs, we labeled prevention efforts. Specific core elements include adherence to established policies and procedures, following established (crisis) roles, training for crises, establishing or implementing programs (e.g., antibullying programs), crisis planning, and again, school–community collaboration.

Problematic issues. Problematic issues included anything that did not go well during the uncovering of the plot or in the immediate aftermath. Such issues as unanticipated events, discovery of systemic deficits, missed warning signs, or problems with the media were included in this domain.

The findings reveal some interesting parallels and contrasts with results of studies of schools at which a shooting occurred (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). The study of school shooters by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found that many of the schools where a shooting took place demonstrated tolerance for disrespectful behavior (O'Toole, 2000). For example, some teachers may fail to confront students who are misbehaving, for a variety of reasons. They may fear for their own safety or fear the response of parents of disciplined students. In our work, we have found that schools that averted a shooting made efforts to curb disrespectful behavior, through establishment of *school conditions*, *interpersonal relationships*, and implementation of programs such as antibullying campaigns (*prevention efforts*).

Second, O'Toole (2000) found that schools commonly dispensed discipline inequitably prior to an attack. There tended to be a hierarchy of students, reinforced by the faculty and administration, who could do as they pleased without serious consequence, while others were seemingly micro-managed. The result is resentment and a tendency for increased misbehavior, or worse. In contrast, we found that administrators in schools that averted a shooting set the tone for consistency in discipline; that is, rules and expectations were articulated, as were the consequences for misbehavior, and those consequences were consistently and fairly meted out.

A third finding by the FBI was that some schools had developed an inflexible culture that became stagnant and unresponsive to changes in the larger culture of the community. A series of studies conducted for the National Academies found that

many rampage school shootings occurred in schools located in rapidly growing and changing communities, but that the schools were not reflecting those changes (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2003). A variation of school–community collaboration emerged in four of the six primary domains described earlier from Daniels et al. (2010) (see Sect. 19.3.2). Specifically, schools that averted a shooting described efforts to cooperate with members of the larger community (*school conditions*) and interacted with members of the community, such as emergency responders, once a plot had been discovered (*intervention*). Moreover, development of active school–community relationships while developing a *crisis plan* was seen as critical. Finally, school–community collaboration was important when developing and implementing *prevention efforts*. Thus, we see the importance of schools becoming integrated with the larger community.

Finally, O'Toole (2000) found that in a large percentage of school shootings, at least one other person knew of the plot beforehand but did nothing to prevent it. This *code of silence* is an adolescent cultural norm; one does not want to be seen as a "snitch" (Morris, 2010). The code of silence may also be present because students did not take the threat seriously, instead believing the person issuing the threat was merely displaying bravado to gain respect. A third source of the code of silence is that even when some students took the threat seriously, they did not feel connected enough to anybody (adult) to report.

There are several things schools can do to break the code of silence. First, they can educate students about the difference between "snitching" and helping. The intent behind snitching is to get a person in trouble; reporting a threat or concern is intended to help the student or others. One school principal described having two all-school assemblies each year where he worked to change students' attitudes regarding snitching and helpfulness (Daniels et al., 2010). Second, schools that averted a shooting worked to develop a culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect (Daniels et al.). When students feel like there is at least one person in the school who cares for them, they are more likely to come forward with concerns, or to report threats. The importance of establishing trusting student–faculty relationships cannot be overstated.

Fuselier and Daniels (2011) presented a model for establishing quality relationships with students through active listening. The Behavioral Change Stairway was developed by crisis (hostage) negotiators as a means of establishing trust, which can lead to behavioral change (see Fig. 19.1). Even where there is no crisis, these same methods may be used to build positive connections with students. From this model we see that the first step to connect with students is to employ active listening skills, such as identifying emotions, use of open-ended questions to elicit student discussion, paraphrasing, reflecting/mirroring emotions, and use of "I" messages.

As we listen to our students, we begin to develop empathy for them. Empathy is defined as understanding another person from his or her perspective, not from one's own, and is a critical component for the development of rapport. Once rapport is established, the student will learn to trust, enabling the adult to influence him or her. Such influence may entail sharing concerns about another student or personal problems. Once the adult has the capacity to influence the student, she or he may then help the student change his or her behavior (e.g., reporting a threat to the proper
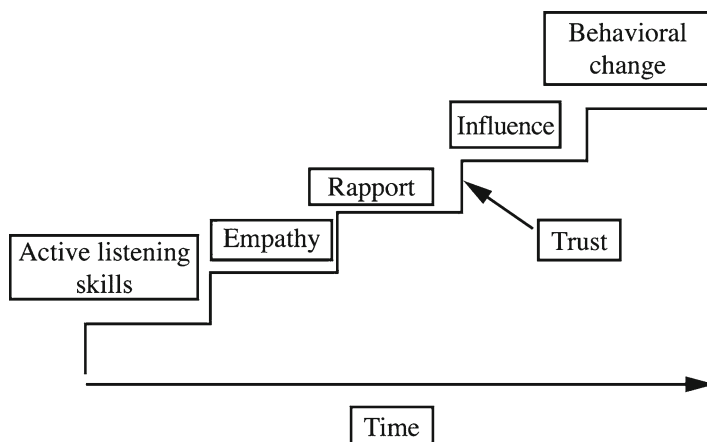
Fig. 19.1 Behavioral change stairway

authorities). Future research needs to validate the efficacy of the behavioral stairway model in breaking the code of silence in schools.

19.4.3 The School Culture

To gain a better understanding of the factors involved in school shootings, we (Daniels & Bradley, 2011) reviewed the research on the culture of schools where a shooting had been averted and compared it to the culture of schools where a shooting occurred. We found four common themes that were markedly more prevalent in schools in which a shooting took place: an inflexible culture, inequitable discipline, tolerance for disrespectful behavior, and a code of silence (Daniels & Bradley; O'Toole, 2000).

Inflexible culture. A school's culture consists of official and unofficial values and patterns of behavior and the associated relationships (O'Toole, 2000). When this culture is inflexible, it becomes insensitive to changes in society and may unwittingly cause a sense of not belonging among certain students. For example, if a school with an increasing Hispanic population fails to offer culturally specific instruction or clubs, the Hispanic students may feel separated and believe that they do not belong or are not valued. The inflexible culture, in effect, creates an "us-and-them" view of the school. While this is common across all schools, it has been shown to be particularly problematic in schools that experienced a shooting.

Inequitable discipline. Inequitable discipline exists when staff members apply school rules differently to different groups (O'Toole, 2000) and can intensify an outsider-view. For example, if certain students believe that athletes are not punished as harshly as they are, they may become resentful and develop contempt for the school and its personnel. Whether the perception is true or not

does not matter. While the vast majority of students will not act on this resentment, some school shooters did.

Tolerance for disrespectful behavior. If a school permits, or is perceived to permit, disrespectful behavior such as bullying, racism, and overt rudeness, the students bearing the brunt of such actions may feel they have no one to turn to, especially if they are aware that the school's policies on such behavior are very lenient (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). As a consequence, their frustration may lead to increases in acting out behaviors, aggression, or even violence.

Code of silence. A code of silence exists when students refuse to report important information about other students; such peer loyalty can have tragic consequences for schools (O'Toole, 2000). In schools where a shooting occurred, Vossekuil et al. (2000) established that most shooters informed others of their intentions before they took action; incredibly, not one confidante reported the information. The motivation for such secrecy is the fear of being labeled a "snitch" and being ostracized by other students. Daniels and Bradley (2011) postulate that the word "snitching" should be reframed to "helping": snitching involves telling on someone to get them in trouble, whereas helping would involve reporting concerns in order to help the person or others. Daniels and Bradley also find, "in addition to changing students' perceptions of snitching, our research points out the importance of, again, developing a culture of dignity and respect" (p. 54). Without this culture of respect, the code of silence will not be broken and potential events will not be reported.

19.5   The Safe School Communities Model

Daniels and Bradley (2011) reviewed the research on lethal school violence, including the role of bullying, barricaded captive-taking in schools, averted school shootings, and building a positive school climate. Synthesizing result of this corpus of research, we developed the five-pronged Safe School Communities Model (see Fig. 19.2). Variables identified as supportive of enhanced school safety were clustered into the five elements of the model.

Skills instruction. Daniels and Bradley (2011) found that both students and school personnel benefit from instruction in various types of skills. Students need to learn communication skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution skills, how to cooperate with others, self-control, and friendship-building skills. Each of these may be taught in developmentally appropriate ways and reinforced in classroom discussions. Since school staff are critical in fostering school safety (Kagan, 2001), Daniels and Bradley stress the importance of teaching faculty and staff crisis management skills. Quality instruction reduces classroom misbehavior and helps to create a positive classroom environment, so teachers need to continually work to improve their teaching abilities. Educational opportunities for faculty and staff are provided during in-service and conference workshops.

Expected student behaviors. One of the most basic steps in fostering a safe school community is to develop a clear definition of how students are expected to behave. In

Fig. 19.2 The safe school communities model

Skills Instruction

Positive Adult Interactions

Expected Student Behaviors

Safe School Community

Student Self/Other Awareness

Engagement with the Community

fact, Finnan, Shnepel, and Anderson (2003) specifically found that a positive school environment utilizing clear behavior expectations promotes respect and mutual trust. For the students, expectations should center on a clear understanding of unacceptable behaviors (including bullying and disrespectful behavior) and the articulation of understandable consequences and clear conduct guidelines to be followed. For the staff, the emphasis should be on equitably enforcing behavior guidelines, seriously addressing all rumors, and promoting leadership and physical safety (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). The faculty and staff members should have a clear, concise rulebook to follow and should be trained on the importance of applying these rules consistently.

Engagement with the community. Encouraging extracurricular activities that promote interaction with the local citizenry helps establish a necessary bond between the school and the community (Daniels and Bradley (2011). When members of the community gather for athletic or creative performances, they take pride in the school and its students. Students benefit from gaining confidence and a sense of belonging. In addition, Benbenishty, Astor, and Estrada (2008) advocate opening a direct line of communication between schools and parents in order to conduct violence risk assessments at a local level, if there are justifiable reasons for doing so. They also recommend schools to develop forums and focus groups to encourage parents to express their views and concerns.

Student self/other awareness. Daniels and Bradley (2011) encourage schools to stress social, emotional, and ethical learning to increase student self/other awareness. This element also includes such issues as identification of one's own and others' feelings (emotional intelligence) and the development of empathy.

Positive adult interactions. Lastly, Daniels and Bradley (2011) stress the importance of developing positive adult interactions with all students, in part to break down any code of silence that could facilitate a school rampage (O'Toole, 2000). The staff, as confident authority figures, should provide positive role models for students; in

doing so, they must demonstrate warmth and a positive interest in the students as individuals. Support for the importance of having a positive role model in schools can also be found in Bandura's research demonstrating that children model adult behavior (1965). While all teachers may not be able to relate equally well to all students, there will usually be some member of staff for any type of student.

And finally, teachers and staff should receive at least some specialized training in recognizing emotional and social problems in students (Fox & Harding, 2005). Today, many are ill-equipped to recognize a student in crisis. Particular attention should be paid to students who have made threats toward other students and/or the general school population; those who may seem depressed, perpetually angry, or isolated and rejected; those whose behavior and/or school performance has changed abruptly; and those who have suffered a major loss or traumatic event. The school counselor, psychologist, or nurse may offer assistance in identifying and responding to students in crisis.

19.6   Addressing the School Culture

The research presented in this chapter highlights offender and environmental factors in schools that have experienced extreme violence. Attempts to apply these findings to the real world must begin with the environment in the school—the school culture—and specifically with the all-too-frequent mind-set that "it can't happen here." Benbenishty and Astor (2005) explained how views about violence on school campuses held by principals and administrators were vastly different from those of the students. The students believed that violence was more widespread in the school, whereas the administrators tended to downplay the prevalence of this violence. This illustrates a dangerous discrepancy between staff and students. Violence can, and does, happen and administrators, staff, students, parents, authorities, and the community at large must face this reality by paying serious attention to the issues involved.

As discussed earlier, schools affected by lethal violence historically tended to be permissive in allowing disrespectful behaviors, including bullying among and between students and staff. Furthermore, they had an inflexible culture that inadvertently supported a noninclusive "us-versus-them" mentality. They also tended to employ inequitable discipline practices that further supported the outsider mentality. After the violence, many schools attempted to crack down on behavior infractions and ultimately addressed these three issues, especially the inflexible culture and disrespectful behavior, by adopting a zero tolerance policy. Although intentions may have been good, these policies have been shown to be ineffective (American Psychological Association, 2008). In fact, it is now believed that a zero tolerance stance could encourage a code of silence by discouraging students from reporting minor violations. Mulvey and Cauffman (2001) found that policies promoting healthy environments are far more effective than punitive punishments.

Preventive measures must go beyond addressing the culture of the school. Various approaches and models have been developed to build safe school communities. One of the more comprehensive efforts is Daniels and Bradley's (2011) Safe School Communities Model, presented earlier. It must be noted that while this model is based on a synthesis of research into limiting school violence, the model itself has not yet been empirically validated.

19.7 Conclusion

Although infrequent in nature, the deleterious effect of school shootings on individuals and society is colossal. From the time children start kindergarten, parents trust that they will be safe when they drop them off at school; every time one of these incidents occurs, this trust is violated. With other forms of violence, people can often choose to avoid situations where violence may occur; avoiding school is rarely an option. Therefore, quality research about how to prevent school shootings is crucial to ensuring the safety of schools, allaying the fears of parents, and protecting the children. After all, it only takes one school shooting incident to instill fear into society, so learning ways to avoid them is paramount.

References

American Psychological Association. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *The American Psychologist, 63*, 852–856.

Ardis, C. (2004). School violence from the classroom teacher's perspective. In W. L. Turk (Ed.), *School crime and policing* (pp. 131–150). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Bandura, A. (1965). Influences of models' reinforcement contingencies on the acquisition of imitative behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1*, 589–595.

Benbenishty, R., & Astor, R. A. (2005). *School violence in context: Culture, neighborhood, family, school, and gender*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Benbenishty, R., Astor, R. A., & Estrada, J. N. (2008). School violence assessment: A conceptual framework, instruments, and methods. *Children and Schools, 30*(2), 71–81.

Cantor, C. H., Mullen, P. E., & Alpers, P. A. (2000). Mass homicide: The civil massacre. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 28*(1), 55–63.

Cornell, D. G. (2006). *School violence: Fears versus facts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Cullen, D. (2009). *Columbine*. New York: Twelve, Hatchet Book Club.

Daniels, J. A. (2011). Bullying and school violence interventions. In R. J. R. Levesque (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of adolescence* (pp. 353–358). New York: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4419-1695-2.

Daniels, J. A., & Bradley, M. C. (2011). *Preventing lethal school violence*. New York: Springer.

Daniels, J. A., Buck, I., Croxall, S., Gruber, J., Kime, P., & Govert, H. (2007). A content analysis of news reports of averted school rampages. *Journal of School Violence, 6*, 83–99.

Daniels, J. A., & Page, J. (2012). School barricaded captive-taking: A literature review and critique. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 17*, 140–146. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2011.11.002.

Daniels, J. A., Volungis, A., Pshenishny, E., Gandhi, P., Winkler, A., Cramer, D. P., et al. (2010). A qualitative investigation of averted school shooting rampages. *The Counseling Psychologist, 38*(1), 69–95.

Dinkes, R., Cataldi, E. F., & Lin-Kelly, W. (2007). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2007*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2012). *Serial murder*. Retrieved March 17, 2012, from FBI.gov: http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder.

Finnan, C., Shnepel, K., & Anderson, L. (2003). Powerful learning environments: The critical link between school and classroom cultures. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 8*, 391–418.

Fox, C., & Harding, D. J. (2005). School shootings as organizational deviance. *Sociology of Education, 78*, 69–97.

Fox, C., Roth, W. D., & Newman, K. (2003). A deadly partnership: Lethal violence in an Arkansas middle school. In M. H. Moore, C. V. Petrie, A. A. Braga, & B. L. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence* (pp. 101–131). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Fuselier, G. D., & Daniels, J. A. (2011, November). Lessons from Columbine: Leakage, and getting teenagers to talk with us. *ACR Crisis Intervention Newsletter*, 2–6.

Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*, 517–572.

Holmes, R., & Holmes, S. (1992). Understanding mass murder: A starting point. *Federal Probation, 16*, 53–61.

Johnson, I. M. (1999). School violence: The effectiveness of a school resource officer program in a southern city. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 27*, 173–192.

Kagan, S. (2001). Teaching for character and community. *Educational Leadership, 59*(2), 50–55.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

May, D. C., Fessel, S. D., & Means, S. (2004). Predictors of principals' perceptions of school resource officer effectiveness in Kentucky. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 29*, 75–93.

McGee, J., & DeBernardo, C. (1999). The classroom avenger. *Forensic Examiner, 8*, 16–18.

Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A., & Gray, T. (2001). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of adolescent mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*, 719–728.

Morris, E. W. (2010). "Snitches end up in ditches" and other cautionary tales. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 26*, 254–272. doi:10.1177/1043986210368640.

Mulvey, E. P., & Cauffman, E. (2001). The inherent limits of predicting school violence. *The American Psychologist, 56*(10), 797–802.

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 285*, 2094–2100.

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2003). *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Newman, K., Fox, C., Harding, D., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

Nims, D. R. (2000). Violence in our schools: A national crisis. In D. S. Singh & C. B. Aspy (Eds.), *Violence in American schools: A practical guide for counselors* (pp. 3–20). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

O'Toole, M. E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: Critical Incident Response Group, FBI Academy, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

Ohsako, T. (1997). *Violence at school: Global issues and interventions*. Lausanne, Switzerland: UNESCO.

Olweus, D. (1992). Bullying among schoolchildren: Intervention and prevention. In R. D. Peters, R. J. McMahon, & V. L. Quinsey (Eds.), *Aggression and violence throughout the lifespan* (pp. 100–125). London: Sage.

Shepard, C. (n.d.). Eric Harris's Journal 4/12/98. http://acolumbinesite.com/eric/writing/journal.html.

Shepard, C. (n.d.). Eric Harris's Journal 4/21/98. http://acolumbinesite.com/eric/writing/journal.html.

Shepard, C. (n.d.). Eric Harris's Journal 11/12/98. http://acolumbinesite.com/eric/writing/journal.html.

Sullivan, M. L., & Guerette, R. T. (2003). The copycat factor: Mental illness, guns, and the shooting incident at Heritage High School, Rockdale County, Georgia. In M. H. Moore, C. V. Petrie, A. A. Braga, & B. L. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Deadly lessons: Understanding lethal school violence* (pp. 25–69). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Swezey, J. A., & Thorp, K. (2010). A school shooting plot foiled. *Journal of Research on Christian Education, 19*(3), 286–331.

Turvey, B. (Ed.). (2008). *Criminal profiling: An introduction to behavioral evidence analysis* (3rd ed.). San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic.

Turvey, B. E. (1998, January). Deductive criminal profiling: Comparing applied methodologies between inductive and deductive criminal profiling techniques. *Knowledge Solutions Library.* Retrieved November 21, 2011, from http://www.corpus-delecti.com/Profiling_law.html.

United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2011). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2011* by Simone Robers, Jijun Zhang, Jennifer Truman, and Thomas Snyder. Washington DC: Department of Education.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center.

Vossekuil, B., Reddy, M., Fein, R., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, M. (2000). *USSS safe school initiative: An interim report on the prevention of targeted violence in schools*. Washington, DC: US Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center.

Chapter 20
Crisis Management in School Shooting Situations: The School—A Forgotten Factor in the Equation

Camélia Dumitriu

In an era of space travel, DNA decryption, and spectacular advances in nanotechnologies, researchers still remain unable to understand and explain "how" and "why" school shootings occur. As Gerd Appenzeller eloquently stated in the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper on April 27, 2002: "We are rational human beings who can understand and explain almost everything but we are helpless when faced with disasters like yesterday's school shooting in an Erfurt high school."

With regard to the status of research on school violence, Sharkey, Furlong, and Yetter (2006, p. 121) show that "topics of school violence and safety have been primarily investigated from a social problem perspective and not as a coherent topic of high-quality scientific research." Moreover, there are relatively few studies on acts of "extreme violence" (ANSI, 2010) in schools. The existing work in this area typically was undertaken by researchers in criminal sociology, psychology, and medicine, who adopted an approach in line with "disaster management" research (as defined by Haddow & Bullock, 2004). These researchers select as the unit of observation the "emergency situation" or "the disaster" as it unfolds, and "the individual" is the unit of analysis. They do not attempt to study the organization that is experiencing the crisis or analyze the institutional aspects related to crisis management. Instead,

C. Dumitriu (✉)
School of Business Science, University of Quebec,
Montreal, QC, Canada
e-mail: dumitriu.camelia@uqam.ca

they focus on collaboration between various actors (police, emergency medical teams (EMT), etc.) during the event, and, in some cases, on the short- and medium-term consequences for the physical and psychological health of those involved. Thus, studies conducted by researchers in the criminology field focus mainly on intervention during the crisis and, to some extent, on the shooter's sociological and psychological profile. Research in the field of psychology deals chiefly with post-crisis management aspects and issues of human factors. Researchers in the field of sociology for the most part adopt an ecological approach to study the influence of the external contexts and, specifically, of the school community. In addition, some contributions have been made in the field of communication studies by researchers who have directed their research toward the crisis communication plan as part of the intervention stage of a crisis. The fact is that little attention has been devoted to the prevention and preparation stage of the crisis management process, or to the school itself (Grunseit Grunseit, Weatherburn, & Donnelly, 2005; Lawrence, 2007). The school seems to be a forgotten factor in the complex equation of school shootings. Yet the Cowan Report on the 1992 Concordia University incident states: "In many cases the mistakes were exacerbated or caused in their entirety by decisional processes, policies, practices and mechanisms [at Concordia] which were never designed or contemplated to carry the burden of such a case" (1994, p. 1).

The present study describes results from a research project designed (a) to describe and explain the process of crisis management in a school shooting situation, by conducting case studies of ten school shootings, and; (b) to identify the critical factors involved in a successful crisis management process, and, consequently, the means to improve this process at all stages, i.e., prevention and preparation ("proactive crisis management"); intervention and communication ("crisis response"); and recovery ("post-crisis management").

20.1   Terms, Definitions, and Research Framework

Although school violence has become "a global phenomenon that affects one of the core institutions of modern society to some degree in virtually all nation-states" (Akiba, LeTendre, Baker, & Goesling, 2002, p. 830), there are no national or regional databases on school shootings of the kind that exist, for example, for civil aviation accidents and natural disasters. The absence of a single resource or directory of school violence could perhaps explain the lack of a common terminology and a consistent methodology.

The term "school violence" is defined differently by different researchers and different national and international organizations. In the United States, some organizations make a clear distinction between extreme violence, which they define as "serious violent incidents," and other "disciplinary problems" such as verbal violence, gang activities, and bullying. According to the 2010 NCES report "Indicators of School Crime and Safety" (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder,
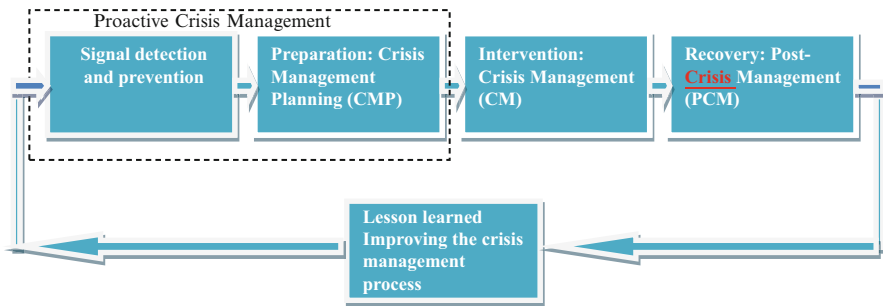
Fig. 20.1 Research framework

2010), school-related violence refers to five forms of violent behavior on school property: (a) serious violent incidents (rape, robbery, and physical attack or fighting with a weapon); (b) violent incidents (serious violent incidents plus physical attack or threat of physical attack without a weapon); (c) theft; (d) other incidents (possession of a firearm or a knife, vandalism, and drug-related issues); and (e) "discipline problems" (acts of disrespect for teachers, verbal violence, gang activities, bullying at school, and cyber-bullying).

For the purpose of this study, a school shooting is defined as a multiple-victim act of extreme violence perpetrated on school premises, generally by a school-related perpetrator (student, former student, teacher, or outsider with ties to the school or its community) who carefully plans the act in advance. Such an event represents a crisis situation, for which schools should be prepared.

For the purpose of this study, the term "organizational crisis" is defined as the materialization of a risk that (a) has a low probability of occurring; (b) can result from an unexpected event or be triggered by the chain reaction of previously accumulated low-risk events neglected by the management team and consequently generated a "butterfly effect"; (c) prevents the organization from fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals, at least in the short run; (d) instantly inflicts severe damage on specific stakeholders and possibly on the whole community; and (e) draws intense media coverage that contributes to amplifying the effect of the original event.

The research framework (Fig. 20.1) is grounded in the crisis management models proposed by Mitroff, Pauchant, & Shrivastava, (1988), Pearson and Clair (1998), and Lagadec (2003).

The approach adopted in this study is part of the new wave of research that focuses on proactive crisis management, as defined by Roux-Dufort, who emphasizes that one of the deficiencies of research undertaken in the field of crisis management is that of "considering crises as a point of departure for exceptional action, whereas they should also be seen as the point of arrival of a long process of destabilization […], the end point in a process of accumulation of vulnerabilities that have been allowed to build up" (2005, p. 3, translated).

20.2   School Shootings: An International Phenomenon

On the basis of the adopted definitions, data on school shootings since 1920 were collected from three databases and various public records and archives (Table 20.1). A rigorous triage process was followed to "extract" the school shooting events from the thousands of records of "school violence." The resulting data was further refined by eliminating records that referred to: (a) school-related attacks/school-related deaths recorded as such only because they occurred on school property; (b) hostage-taking for exclusively political reasons; (c) gang-related disputes or fights that escalated into a shooting; (d) other shootings that occurred as a result of a verbal or physical confrontation between students (such as a dispute over a girl) or relatives (husband–wife, brother–sister, etc.). Finally, the data set obtained was adjusted by the addition of some cases of extreme violence in schools that had all the characteristics of a school shooting event but were perpetrated with knives rather than guns. Such events have occurred recently in countries with limited access to firearms, such as China.

Table 20.1 shows that the frequency of school shootings has been rising since the 1960s. Moreover, this social phenomenon, which seems to have its historical roots in North America, has become contagious, spreading after 1990 to European countries and, more recently, Asian countries.

Two types of school shootings emerged: (a) non-random shootings, perpetrated generally by an insider (student, former student, teacher, or employee) or by an outsider with ties with the school community, and (b) random shootings generally, but not necessarily, perpetrated by outsiders who chose the school randomly. About 70% of the 115 shooters were students or former students of the school.[1] In 8% of cases the shooter was a teacher/professor, an employee, or a school administrator. About 4% of shooters were "outsiders" who had ties with the school community (with teachers, students, or parents). Finally, in 18% of the cases the shooter was an outsider with no apparent tie with the school, its students, or its teachers.

By applying Hofstede's model of national cultural differences (2001) to the countries in which most of the school shootings occurred (Table 20.1), one can notice that all these countries share two common characteristics: high individualism (IND) and low power distance (PD).

The power distance (PD) index indicates the extent to which people in a certain country accept that power in society is distributed unequally (within the family, school, firm, etc.). In societies that score high on this dimension, social status is important and respect for "power" shapes relationships among individuals (child–parent; student–teacher; employee–employer). In these societies, the "less powerful members" expect directives from "the power" on how to act, and are reluctant to express disagreement with "the power." In contrast, national cultures with low PD indices are characterized by "greater equality between societal levels, and even

---

[1] The total number of perpetrators is greater than the total number of school shootings because some attacks involved two perpetrators.

Table 20.1 School shooting events worldwide

Decade	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2012	Total
Number of school shootings	2	0	1	0	5	6	12	31	39	15	111
United States	1		1		2	4	9	22	22	8	69
Canada						2	1	4	1		8
Germany					1		1		5		7
France								1	3	2	6
Finland							1		2		3
Australia								1	1		2
Scotland					1			1			2
Netherlands								1	1		2
China									1	4	5
Taiwan					1						1
Japan									1		1
South Africa								1			1
Lithuania	1										1
Bosnia-Herzegovina									1		1
Brazil										1	1
Argentina									1		1

within families" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 403), and individuals are not reluctant to take the initiative or even "to demand justification for inequalities of power."

Individualism represents the extent to which individuals in a society prefer to look after themselves rather than to integrate in groups. In societies that score high on this dimension, individuals are self-centered and focused on individual achievement. They place great emphasis on their individual goals and autonomy and do not avoid confrontational situations. Personal privacy is respected and embodied within the cultural norms. Societies that score low on this dimension are collectivist societies in which the most important personal goal of an individual is to belong to a certain group, often at the cost of sacrificing personal privacy. Group achievement is more highly valued than personal achievement and confrontational situations are avoided.

20.3   Research Design and Research Method

Ten of the 111 school shootings shown in Table 20.1 were selected for in-depth qualitative case studies (Yin, 2003). The composition of the sample complies with Yin's recommendations regarding the multiple case study method (Table 20.2).

Table 20.2 Sample of cases

Country/State/District and date of incident	School and number of students	Community	The shooter: age and ties with the school	Target (T) and possible/alleged motives and root causes (M)
United States, Colorado, Jefferson County April 20, 1999	Columbine High School; 2,000	Columbine Valley, a non-incorporated area in southern Jefferson County; Littleton; small suburban town; 40,000	Students (2); both 18	T: the school as symbol; some categories of people and group-related conflict ("non-athlete group"/Goth culture group/Trench Coat Mafia group versus jocks/some ethnic groups/some social groups) M: revenge; teased/bullied; outcast; antidepressant medication; xenophobia (especially racism); "folie a deux" syndrome (shared psychosis)
United States, Virginia April 16, 2007	Virginia Polytechnic and State University (Virginia Tech); 26,000	Blacksburg; rural community; 48,000	Student (ethnic minority, Korean descent); 23	T: the school as social institution M: revenge for perceived unfair treatment; record of mental illness ("selective mutism" and major depression: single episode); tense relationship with father
United States, Pennsylvania October 2, 2006	West Nickel Mines Amish School; 27	Bart Township; rural community; 4,000	Outsider with ties with the Amish community	T: both the school and a category of people as religious symbol; M: revenge against "God"; possibly PTSD; possibly family-related issues
Canada, Quebec September 13, 2006	Dawson College; 10,000	Montreal; metropolitan area; 1.8 million	Outsider (ethnic minority family); 25	T: the school as symbol; copycat (Columbine); Goth culture group; M: unknown; record of mental illness

Canada, Quebec August 24, 1992	Concordia University; 40,000	Montreal; metropolitan area; 1.8 million	Professor (ethnic minority, Russian immigrant); 52	T: specific colleagues (university professors and faculty administrators) M: revenge; tenure dispute; alleged academic mobbing; immigration stress
Scotland, Stirling March 13, 1996	Dunblane Primary School; 640	Dunblane; small town; 7,900	Outsider with ties with the school (managing various "boys' clubs" attended by children enrolled at the school); 43	T: some categories of people M: perceived unfair treatment; revenge on those who "had spread unfounded rumors about him" (pedophile or member of a child pornography network) Boys Scouts Association, the Boys Clubs and other social and political implications Possibly sexually abused as a child, by father; Possibly homophobia
Australia, Victoria October 21, 2002	Monash University, Clayton Campus; 55,000	Melbourne; metropolitan area; 4.1 million	Student (ethnic minority, Chinese); 36	T: apparently one specific colleague of Asian origin M: teased by classmates because of difficulty in communicating in English; social stress/social isolation; academic stress (pressure to perform); immigration stress
Germany, Thuringia April 26, 2002	Johann Gutenberg Gymnasium; 700	Erfurt; town; 207,000	Former student; 19	T: the school as a social institution; the school principal and the teachers M: expelled from the school 6 months before graduation; perceived unfair treatment

(continued)

Table 20.2 (continued)

Country/State/District and date of incident	School and number of students	Community	The shooter: age and ties with the school	Target (T) and possible/alleged motives and root causes (M)
Germany, North Rhine Westphalia November 20, 2006	Geschwister Scholl school; 700	Emsdetten; small town; 36,000	Former student; 18	T: the school as a social institution; copycat (Columbine); Goth culture group M: unknown; troubled teenager in search of "originality," wanted to "copy" the Columbine school shooting
Argentina, Buenos Aires District September 28, 2004	Islas Malvinas Middle School; 400	Carmen de Patagones; rural community; 30,000	Student; 15	T: unknown (apparently one specific colleague but diverging opinions of witnesses) M: teased in gym class by some classmates (possibly-homophobic bullying); tense relationship with father; "folie à deux" syndrome (shared psychosis)

20.4 Key Findings

This section describes and explains the decisions the management of the educational institutions should make to prevent a school shooting from occurring or limit its consequences. Some of these decisions are the result of the interaction between the school and its main stakeholders in a crisis situation (students, teachers, parents, police, EMT, etc.). Table 20.3 presents a synthesis of the research findings.

20.4.1 Pressure Points

Simons' framework for assessing the strategic risk of an organization (1999) was used in this study to identify the school's pressure points and assess their impact on students and staff. Simons (1999) argues that organizations experiencing rapid growth are more exposed to various risks immediately after the expansion period, unlike counterparts that adopt an incremental approach to expansion. This is partly because the extreme pressure of struggling to support rapid growth sometimes leads them to neglect key aspects, and in turn new risks can emerge.

Four types of pressure points have been identified: (a) growth-related, (b) competition-related, (c) budget-related, and (d) culture-related. The research findings suggest that school management should carefully monitor these pressure points, assess their impact on students and staff, and take appropriate measures to mitigate the specific risks that they may pose to their organization.

20.4.1.1 Growth-Related Pressure Points

Many of the schools analyzed in this chapter had adopted a rapid growth strategy prior to the shootings. Columbine High School was the beneficiary of a 13 million dollar development fund, part of which was used to expand its "numerous athletic fields and sports facilities" (CNN, April 20, 1999). The organizational culture of the school seemed to favor athletes, creating frustration among other students, including the two shooters.

The Faculty of Engineering, where the Concordia shootings occurred, went through "a prolonged period of expansion […] and diversification" (*Waterloo Gazette*, July 27, 1994, p. 2). Data analysis revealed that the factors that triggered the tragic event at Concordia included flaws in research policy and poor financial control that "had failed to keep pace with the rapidly expanding research activities at the University" (Arthurs Report: Arthurs, Blais, & Thomson, 1994, p. 12). Consequently, some academics abused the system and used it for their own ends.

When the shooting occurred at Virginia Tech, the main objectives of their 2006–2012 strategic plan were to implement new technologies and to "increase doctoral numbers, expand graduate degree offerings, increase competitiveness and diversity

Table 20.3 Key findings and implications for practice

Pro-active crisis management	
***Prevention: School boards should*…**	

4.1 Review the school's pressure points and assess their impact on students and staff	Four categories
	    Growth strategy
	    Competitive environment and pressure to
	      perform
	    Budgetary constraints
	    Particular features of organizational culture

4.2 Review specific rules and policies	Four policies and two procedures
	    Hiring and firing policies
	    Promotion policy
	    Research policy
	    Student exclusion procedure
	    Admission procedure

4.3 Put in place measures and mechanisms for detecting warning signs (red flags)	Seven categories of warning signs (see Table 20.4).

4.4 Implement basic security measures and consider various ICT-related issues	Options to be considered
	    Door locks; visitor sign-in policy and badge
	      (primary and secondary schools mainly);
	      control access to building (security guards
	      and number of main entrance doors to be kept
	      open); specific security measures for some
	      areas (e.g., cafeteria, library, playground)
	    ICT measures that are the most effective and
	      appropriate for the school's specific situation

4.5 Review the parent-school relationship	Strong leadership of the parent-school
	      relationship during periods of "business as
	      usual"
	    Conflict management skills

***Preparation: Crisis management plan to deal with* …**	
4.6 Issues related to the evacuation process	School blueprints Crisis exercise

4.7 Issues related to the victim identification process	Accurate records for staff and student
	      identification and specific responsibilities
	      assigned (maintaining and safeguarding
	      student records, controlling access to records,
	      providing copies of records)

4.8 Issues related to the intervention and communication process	Crisis team, crisis center, and meeting place
	List of all important stakeholders (and their
	      coordinates)
	Crisis communication plan and designated
	      spokesperson

and international offerings." The university had also a dedicated unit providing mental health services to students and staff (Cook Counseling Center), but the strategic plan stated no specific objectives with regard to it. After the shooting, it was revealed that the Cook Counseling Center lacked a dedicated core of full-time personnel. Moreover,

in its report, the Virginia Tech Review Panel (2007) criticized the center for not having taken appropriate measures to provide Cho (the shooter) with the necessary medical attention. Prior to the shootings, Cho, who had been suffering from selective mutism, begun to show signs of aggressive behavior at school, and was referred to the center by the director of the English department. He asked for help from practitioners at Cook Counseling Center, but was met with the indifference that prevailed in that organization at that time. The report of inquiry into the shootings shows that after the dramatic event staff at Cook Counseling Center were not even able to find Cho's medical file, or remember if and when he had had an appointment or whether he had come in for a visit at all. After the shootings, the police found a note in his dorm room, stating that "You caused me to do this" (Potter, Schoetz, Esposito, Thomas, & the staff of ABC News, 2007).

Prior to the shootings, Monash University, the largest public university in Australia, participated in many joint ventures with other academic institutions in Australia (Dumitriu, Slee, & Giroux, 2009) and abroad in establishing three foreign branches (in 1998, 2000, 2001). With its eight campuses, two of which were located outside Australia, Monash University was also one of the largest Australian universities in terms of recruitment of foreign students. Many of its international students (the shooter included) came from China. At that time, the educational services industry was Australia's third-largest service export industry (Dumitriu et al., 2009) and many universities competed to attract international students. After the shooting, the Student Association pointed to the university's failure to allocate sufficient resources to assisting these foreign students with their integration into the new environment (Rees, 2002).

20.4.1.2   Competition-Related Pressure Points

Four of the school shooting situations analyzed in this study occurred in high-performance-oriented schools. The pressure to perform is fueled by national and international ranking agencies that assess the quality of educational services offered by schools and universities, using "the podium model" (Van Parijs, 2009) according to which "ranking high in terms of the scores constructed … was immediately interpreted as belonging to the 'top,' 'best,' 'greatest' universities in the world" (p. 194). Just prior to the shootings, Monash, Virginia Tech, and Concordia were competing for places on the podium and accordingly adopted a numbers-driven approach in setting metrics to evaluate the progress made in their academic activities. Virginia Tech (Strategic Plan 2006–2012) decided to improve its Lombardi rank (targeting a position between 25 and 50) and its US NEWS rank (Top 40 National Universities—Doctoral) while Monash University aimed to become "one of the finest and most innovative, modern universities in the world" (Monash Strategic Plan 1998–2002) and "to lead the way in higher education in Australia" (Government of Australia & Education, 2003). Coincidental or not, Monash had just been excluded from the THES World University Rankings on account of plagiarism (Baty, 2002) when the shooting occurred in 2002. This incident suggests that pressure to perform could lead people to commit desperate acts.

Columbine High School has been described as an upper-middle-class suburban school with high academic standards, as evidenced by the fact that most of its graduates continue on to college (Erikson 2001). Performance in sporting competitions was one of the school's priorities at the time of the shooting.

The external competitive environment in the educational sector, and especially in the academic sector, puts academics and students under extreme pressure to perform.

20.4.1.3   Budget-Related Pressure Points

Prior to the shootings, some of these schools were suddenly confronted with tough budgetary constraints and a lack of funds, and accordingly sought other readily available sources of revenue, such as research funds (Concordia University) and international students (Monash University). In the case of Concordia University, the shooting was somehow related to the misuse of these funds, while in the case of Monash University the shooting, which was perpetrated by a student of Asian origin, reopened the debate on the lack of necessary funding for social services for international students.

In the case of Concordia University, the Canadian government reduced university funding by 13% during the years preceding the shooting. In response, some universities adopted new organizational values to fit into a "production-driven research culture" (Arthurs et al., 1994, p. 4) and began to look for new funding opportunities provided by various research bodies. As the Arthurs Report (1994) states, because "research grants and industrial contracts were awarded on the basis of numbers of publications, rather than on their quality and significance," academic staff had "to be prolific" in terms of publications. In order to deliver results under pressure and cope with tight deadlines, some members of the academic community in Concordia adopted a strategy of "being as prolific as possible." The inquiry report further emphasizes that "some of these strategies may promote undesirable behavior" such as "misappropriation of credit for work done and unwarranted claims of authorship" (1994, p. 7).

Before the Concordia shooting, the perpetrator, a tenure-track professor, complained about the administrators of the engineering department, who had co-authored many of his scientific articles without in fact contributing and used them to obtain research funds for their own ends. "All of us knew that he [Dr. Fabrikant] was an excellent researcher and that they [the administrators of the department] refused to give him his tenure because he was very productive in terms of articles that they authored," a then PhD student told us. Unfortunately, the tragic event that followed was not an isolated case in the academic world. Four years later, in 1996, a graduate student in engineering at San Diego State University killed his thesis adviser and all other academic members of the thesis committee, during his thesis defense, claiming that his adviser "was bogging him down with work unrelated to his project" (*New York Times*, July 17, 1997), that together they had published two articles, and that he thought he "would have been denied the degree he had worked for two years to obtain" (Perry, 1996).

Our analysis revealed that budget-related pressure points could induce social and/or ethical risks that, following a "butterfly effect" and in conjunction with other factors, could trigger a school shooting. These findings are in line with those of Hendrickson and

James (2005), according to whom "economic pressures" that suddenly constrain agents' "money–ethical behavior" trade-off increase their tolerance to unethical behavior. Moreover, employees in an organization that engages in budget cuts could perceive some of its actions as social disorder. In some cases, these perceptions "become a trigger for a wide variety of unethical workplace behaviors" (Vanguard, 2009, p. 10).

20.4.1.4 Culture-Related Pressure Points

Data analysis revealed that some features of the school culture may be either a factor that triggered the crisis or an enabling agent of the actions undertaken by crisis stakeholders during and immediately following the shooting.

In the case of Columbine High School, an organizational culture that seemed to favor a certain "elite" (students with exceptional athletic performance) represented a major stress factor for other students who did not possess such sporting abilities, among them the shooters themselves. The two shooters seem to have targeted, along with other categories of students, their peers who possessed exceptional athletic ability. One student at Columbine at that time described this feature of the Columbine culture as "jock elitism" (Holtz, 1999). This opinion was shared by some members of the Jefferson County School Board (n.d.), who, long before the shootings, had observed that "in all of our schools, athletes can appear to have a different status" and "special privileges" (Adams & Russakoff, 1999).

As in all organizations, this culture was propagated through various values, rites, artifacts, and symbols. Sports trophies were displayed inside the school, in the most visible areas. In the school's yearbook, the quality of the paper displaying sport events and athletes' photos was better than that devoted to academic events; after the shooting, the yearbook found in the home of one of the shooters had words scrawled across some students' photos, such as "dead," "should die," "may live," etc. (Fagan, Van Derbeken, & Wallace, 1999).

Another feature of Columbine's school culture was high tolerance of verbal and physical violence. The school also tolerated the violence embodied in various assignments submitted by students; for instance, several school papers written by Eric Harris for his English class were filled with violence, but some of the written comments by his teachers were congratulatory[2]; the teachers evidently focused their attention on style and form, rather than on content.

This culture, which was based on values that were not shared by all the members of the organization, led to some frustration. One student at Columbine at that time told Washington Post reporters that "We all hated it—hated the fact we were outcasts just simply because we weren't in sports" (Adams & Russakoff, 1999). A former student said that "With all the animosity between the various social groups at Columbine, something like this was bound to happen" (Weinhold, 2002, p. 7).

As regards the Faculty of Engineering at Concordia, in 1992, its organization embraced a production-driven research culture infiltrated by poisoned values shared

[2] Jefferson Country Sherriff's Office, JC 001-025923–026859.

and promoted by some professors, such as allegations of conflicts of interest (Noel, 1992), "intellectual and financial exploitation of vulnerable foreign graduate students […], lack of standards of scientific and academic integrity," and favoritism (Arthurs et al., 1994). This subculture and the absence of firm action by Concordia's board of governors at that time may have contributed to the tragic events.

In two other cases, Virginia Tech and Monash University, both of which are very research-intensive universities, an individualistic and performance-driven organizational culture subjected students to a great deal of pressure. On the other hand, students themselves became more individualistic and paid less attention to their fellow students.

In the aftermath of the shooting, one of a group of students from Loyola College (United States), who were at Monash University for a study program when the shooting occurred, stated: "Monash is much larger [than Loyola] and has a large commuter base, so there really isn't the sense that the school community as a whole has been affected" (Memoli, 2002). Nevertheless, the econometrics department was very small, having an enrollment of only 12 students, including Xiang, the Chinese student who perpetrated the shooting. One may therefore assume that there was a sense of community and that everybody knew him and he knew everybody. However, the Head of the Economics Department at Monash University acknowledged that "people were impatient with Xiang, because they did not understand him due to the bad accent" and concluded that "people's intolerance led to social isolation" (Thomas, 2005). Indeed, Xiang's fellow students seemed to ignore him entirely. Alistar Boast, Xiang's fellow student who joined forces with professors Gordon Brown and Brett Inder to subdue him when he started shooting, said that he was "somebody they [his fellow students] knew, but not by name, maybe by face," and that "there were some student groups in the school" [the econometrics department], but Xiang "did not approach their group and students in their group did not approach Xiang" (2005).

On October 21, 2002, Xiang was attending a tutorial on econometrics when he suddenly climbed up on a desk and opened fire on the group of eleven students in the classroom, killing two fellow students (of Asian descent) and wounding four others along with the econometrics professor. He was enrolled in his final year at the Faculty of Commerce (econometrics department) and on the day of the shooting he was due to give an oral presentation. Xiang had serious difficulties communicating in English, being perpetually frustrated by his inability to make himself understood by teachers and classmates. When he started shooting, he yelled "You never understand me!" (Berry, 2003).

Both cases (Monash and Virginia Tech) involve a student of Asian origin who may have had difficulty in adapting to cultural and social values different from his own. Also, Dr. Fabrikant, who perpetrated the shooting at Concordia University, was a Russian immigrant. Russia and many Asian countries have national environments characterized by "low individualism" in terms of Hofstede's model of national cultures (2001). Instead, collective values are dominant in these cultures. In contrast, the United States, Canada, and Australia are characterized by high individualism (Fig. 20.2), and therefore, according to

IND
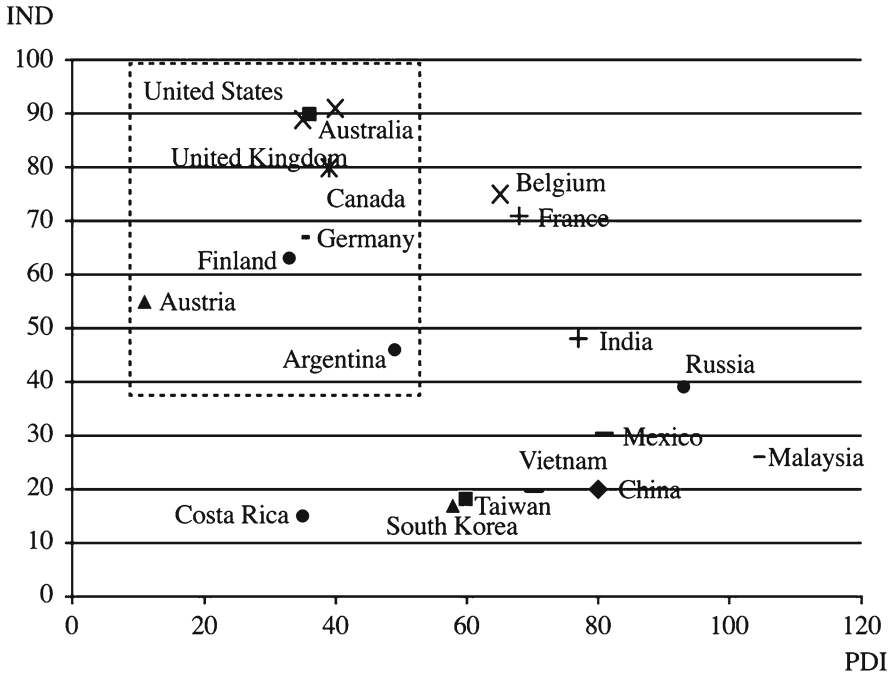
Fig. 20.2 School shootings around the world: Hofstede's model of national cultural differences

Hofstede's model of national cultural differences, each individual is primarily concerned with his or her own objectives (especially career goals) and needs (especially material needs), and is insensitive to the needs and objectives of other members of the community.

Specific features of the various organizational cultures revealed by data analysis—such as rigidity, individualism, and favoritism—led to frustrations among the members of the organization and were also responsible for enlarging the gaps between the different groups within the organization, thus leading to the emergence of various subcultures. Although the presence of subcultures is rather the norm in large, diversified organizations, it is up to their managers to create a set of core values shared by all the members of the organization. This set of core values serves to motivate and mobilize all the cultural subgroups and prevent the emergence of conflicts between them.

In other cases, specific features of the school's culture were not necessarily the enabler of the crisis, but instead represented important challenges for the decision-makers who managed the crisis. Thus, for instance, the religious beliefs that prevent the Amish from traveling by car, plane, or any other motorized vehicle, adopting modern technologies (e.g., using a telephone, watching TV, etc.) and taking pictures of themselves, led to serious delays in the decision-making process adopted by various stakeholders to manage the crisis at Bart Township in 2006 (Dumitriu and Donia 2009a). In fact, the nine girl victims were transported to trauma centers in different cities without being identified, as the Amish school did not keep records on

children, no identification badge existed, and all the girls were dressed alike. Although some parents traveled from hospital to hospital and city to city searching for their children, all of them refused to use the police helicopter or other rapid transportation, thus complicating the task of the police and the emergency medical teams, two other important stakeholders in the crisis. A physician from one of these trauma centers acknowledged that one of the most important challenges they faced was the crisis communication process.

20.4.2 Policies and Procedures

In many of the cases analyzed, some school policies and procedures were the subject of important debates after the shootings because they proved in some respects inappropriate for dealing with exceptional circumstances.

20.4.2.1   Hiring, Firing, and Promotion Policies

In the absence of specific rules and regulations regarding hiring procedures and necessary qualifications for people working with children, the Scottish authorities were unable in 1996 to order the closure of the gym clubs run by Hamilton (Dunblane Primary School 1996), in spite of numerous complaints lodged by parents and teachers about the fact that he was running his club alone, without any other personnel present when the children came in for activities.

In the same vein, at the time of the shooting in 1992, Concordia University's policy for firing a professor did not cater for those displaying threatening behavior. While administrators searched for a provision in the CUFA Agreement (Concordia University Faculty Association) that would allow them to fire Dr. Fabrikant, he entered the school in the middle of the day and shot four colleagues. Concordia has now modified the procedure for termination of employment for all permanent employees of the university, amending the article dealing with dismissal to include additional "valid reasons" for dismissal such as "fighting, fraud, theft, insubordination or incompetence." The university has also decentralized authority for dismissal; department heads now have the authority to dismiss an employee in consultation with the Vice-President and the Human Resources department.

As regards promotion procedures and criteria, and the rules and regulations guiding administrators, in the case of Concordia University the two independent external committees of inquiry made many criticisms, stating that in fact Dr. Fabrikant had been entitled to obtain tenure and the sabbatical leave he had asked for. Nevertheless, it seems that the ambiguity of provisions in the CUFA agreement at that time allowed some professors to abuse their administrative powers, thus preventing him from obtaining tenure. The administrators of the Engineering Department were fired, Concordia's Rector and Vice-Rector resigned, and the research funding bodies froze the research funds for the Engineering Department. Fabrikant is currently serving a life sentence in prison.

Concordia has changed all these policies, but other school shootings have occurred since in the United States for similar motives. In 2010, Amy Bishop, a professor at the University of Alabama who had been denied tenure, killed three colleagues and wounded three others (Van Wormer, 2010). In the same year, Clay Duke interrupted a meeting of the Bay District school board in Florida and attempted to shoot the members, who, he thought, were responsible for his wife's dismissal several months earlier. His wife was a teacher hired in 2009 who failed to obtain tenure at the end of her probationary period (*Daily Mail*, December 16, 2010). After the shootings, she explained that her husband was suffering from bipolar disorder, and that he was "under a lot of stress" because his unemployment benefits had come to an end that week.

The "trauma of tenure denial" (Van Wormer, 2010) and the dismissal of a tenured professor are not unique to modern society. In 1900, Stanford University denied tenure to a brilliant professor because of his political views, and in 1971 dismissed a disruptive tenured professor. After analyzing those two cases, Tierney (1983, p. 29) emphasizes that universities need more and more procedures, thus becoming bureaucratic institutions, and concludes that "The life of Stanford University—and no doubt other modern organizations—demands a symbolic understanding of its actions, the individuals within those actions, and the history from which it has come."

20.4.2.2   Research Ethics Policy and Procedures

As shown in the previous section, some of the school shootings occurred in a period of budget cuts. As the main source of additional funds, research funding bodies are important stakeholders of universities, and specific policies and control mechanisms should be established to improve cooperation between these two categories of institutions. In the absence of clear provisions regarding research ethics, which deal specifically with these issues, Concordia was faced with a delicate situation in 1992, when some of its members misused research funds. After the shootings, Concordia's board of governors adopted a new research ethics policy along with a new organizational structure establishing clear responsibilities. The new policy addresses issues related to (a) conflicts of interest, (b) intellectual misconduct in academic research, (c) financial misconduct and misuse of research funds, and (d) criteria for determining authorship. The Office of the Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies is responsible for enforcing this policy.

20.4.2.3   The Admissions Procedure

The admissions procedure in most US universities and colleges relies mainly on academic metrics such as GPA and standardized tests. Some universities also require recommendation letters from the schools that the candidates previously attended, but even then high school counselors are torn between having no right under federal privacy law to disclose any mental-health-related concerns they have about students

and trying to warn the university admission staff about the potential threat such students represent. Therefore, some high school student guidance counselors try subtly to warn about such cases in their recommendation letters so that university admission officials request an on-campus face-to-face interview with the applicant (*Higher Education News Weekly*, April 27, 2007, p. 108). In 2006, Virginia Tech did not require students to write a personal essay or to provide letters of recommendation, which were only optional.

When he was in seventh grade, Cho (the shooter who perpetrated the shootings at Virginia Tech) was referred to the educational screening committee within his school, who advised his parents to seek therapy for him. He then was assessed by the Center for Multicultural Human Services (CMHS) and was given the diagnosis of "selective mutism," a type of social anxiety disorder that prevents a person from properly communicating in organizational settings and public situations. Moreover, the person is unable to speak or make eye contact in certain specific social situations where speaking is expected (DSM-IV-TR, APA 2000). Over the next few years he periodically saw a psychologist and, on his parents' request, his medical records were sent to the school he attended at the time. Unfortunately, this information was not passed on to the university admission staff when Cho applied to Virginia Tech University. Virginia Tech now requires students to provide recommendation letters as part of their application, and to send them directly to the department to which they are applying.

Erfurt, where the Gutenberg Gymnasium school shooting occurred in 2002, is the capital of the State of Thuringia, one of the eastern states that joined the Federal Republic of Germany after reunification in 1990. On April 26, Robert Steinhäuser, a former student of Johann Gutenberg Gymnasium, who had been expelled 6 months prior to graduation, killed 16 people at his school before committing suicide. Thirteen of the victims were teachers, which represented about a third of the Gutenberg Gymnasium teaching staff at that time.

In the state of Thuringia the education system was rather rigid in 2002. At the end of Grade 4, students were offered the choice of enrolling at the *Regelschule*, in order to follow a vocational track and obtain the "Mittlere Reife" certificate, or the *Gymnasium*, which allows students who graduate and successfully pass the "*Abitur* examinations" to attend university. In fact, after the fourth grade of elementary school, based on the student's academic record and following consultation with his or her parents, a school committee makes a recommendation for each student, indicating the next stage in his or her educational path. In many German states students could switch from one path to another (vocational training versus university track), but this was not the case in Thuringia, where students who failed the *Abitur* examinations left school without any qualification or diploma, thus having less of a chance to find a job than those with a lower qualification from *Regelschule.* According to an official of the state Education Ministry, "in Thüringen there is a lot of tolerance for the parents' wishes; […] they often push their kids to go to Gymnasium even if they do not want to, thus causing them to fail later" (interview, translated from German).

Steinhäuser was first enrolled in a *Regelschule*, but then his parents decided to enroll him at Gutenberg Gymnasium. They said later that this was "a horrible mistake" (Brinkbäumer et al., 2002, p. 122). The account given by the school officials is

different. They emphasized that "it was not the fault of the educational system," but rather of his parents, because "Robert had problems in *Regelschule*, but still was forced by his parents to go to the Gymnasium" (interview, translated from German).

20.4.2.4 The Exclusion Procedure

In many of the 111 school shootings reviewed (Table 20.1), the perpetrator had previously been expelled from the school and was seeking revenge (Linghurst High School 1992; Oregon Thurston High School, Springfield 1998; R. Myers High School 1999; University of Arkansas 2000; University of Washington in Seattle, 2000; Virginia's Appalachian School of Law 2002; Gutenberg Gymnasium 2002; Geschwister-Scholl-Ganztagsrealschule 2006; Tasso da Silveira School, Brazil 2011).[3] In 2000, the University of Washington in Seattle announced that Dr. Jian Chen, a Chinese physician, would be expelled from the residency program of the Faculty of Medicine and that his contract would not be renewed. Like Xiang (Monash University 2002), he had difficulties with the English language and was not able to cope with the workload and the academic demands of the curriculum (*The Daily* (University of Washington Newspaper), July 5, 2000). As he was unable to enroll in another residency program in the United States, the only alternative for him was to return to China. He then killed his supervisor and committed suicide.

The tragic event at Gutenberg Gymnasium (Erfurt 2002) is similar to the incident at the University of Washington in 2000. While many circumstantial factors may have contributed to each of these events, both cases involve a psychological trauma induced or at least aggravated by an exclusion procedure perceived as unfair by the shooter. Steinhäuser wanted to become a software engineer, but during his years of study, he gradually realized that he was not able to perform according to the high academic standards imposed by the Johann Gutenberg Gymnasium. He feared that he would not be able to pass the *Abitur* examinations and obtain the required grades. Six months before graduation, he missed a geography class to avoid receiving a poor grade in a test, and provided the school with a forged medical certificate. After a 30-min hearing, the school administrators decided to expel him, but did not notify his parents about their decision. Like Dr. Jian Chen, Steinhäuser tried desperately to enroll in another college. According to school administrators who participated at his hearing and decided to expel him, "he tried on his own [to enroll in another gymnasium], but no school wanted to take him." Moreover, "he did not tell his parents, but tried to manage [this situation] independently," and thus "he became very isolated" (interviews, translated from the German).

---

[3] The terms *exclusion* and *expulsion* are used interchangeably in many countries. However, in some countries (e.g., Australia), *expulsion* denotes the suspension of a student for a period of time (many years or indefinitely) that is longer than that implied by an *exclusion* (up to 1 year).

The exclusion procedure was also the subject of debates in the case of Monash University, when the Student Association pointed to the pressure felt by the foreign students, the academic stress induced by the exclusion procedure, and the lack of necessary resources to assist these students. At Monash University, decisions concerning the exclusion of a student are made by the Academic Progress Committee. When the shooting occurred, the majority of students who had attended an Academic Progress Committee hearing were international students (Rees, 2002). The root cause of their problems appeared to be the difficulty they experienced becoming proficient in English.

In addition, a specific government policy concerning universities in Australia has a significant impact on students and especially on international students. Being in place since 1989, this policy has its roots in the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), a government program offering financial assistance to students enrolled in award courses in universities within the Commonwealth. HECS allows students to receive an interest-free student loan to pay their tuition fees. The loan amount, which is paid through HECS directly to universities, is tied to the Consumer Price Index, and students must repay the loan as soon as their income exceeds the minimum repayment threshold. If a student is excluded on account of academic failure, he or she then has to repay the loan amount immediately. For international students, the procedure is more complicated, because they have to contact the International Student Support Unit at Monash to discuss the implications that exclusion has for their visa. After the shooting, Rees (2002) argued that these circumstances further aggravated the social problems of the international students, arising from their integration in a new economic, cultural, and social environment.

After he arrived in Australia, Xiang faced many kinds of stress. First, he experienced post-traumatic stress. Before coming to Australia, his father was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer and Xiang took care of him for more than a year. After his father died, Xiang attempted to commit suicide. The second stress was the stress of immigration. He had come from a society where "collective" values are predominant and was forced to adapt to a highly individualistic society. While Australia has the second-highest score of any country on the Individualism Index, China's score is very low at 20. Third, when the shooting occurred, Xiang might have been facing "housing stress," as he had no major source of income, except that provided by the state. He shared a small and uncomfortable apartment with his mother, who had no source of income. In addition to these stresses, he was isolated by his peers. Several days prior to the shooting, he sent an email to Dr. Lee Gordon Brown to complain that some of his colleagues were talking about him "behind his back" (Thomas, 2005). Further, he was struggling with communication in English and, on the day of the shooting, was scheduled to give his oral presentation for his honors year. A failure would probably have affected his academic standing, and might have had major long-term social and financial implications. During the trial, it was shown that Xiang was suffering from "delusional paranoid disorder" that appears to have been undiagnosed and untreated. It is possible that this was the culmination of

the social and psychological pressures and that this, coupled with his symptoms of mental illness, in the absence of effective social and medical assistance, led to the terrible event in November, 2002.

Monash University modified their exclusion procedure only recently, but immediately after the crisis they improved social services, helping students to overcome the difficulties they encounter at school and in their private life—including academic difficulties, financial difficulties, and problems related to their abilities to communicate (Dumitriu et al., 2009). More recently, they also improved the policy dealing with "discrimination and sexual harassment." A new unit has been created, the Equity and Diversity Center, and students can now discuss these problems with a group of experienced advisers ("discrimination and harassment grievance advisers," DHGA) and conciliators ("discrimination and harassment grievance conciliators," DHGC).

The exclusion procedures that were in force at Gutenberg Gymnasium and Monash University in 2002 left the expelled students to fend for themselves; they had to cope with the situation and find another school. In the United States, schools must offer "an alternative educational opportunity" to an expelled student, unless the exclusion is "for carrying a dangerous weapon or selling or distributing illegal drugs on school grounds" (Lohman, 2002, p. 2).

20.4.3 Warning Signs of Extreme Violence (Red Flags)

Closer scrutiny by those around the perpetrators would have revealed important harbingers of events to come. In many cases teachers and school administrators, police, physicians, parents and other relatives, classmates and friends, and Internet providers failed to notice the red flags (Table 20.4).

Violent writings appear to be an important warning sign that was missed at Columbine School and insufficiently considered at Virginia Tech University. Some of Eric Harris's written assignments released by the Jefferson County police following the shootings at Columbine High School show that teachers had criticized written style or grammatical errors, but appear to have had no concern about their violent content. One of these papers (November 13, 1998, a year before the tragic event) dealt with the Nazi culture (the perpetrators were obsessed with this doctrine and the shooting occurred on Hitler's anniversary). Harris's obsession with Nazism is obvious in his writing, albeit masked by his condemnation of their actions; the teacher made comments such as: "maybe more definition on who they are," "maybe put this sentence next," and "maybe expand" (JCSO documents).

Retrospectively reading Harris' essays on violence chillingly suggests that his academic work, marked by his teachers, developed in parallel with the massacre he and Klebold were planning. He warned in his essay that "in the past few years there has been news of several shootings in high schools" (document JC-001-26352) and that schools could not detect students who introduced guns to school, concluding that "it is just as easy to bring a loaded handgun to school as it is to bring a calcula-

Table 20.4 Warning signs and other common issues

School	Suicide letter / intention	Written complaints (C) addressed to school administrators/ teachers/others or explicit threats (T)	Planning the shooting well in advance: diary (D); written notes (WN); "death list" (DL); web or expressed specific site (W); videotapes sent later (VT)	Friends or relatives accidentally discovered intentions (I) or expressed doubts about later perpetrator (D)	Sudden violent behavior, in school: mood swings (MS); violent writings (student papers) (VW); verbal violence (VV); cyber violence (CV)	Legal procurement of guns (applies for a gun permit or attends gun clubs (LP); Illegal procurement of guns (IP); Family gun (FG)	Medical records (MR) indicating history of mental illness—(ex ante and not ex post; Previous psychological assessment (PPA); Police records (PR)	Dress and hobbies: Goth culture; pro-Nazi culture; heavy metal music; violent videogames, etc. (more than the usual teenager)	Direct or indirect ties to: : Army/Navy/ Marine Corps/ other military organization
Columbine High	X		D; WN; DL; WI		VW	IP	PR; PPA	X	X
West Nickel Mines	X		WN			NA			
Virginia Tech	X		WN; VT	D	VW	LP	MR; PR	X	
Monash		C	DL	I		LP			
Islas Malvinas	X	C	WN	D		FG	PPA	X	X
Dunblane Primary				D	MS	LP	PR		X
Concordia		C &T		I; D	VV	LP			
Dawson	X		W		CV	LP		X	X
Johann Gutenberg					VV	LP			
Geschwister-Scholl	X		W; DL		CV	IP	PR	X	X

tor." Nevertheless, he suggested that while solutions are expensive, they could be efficient, especially installation of "metal detectors" in schools and "more police officers" to monitor schools. Ironically, after the shootings, these two solutions were adopted by many US schools.

Following the school shooting at Columbine High School, Jeffco Public Schools implemented new policies and procedures intended to detect warning signs and prevent crises related to school violence. In Jefferson County the Code of Student Conduct is now distributed to all students at the beginning of each school year and addresses all the main issues that emerged from the Columbine shooting explicitly, such as (a) grounds for suspension and exclusion (450 grounds for suspension or exclusion are explicitly formulated); (b) sharing and disseminating information from student records, including "disciplinary information"; (c) control over the written content of students' published papers; (d) student dress code; (e) secret societies/gang activity; (f) student use of the Internet.

Written complaints, letters of concerns, and explicit threats made to specific colleagues appear to be an important warning sign, but were missed by Dunblane Primary School (1996), Concordia University (1992), and Monash University.

At Dunblane (1996), Thomas Hamilton, an ex-member of the Boy Scouts Association, claimed that he was the victim of unfounded rumors spread by teachers at Dunblane Primary School, which led most parents to withdraw the children from his gym clubs (Lord Cullen 1999). He sent many letters of complaint to various organizations, to parents, to the Dunblane School Principal, to the gym teacher at Dunblane School, and even to the Queen of England (Dumitriu & Giroux, 2010). In his very last letter, sent to the Queen of England a day before the shootings, Hamilton stated that he was writing as a "last resort" and hoping for "a form of intervention" that would allow him to "regain his self-esteem within society" (Hamilton, letter to the Queen, March 12, 1996, Transcript of proceedings at the public inquiry into incident at Dunblane Primary School on 13th March, l996; January 15, 2001 (revised December 04, 2006)). On March 13, 1996, Thomas Hamilton entered the school and headed toward the school gymnasium, where about 30 first-grade pupils (primary one) were about to start their gym class. He first fired at the gym teacher, and, after missing her, fired 29 times, killing or wounding most of the children (Lord Cullen 1999).

In order to be able to detect warning signs and obtain regulatory power to act, in 2004, the Scottish government modified the legislation for gym clubs registered as private units, which organized summer camps and other such activities in Scotland.

After Concordia University denied Dr. Fabricant tenure, he sent letters of complaint to Concordia Board of Governors and Concordia Union, accusing his colleagues of academic misconduct and misuse of research funds (Arthurs et al., 1994). The internal inquiry ordered by Concordia Board of Governors found no problems within the Engineering Department, thus rejecting Fabrikant's allegations. Instead, it revealed Fabrikant's threatening behavior, which included death threats against colleagues.

In response, Dr. Fabrikant decided to go public with his complaints, and filed a lawsuit against Concordia administrators. Like Hamilton (Dunblane 1996), who sent letters to the parents of children who attended his gym clubs, Fabrikant sent

e-mail messages to the academic community asking for support, but his initiative was met with the attitude of "non-involvement" typical of the academic community when it comes to highly controversial matters. On August 24, 1992, he entered the university and opened fire, shooting four colleagues. Like Hamilton, he had no history of mental illness, and no criminal record.

According to one of our interviewees, when the shooting at Concordia occurred "all of us feared Fabrikant […]; he had made explicit threats to specific colleagues, we were notified about the fact that he asked for a gun license, but no one believed that such a tragedy could ever happen."

After the shooting event, Concordia put in place an internal reporting mechanism that allowed staff and students to report threatening behavior by colleagues. In 2010, this new procedure enabled Concordia to suspend a professor for threatening behavior. In his allegations of academic mobbing, he repeatedly made reference to Dr. Fabrikant.

20.4.4 Security Measures and Technology-Related Issues

The analysis of these ten school shootings revealed contradictory opinions about the efficiency and effectiveness of technology to prevent or manage such crises. Virginia Tech had a modern information and communication technologies (ICT) system, but this could neither prevent the shooting nor limit its consequences.

On April 16, 2007, Seung Hui Cho, a student of Korean descent, shot two people in a student dormitory (including one female student with whom he seemed to be obsessed). There were no witnesses and the university administrators thought that the murder was an isolated incident of domestic violence, which posed no threat to students. They concluded that the education process need not be disrupted and decided not to initiate the lockdown procedure by sending a communication system message (CMS), and not to notify the student community. Two hours later, they sent e-mail messages to campus staff, faculty, and students, but, by that time, Cho had entered the Norris Hall Building and sealed the three main entrance doors with chains from the inside. While the police tried to penetrate the building, Cho entered five classrooms in a row, shooting as he passed through each and killing a total of 32 people (students and teachers) and wounding 17.

Although a great deal of modern technology was installed on Virginia Tech campuses, the entrances to the school buildings were neither restricted in any way nor equipped with video surveillance cameras. Only staff offices and a few classrooms had door locks. Moreover, the locks on the classroom doors were not operable from the inside. If the classrooms had had adequate door locks, much of the carnage might have been prevented. Nevertheless, individuals whose intentions are nefarious find ingenious ways to overcome the most sophisticated of deterrents, so there is no "perfect" preparation strategy when choosing the technologies and equipment to install. For instance, Columbine High School did have lockable classroom doors, but the shooters did not attempt to enter the classrooms at all, choosing instead to perpetrate the massacre in the school library.

Finally, the analysis of these school shootings shows that the decision to adopt these technology-based prevention measures has a cultural component. While US culture appears more "addicted" to new technologies, European culture seems to be steeped in human values. In fact, many of our interviewees in Erfurt and Emsdetten made statements such as "the American model, with its many technology-based security measures, would be overstated in Germany" and that "the best security is to find a means of preventing children from doing this." Finally, in both North America and Europe some school administrators and parents said that they did not want "schools to become prisons or fortresses."

20.4.5 *Parent–School Relationship*

The data analysis showed that strong leadership and good management of the parent–school relationship during periods of "business as usual," especially in the case of the primary, middle, and high schools, could prevent some undesired outcomes that such crises can have.

In many countries that embrace the Anglo-Saxon economic and social model (such as the United States, Canada, and Australia), the dominant pattern of "student–parent–school" relationship is based on "independence" and "privacy." The values of this societal model are taught to children at school as early as their secondary school years, and then reinforced during the college education cycle. In many of these societies, including Canada, school administrators cease sharing information with parents as soon as the child reaches the age of 16, unless they have the student's written consent. All letters concerning academic results, exclusion, or other issues are sent directly to the student, who then decides whether or not to share the information with his or her parents. In the United States, under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act (FIPPA) colleges are not allowed to "discuss student progress and attendance" with students' parents without written permission.

In the case of the Virginia Tech massacre, Cho was expelled from one course because of his violent writings, and referred by the university's administrators to the Cook Counseling Center. However, in line with the societal norms in North America, the university did not inform his parents about these issues. When asked what they would have done if Virginia Tech had informed them of their son's problems, Cho's parents responded that they "would have taken him home and made him miss a semester" in order to find a solution to his problems (Virginia Tech, 2007).

Similarly, the shooting perpetrated by Robert Steinhäuser at Gutenberg Gymnasium in 2002 might not have occurred if the school administrators had communicated with his parents before deciding to expel him just months before graduation. In the months following the expulsion, Steinhäuser pretended to go to school each morning, but instead spent his time either in Internet cafés, or in trying unsuccessfully to enroll in other schools. On the day of the *Abitur* examinations, he left his parents' house, telling them he was on his way to sit the examination, but instead went to school and killed 16 people, before committing suicide. Thirteen of the victims were teachers (Hooper, 2002).

At Virginia Tech, the victims' families were not satisfied with the inquiry conducted by the Virginia Tech Review Panel in 2007. They claimed that the university, and especially Cook Counseling Center, had been negligent and had failed to provide Cho with the necessary medical attention. In 2009 they asked the state Governor Kaine to reopen the case (Urbina, 2009), claiming that Dr. M., the former director of the Cook Counseling Center, had concealed Cho's mental health records at his home. The case was reopened and the new report confirmed that the missing files were found in Dr. M's residence (TriData, 2009, p. 4).

A "witch hunt" by parents haunted the Islas Malvinas school for many years following the shooting there. Immediately after the event, the head of the school was dismissed. In addition, six teachers and school advisers, along with the school secretary, were fired. The teacher who was supposed to be in class at the time of the shootings, but was not, was charged with negligence. One interviewee said: "Between 2004 and 2006, control by the school's management vanished and the school's authority was practically in the hands of students and parents." During this period, three successive management teams resigned due to the hostile atmosphere among parents, students, and the school management.

At meetings organized by the school following the shootings, parents accused teachers and school management of negligence, and teacher C.R., of not being in class when his course was scheduled to begin. Indeed, the picture that emerges from the accounts of various psychologists who provided counseling to students immediately following the shootings is not positive. According to one of them:

> The adults [teachers and supervisors] said that they had been there and had done this and that, but when you listen to the boys, they were alone. […]. The teacher was not in class and had not arrived …it was said that the shots were heard so that children across the school came running, even entering classrooms to get teachers to come and help, but no one came. This was terrible. And the terrible thing is that when we convoked a school meeting [to share our findings], they did not assume their share of responsibility.

The psychologists went on to explain that, in the months that followed, they had to separate the children from their parents during the sessions, because they felt that the children's perceptions were becoming increasingly influenced by their parents, who were conducting a real crusade against the school. Finally, according to others, this "war" was the result of a process of transformation that affected Argentinian society in early 1990: "We do not listen to others. We do not respect others' opinions […]. The only way in which we express ourselves is by aggression, […] individualism, and an attitude of non-involvement" (interview with I.R.).

All the issues discussed above relate to the *prevention measures* that schools should adopt in order to reduce the risk of school violence.

With regard to the *preparation*, six of the ten schools had no crisis management plan at the time of the shootings. Virginia Tech had an "all-purpose" emergency plan, but it contained no specific provisions for shooting situations. In some other cases (Jefferson County School District, Columbine School, and Monash University), such a plan existed and defined responses for a wide range of incidents, including bomb threats and student and staff injury or death. Moreover, at Monash, this plan had been updated just before the school shootings occurred, and crisis exercises had

been conducted. In debriefing the crisis provoked by the shooting, Monash University concluded: "In the event of a crisis, having a Crisis Management Plan, even if it is not optimal, is better than not having one at all" (Dumitriu et al., 2009).

Data analysis revealed three deficiencies in the crisis management process adopted by these schools to cope with a school shooting situation. They relate to (a) the evacuation process, (b) the victim identification process, and (c) the intervention and communication process.

20.4.6 Crisis Management: The Evacuation Process

At the time of the shooting, many of these schools did not have detailed blueprints of all the school buildings and facilities readily available to the police. When such a crisis occurs, the first priority for police is an action plan to enter the school, evacuate students and staff, and stop the attack. As the interviews and other data revealed, one of the main challenges police faced in five of the ten cases (Dunblane Primary School, Dawson College, Columbine High, Monash University, and Gutenberg Gymnasium) consisted in navigating rapidly and effectively through the school, as in all these cases the buildings were large and they had no plan of the building. At Dawson College, the police asked for assistance from a school security officer who helped them to find their way around the school.

At Gutenberg Gymnasium, police asked students who had fled the school to sketch plans of the building for them (Jacob & Dumitriu, 2010). Their task of evacuating students was complicated by the fact that the doors of some classrooms were not numbered and repairs under way inside the building restricted access to some rooms.

In the Columbine case, the shootings started at 11:19 a.m. While the first SWAT team entered the building via the southeast doors and began evacuating the trapped students, teachers, and staff at 12:05, the second SWAT team spent about 40 min searching the west area of the school, where the library was located (Dumitriu & Donia, 2009b). Unable to find the library in the 250,000 square feet of the two-level building, at 12:39 they finally requested a floor plan of the school. Although the shooting had already ended and nothing further could be done to stop the attack, a rapid intervention would have helped to save many wounded students who remained trapped in the school for many hours. The first wounded student from inside the school was transported to the hospital at 1:09 p.m. while the last was brought out at 3:40 p.m. (Dumitriu & Donia, 2009b).

20.4.7 Crisis Management: The Victim Identification Process

In order to limit the psychological consequences of the crisis, school administrators need to quickly identify the victims in cooperation with the police. Public

schools keep records and files containing the contact details of students and their parents, along with each student's photo. They are usually equipped with means to contact students' parents to request any additional information needed to identify their children. Even so, the victim identification process appears to be one important challenge of the crisis management process.

These ten cases under study reveal some drawbacks in the process. In some cases, the files containing personal student data did not exist (Nickel Mines Amish School), were not up-to-date (Dunblane Primary School), or were not readily available (Columbine High School).

20.4.8   The Crisis Communication Process

20.4.8.1   Communication with Students and Parents

In none of the ten cases analyzed did the crisis management plan specify a meeting place for students and relatives to gather, where school management could disseminate accurate information (Erikson, 2001, p. 128).

At Columbine High School (1999), students and staff who escaped without their personal belongings gathered either in the Columbine Public Library or in nearby restaurants, and desperately attempted to communicate with their families (Austin, 2003). They had no access to their cars, because the police sealed off the school and its parking lots; telecommunications networks were overloaded, making phone conversations difficult in the area. No specific meeting point had been established in advance, so families received contradictory information and accordingly gathered in two different places, Leadwood Elementary School and the Columbine Public Library. The library closed at 6:00 p.m. and the students' relatives, already under great stress, were transferred to Leadwood Elementary School, where, in an immense crowd of people, escaped students and their families were trying to find one another.

Seven years later, the lesson still had not been learned. After the shooting at Dawson College (2006), the Student Association complained that students had been left by themselves; with a completely overloaded cellphone network and their bags and clothing inside the school, there was no opportunity for them to contact their families or to go home. At the time of the shooting, Dawson College had no crisis management plan, no established crisis management team, and no designated crisis management center, and teachers and students interviewed on the day of the event insisted that they had never heard of such notions or received any instructions on how to act in such a situation. However, the Student Association at Concordia University, which has built a strong crisis culture since the shooting there, set up an information and counseling center for Dawson students.

20.4.8.2   Crisis Communication and Media Relations

Data analysis revealed that when such a crisis occurs, rumors circulate very quickly and are exacerbated when those concerned with the crisis management process are slow to make official statements to the media or when they make contradictory statements. In each of the ten school shooting situations, rumors and/or confusion emerged in regard to the number of shooters (Columbine, Dawson, Gutenberg Gymnasium), their motivations (Monash University, Virginia Tech), the number of victims (Columbine, Gutenberg Gymnasium), their identities, and the hospitals to which they were transported (Nickel Mines Amish school). At Virginia Tech, it was believed that the first wave of attacks was related to domestic violence, leading university management not to order a lockdown. Similarly, at Monash University officials thought that they were dealing with a terrorist act, because just before the shooting a terrorist attack in Bali had killed more than 100, including 80 Australians. Later, the media reported that there were several shooters (The Sydney Morning Herald 2002). The first official statement at Monash mentioned two dead and eight wounded, but the number of wounded was revised downward to five later that day (Dumitriu et al., 2009). Moreover, it would seem that the university did not appoint a specific spokesperson to disseminate information to the media, to students, and to other stakeholders, and that, consequently, it "spoke with many voices." Late in the afternoon Monash addressed the students with an official statement released by their vice president. Meanwhile, the director of international programs told the media that "the incident is quite limited," even though it was known at the time that two students had already died and several other students and professors had been injured.

20.4.8.3   Communication with Other Stakeholders

In many cases there was little interaction and cooperation among the various spokespersons representing the three main stakeholders (school, police, and emergency medical teams) and consequently many contradictory statements were made.

Most of the ten schools had no readily available list of all important stakeholders and their coordinates. Two categories of stakeholders were identified: (a) internal stakeholders such as teachers and school administrators, students, employees, official guests, and service providers (e.g., the information and communication center, cafeteria, etc.), and (b) external stakeholders such as the police, parents, EMT, social services, psychologists, the telephone company, the Internet service provider, the media, the web administrator, the school's public and private funding bodies, including those providing research funds; the insurance companies, the government, and various NGOs.

In some other cases (e.g., Virginia Tech and Monash University), there was such a list, but it was out of date and/or incomplete. For instance, after the shooting, Monash University considered including in its list the nearest medical services and the distance and time involved in moving an injured person to each (Dumitriu et al.

2009). The emergency medical teams (EMT) are an important stakeholder in such a crisis, and the decisions they make during the triage process have a crucial impact. In some cases, EMTs did not necessarily make the best decisions when selecting trauma centers to which to transport the wounded (Dumitriu, 2009). After the shootings at the Amish school (Nickel Mines 2006), some girls were transported by vehicle to the nearest trauma center, although it could not provide pediatric services and was not equipped for neurosurgery. Consequently, the Amish girls were flown by helicopter from this trauma center either to an out-of-county trauma center or to Philadelphia Children's Hospital.

20.5   Conclusions

This contribution examines the first stage of the school shooting crisis management process (i.e., prevention and preparation), presents and explains the root causes and dynamic pressures that can increase the vulnerability of schools to hazards related to acts of extreme violence, as well as the main deficiencies in crisis preparedness for dealing with such hazards, and suggests a comprehensive set of measures to help schools to prevent such a crisis from occurring, or to be prepared to deal with it.

Ten school shooting incidents were selected as a sample of cases to analyze. An explanatory research strategy was adopted to analyze the internal environment of each of these schools prior to the crisis, the crisis management approach adopted by the school administrators to deal with the crisis, and the lessons learned following the crisis.

- Four of the ten schools had adopted an aggressive growth strategy prior to the shootings. The findings of this study suggest that schools that adopt a rapid growth strategy must strike a balance between economic and market-related goals, and socially related goals. They also must take the necessary steps to protect their original organizational culture, by preventing the business-driven values from distracting from their core mission. These values could eventually generate "social disorganization," which is defined by Faris (1955, p. 81) as factors that contribute to "the weakening or destruction of the relationships that hold together a social organization." If one accepts that campuses are communities and, to a certain extent, "small cities." these growth-related pressure points can also be explained from the perspective of social disorganization theory, according to which rapidly evolving cities are more exposed to the risk of social disorganization (1955). Moreover, social disorganization may lead to cultural disorganization "provoked by conflicts among values, norms and beliefs within a widely shared, dominant culture" (Cullen, Wright, & Blevins, 2009, p. 61).
- Five of the school shooting situations analyzed in this study occurred in high-performance-oriented schools. These findings do not, however, suggest that universities should become less competitive in order to prevent such a crisis. In fact, universities that have a long and consistent tradition of high performance

and adequate mechanisms to select students and staff according to their own high standards are less exposed to risks induced by this pressure point, due to their high homogeneity in terms of organizational culture, structure, and growth trend.[4]

These risks occur mainly when universities with a less homogenous culture and less consistent growth trend initiate short-term growth strategies with very ambitious goals, without putting in place the necessary processes to mitigate the new risks that could emerge. Recently, many academic institutions (e.g., Concordia) have put in place the mechanisms to assist students and professors who have difficulties in dealing with the academic stress induced by the pressure to perform. These initiatives are in line with the findings of many research studies that show that "the overall stress level of professors is now second only to the recently unemployed, when compared to other professions" (Korotkov et al., 2008, p. 1).

- Five of the ten schools had an organizational culture that, through its dominant values (favoritism, individualism, pressure to perform, rigidity and self-sufficiency, tolerance of violence, and lack of ethics-related values) created important gaps between member groups or between members and the "external world," or placed enormous pressure on members—teachers and students—to perform better.

School administrators should align culture and organizational design around core values aimed at creating not only a fair, ethical, safe, and competitive environment, but also an "inclusive" one to address potential social tensions. These core values may be related to the "school connectedness" that Blum (2005, p. 1) defines as "the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals." Blum and Libbey (2004) and Blum (2005) show that there is a strong negative correlation between school connectedness and violent and deviant behavior. They also emphasize that school connectedness values are built and enforced only when academic rigor and high expectations are associated with "support for learning, positive adult–student relationships, and physical and emotional safety" (2005, p. 2). Moreover, school districts, education ministries, and other policymakers must understand that providing schools with various frameworks aimed at assisting them to design a crisis management plan is worth nothing unless these frameworks are "culturally tailored" to reflect each school and community-specific environment.

- Another common characteristic of these schools consisted in flaws in four specific policies and two procedures that proved in some respects to be inappropriate for dealing with exceptional circumstances: hiring and firing policies; promotion policy; research ethics policy; admissions procedure; exclusion procedure. These flaws might have contributed to triggering or aggravating the crises that these schools later faced. These findings support those of Grunseit et al. (2005,

---

[4] The term "homogenous" is not meant to denote homogenous societies and cultures, but instead refers to universities that, through formal and informal rules, rally their staff and student population around a common vision and a set of shared values such as competition and performance-related values.

p. 5), who show that student perceptions of "the fairness of school rules and their clarity" are strongly linked to the level of student misconduct.

- School administrators should carefully scrutinize these policies and procedures from several perspectives, including those of hazards related to acts of extreme violence.
- Closer scrutiny by those around the perpetrators would have revealed important harbingers of events to come. In all ten cases, teachers and school administrators, police, physicians, parents and other relatives, classmates and friends, and Internet providers failed to notice red flags. Seven categories of warning signs have been identified (Table 20.4).

Educational institutions should design explicit rules and regulations to deal with disruptive and violent behavior, and properly communicate them to students, teachers, and parents. They should implement a reporting mechanism allowing parents, students, and school staff to anonymously report possible threats. Also, each school should establish a list of factors that might constitute warnings of a potential crisis and maintain accurate records of all reported threats and actions taken by the administrators to cope with these threats. Third, they should create specific units with qualified personnel to address issues related to discrimination, harassment, depression, bullying, and academic mobbing.

- In many of the cases analyzed, social tensions between the school and the parents arose after the shootings. Strong leadership and good management of the parent–school relationship during the periods of "business as usual," especially in the case of primary, middle, and high schools, could prevent some undesired outcomes of such crises. School administrators should try to strengthen the bonds with students' parents, involve them in extra-curricular activities, and encourage them to cooperate with the school and to report possible threats.
- The study revealed contradictory opinions of the efficiency and effectiveness of technology designed to prevent or manage such crises. The decision to adopt technology-based prevention measures has a cultural component. While US culture appears to be more "addicted" to security technologies, European culture seems to be steeped in human values. Notifying students through ICT means and using ICT platforms for declaring a lockdown on campus as soon as such an incident occurs are two important measures to include in the crisis management plan.
- In order to speed the evacuation process, school administrators must prepare in advance the detailed plans of all school buildings and facilities, which should be made available to the police and other stakeholders for use in the event of a school shooting. Further, using the school access plan, police test their ability to navigate the school by cooperating with the school administration in organizing at least one crisis exercise each year. Also, the school staff and student population should be taught how to act in the event of a school shooting.
- In order to speed the intervention and communication process, school administrators should consider naming a meeting place in advance where students and relatives could reunite immediately after such an event, and where school district personnel could disseminate accurate information.

- In order to limit the psychological consequences of a school shooting, schools must collaborate with the police to quickly identify the victims. Accordingly, school boards should formulate in advance specific policies with regard to students' personal information and assign specific responsibilities for maintaining and safeguarding the records, updating them regularly, controlling access, and providing copies should such a crisis occur.
- School administrators should design a crisis communication plan, as part of the crisis management plan, helping them to promptly and effectively communicate with their stakeholders. As part of this plan, they should prepare a list of all important stakeholders and their coordinates. The study identified many categories of stakeholders, including trauma centers and hospitals. As part of their list of stakeholders, it would be helpful for schools to identify the nearest trauma centers and hospitals along with their coordinates and capabilities (Trauma I/II/III) and provide the EMT with this list should such a crisis occur.
- The analysis revealed that each of the countries where these ten school shootings occurred has laws that strictly regulate the confidentiality of personal information. This prevents, or at least limits, the disclosure of such sensitive information as a person's medical, academic, and criminal records. Also, these countries share two common characteristics in terms of national culture, namely high "individualism" and low "power distance" (as defined by Hofstede). In three of the ten cases analyzed, the shooter was an immigrant from a country that had a national culture characterized by the opposite characteristics—high "collectivism" and high "power distance."
- The study also revealed some common aspects shared by shooters. Eight of the eleven shooters appeared to have had normal relationships with their families. Each of the three adult shooters (Dunblane Primary School, Concordia University, and Nickel Mines Amish School) was described as hard-working and passionate about his work. In seven of the ten cases, the shooter felt frustrated, isolated by his peers, or persecuted by his teachers or by the school administrators. The feeling of persecution seems to be linked to a specific feature of the organizational culture of the school involved in the shootings, or to a decision made by the school administrators in a matter that concerned him. In each of these seven cases, the shooter's motive appears to have been "getting revenge" on fellow students or on the school itself, which was perceived by the perpetrator to be an institution represented by either its "institutional power" (teachers, school administrators, rules and regulations) or its values and symbols.
- Finally, all the studied shootings were carefully planned in advance and in eight of the ten cases the shooter had specific targets: individuals (students and/or teachers), a specific category (social and/or ethnic groups), or the school as an institution or as a symbol. The remaining two school shootings (Dawson College and Geschwister-Scholl) were planned mainly as Columbine copy-cat shootings. Thus, most school shooters do not appear to be "equal opportunity shooters." Instead, it appears that school shootings cause "war casualties" and that some people, who are not initially targeted, die just because they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

References

Adams, L., & Russakoff, D. (1999, June 12). Dissecting Columbine's cult of the athlete. *Washington Post*, p. A1.

Akiba, M., LeTendre, G. K., Baker, D. P., & Goesling, B. (2002). Student victimization: National and school system effects on school violence in 37 nations. *American Educational Research Journal, 39*(4), 829–853.

American National Standards Institute (ANSI). (2010). *Standard for natural and man-made hazards to higher education institutions*. Washington, DC: AMSE-ITI.

American Psychiatric Association, (July,2000). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR). Washington DC, American Psychiatric Association, 2000.

Arthurs, H. W., Blais, R., & Thomson, J. (1994, April). *Integrity in scholarship: A report to Concordia University*. Independent committee of Inquiry.

Austin, S. J. (2003). *Colorado School Counselor Association: Lessons learned from the shootings at Columbine High School*. Paper presented at Risk Institute Symposium, The Human Side of School Crises.

Baty, P. (2002, 19 July). Plagiarism puts Monash V-C out of job. *Times Higher Education*. Suppl. p. 1.

Berry, J. (2003, September 12). Student believed Monash killings were "his destiny." *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/09/11/1063268520181.html.

Blum, R. W. (2005). *School connectedness: Improving the lives of students (research Grant report)*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Blum, R. W., & Libbey, H. P. (2004). School connectedness: Strengthening health and education outcomes for teenagers. *Journal of School Health, 74*, 229–299.

Brinkbäumer, K., Cziesche, D., Hoppe, R., Kurz, F., Meyer, C., Repke, I., et al. (2002). Das Spiel seines Lebens. *Der Spiegel, 19/2002*, p. 121.

CNN. (1999, April 20). As many as 25 dead in Colorado school attack. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/US/9904/20/school.shooting.08.

Cowan, J. S. (1994). *Lessons from the Fabrikant file: A report to the board of governors of Concordia University*. Concordia University Archives.

Cullen, F., Wright, J., & Blevins, K. (2009). *Taking stock: The status of criminological theory*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Daily Mail. (2010, December 16). "He was a gentle giant … He didn't want anyone to get hurt": Wife defends the Florida school gunman. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1339067/Florida-school-board-shooting-Clay-Dukes-wife-Rebecca-says-hes-gentle-giant.html.

Dumitriu, C. (2009). *Crisis management: The case of school shootings: The West Nickel Mines (Amish) School Case*. Library and Archives Canada. Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (Quebec Library and Archives). ISBN 978-2-9810956-0-2.

Dumitriu C., & Donia M. (2009a). *Crisis management: The case of school shootings: Case study: "Islas Malvinas" Middle School*. National Library and Archives Canada. Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (Quebec Library and Archives). ISBN 987-2-9810956-3-3.

Dumitriu C., & Donia, M. (2009b). *Crisis management: The case of school shootings: The Columbine High School Case*. National Library and Archives Canada. Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (Quebec Library and Archives). ISBN 978-2-9810956-1-9.

Dumitriu, C., & Giroux, C. (2010). *Crisis management: The case of school shootings: Dunblane Primary School*. [Working Paper]. ESG UQAM.

Dumitriu, C., Slee, P. T., & Giroux, C. (2009). *Crisis management: The case of school shootings: Case study: Monash University*. National Library and Archives Canada. Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (Quebec Library and Archives). ISBN 978-2-9810956-2-6.

Erikson, W. H. (Chair). (2001, May). *The report of Governer Bill Owens*. Columbine Review Commission.

Fagan, K., Van Derbeken, J., & Wallace, B. (1999). *Pair rehearsed killing spree: Police find video, yearbook with marked victims*. San Francisco: San Francisco Chronicle.

Faris, R. E. (1955). *Social disorganization* (2nd ed.). New York: Ronald.

Government of Australia (2003). Deptartment of Education, Employment and Workforce relations. Archives. Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Australian Higher Education, 1998-2002. Monash. Retrieved from http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/pubs/quality/monash.htm (9 December, 2008).

Grunseit, A. C., Weatherburn, D., & Donnelly N. (2005). *School violence and its antecedents: Interviews with high school students*. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. Retrieved from: http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/r56.pdf/$file/r56.pdf.

Haddow, G. D., & Bullock, J. A. (2004). *Introduction to emergency management*. Amsterdam: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Hendrickson, M., & Harvey, S. J., Jr. (2005). The ethics of constrained choice: How the industrialization of agriculture impacts farming and farmer behaviour. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics, 18*(3), 269–291.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G., and Hofstede, G. J. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (rev. & exp. 2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Holtz, R. (1999, April 27). Shootings fuel debate over "jock elitism" at Columbine. *Rocky Mountain News*. Retrieved from: http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/1999/apr/27/shootings-fuel-debate-over-jock-elitism-columbine/.

Hooper J. (2002, April 29). Killer's secret behind revenge. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/apr/29/schools.education.

Illinois Board of Higher Education. (2007, April 27). *Higher Education News Weekly*. Retrieved from: http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/NewsDigest/NewsWeekly/042707.pdf.

Jacob C., & Dumitriu, C. (2010). *Crisis management: The case of school shootings: The Gutenberg Gymnasium*. [Working Paper]. ESG UQAM, 2010.

Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JSCO). (n.d.). *Columbine Documents*, JC-001-25923 through JC-001-26859, 946p.

Korotkov, D., Fraser, I., Houlihan, M., Fenwick, K., McDonald, K., & Fish, T. (2008). *The balancing act: The impact of university professors' juggling research, teaching and service* (Conference paper). Retrieved from http://aabss.org/Perspectives2008/AABSS2008Article12TheBalancingAct.pdf.

Lagadec, P. (2003). La recherche confrontée à la question des crises: Pour des ruptures créatrices. In C. Gilbert (Ed.), *Risques collectifs et situations de crise: Apports de la recherche en sciences humaines et sociales* (pp. 297–316). Paris: Harmattan.

Lawrence, R. (2007). *School crime and juvenile justice* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lohman, J. (2002). *School expulsion procedure*. OLR Research Report. Retrieved from http://www.cga.ct.gov/2002/olrdata/ed/rpt/2002-r-0849.htm.

Lord Cullen. (1999). *The public inquiry into the shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996*. District Courts of Scotland Archives; The Scottish Office Archives, Part II, The Scottish Office 1886–1999.

Memoli, M. (2002, October 29). LC students safe after Australia university shooting. *The Greyhound, Loyola Student Association Journal*.

Mitroff, I. I., Pauchant, T. C., & Shrivastava, P. (1988). Conceptual and empirical issues in the development of a general theory of crisis management. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 33*, 83–107.

New York Times. (1997, July 17). Man gets 3 life terms for killing 3 professors. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/19/us/man-gets-3-life-terms-for-killing-3-professors.html.

Noel, A. (1992, August 26). Sécurité déficiente, affirment étudiants et employés de l'université. *La Presse* (Montréal), p. A3.

Pearson, C. M., & Clair, J. A. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *The Academy of Management Review, 23*(1), 59–6.

Perry, T. (1996, August 20). Triple-slaying suspect enters not guilty plea: Courts: Prosecutor says death penalty will be sought in shooting of three professors at San Diego State University. *Los Angeles Times.*

Potter, N., Schoetz, D., Esposito, R., Thomas, P., & the staff of ABC News (2007, April 17). Killer's note. *ABC News.*

Rees, M. (2002, October 29). Two students killed in Australian university. *World Socialist.* Retrieved from http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/oct2002/mon-o29.shtml.

Robers, S., Zhang, J., Truman, J., & Snyder, T. (2010). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2010 NCES report.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Roux-Dufort, C. (2005). Comment en est-on arrivé là ? Du terrain de crise à la catastrophe. *Le magazine de la communication de crise, 1,* 1–18.

Sharkey, D. J., Furlong, M. J., & Yetter, J. (2006). Overview of measurement issues in school violence and school safety research. In S. Jimerson, A. Nickerson, A. Mauer, & M. Furlon (Eds.), *Handbook of school violence and school safety: From research to practice* (pp. 121–134). New York & Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Simons, R. (1999). *How risky is your company?* (pp. 99–111). May: Harvard Business Review.

The Daily of the University of Washington. (2000, July 5). Shooting tragedy rocks UWMC. Retrieved from http://dailyuw.com/news/2000/jul/05/shooting-tragedy-rocks-uwmc/.

The Sydney Morning Herald (October 21, 2002). Two shot dead, five wounded at Monash Uni. Retrieved from http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/10/21/1034561430158.html.

Thomas, S. (2005). Classroom Shooting—Australia Monash University *YouTube.* Retrieved from http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=mnHw3_p9_Xk&feature=related.

Tierney, W. G. (1983). The tenure drum: An investigation of ritual violence in the modern university. *The Annual Meeting of the Ethnography in Education Forum* (Philadelphia). Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED230157.pdf.

TriData Division (2009, November). Mass shootings at Virginia Tech: Addendum to the report of the review panel. Retrieved from http://www.governor.virginia.gov/tempcontent/techPanelReport-docs/VT_Addendum_12-2-2009.pdf.

UK Gov. Archives. (2006, December 4). Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act, 1921. Transcript of proceedings at the public inquiry into incident at Dunblane Primary School on 13th March, l996. January 15, 2001 (revised December 04, 2006).

Urbina, I. (2009, July 29). New inquiry is sought in Virginia Tech Massacre. *New York Times,* p. A14.

Van Parijs, P. (2009). European higher education under the spell of university rankings. *Ethical Perspectives, 16*(2), 189–206.

Van Wormer, K. (2010, February 16). Crimes of violence: Analysis of high-profile crimes of violence of psychological significance: Amy Bishop and the trauma of tenure denial. *Psychology Today* (online). Retrieved from http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/crimes-violence/201002/amy-bishop-and-the-trauma-tenure-denial.

Vanguard Institute. (2009). *Organizational ethics and counterproductivity risks during an economic downturn: Causes and mitigation.* Human Capital Research Report.

Virginia Tech. (2007, August). *Report of inquiry: Mass shootings at Virginia Tech, April 16, 2007.* Report of the Review Panel Presented to Governor Kaine, Commonwealth of Virginia.

Waterloo Gazette. (1994, July 27, p. 1). Concordia audit finds funds misused.

Weinhold, K. (2002). Bullying and school violence. The tips of the iceberg. *Empathic Parenting, 25*(1), 3–15.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Chapter 21
Democratic Education and Promotion of Social Skills in Schools and Classrooms as Primary Prevention: An Overview of the Discourse in Germany

Carsten Rohlfs and Marius Harring

The school shootings in Erfurt, Emsdetten, Winnenden, and Ansbach in Germany are unmistakable proof that this violent phenomenon is by no means confined to schools abroad—or specifically, as media reports often claim, to those in the United States—but that it affects German schools, too. This development touched off controversies in Germany, with unprecedentedly vehement calls for improving safety at schools. The discussions focused primarily on secondary and tertiary preventive measures, such as weapons checks at schools and the prohibition of first-person shooter games, presupposing a direct influence of such games on school shootings and suggesting the existence of cause-and-effect relationships between the two. What was not addressed was the fact that while this approach might help to combat the symptoms, it would be unable to get at the cause of the phenomenon. If, however, the objective is to achieve far-reaching changes, what is necessary is an approach on the primary preventive level that takes a holistic view of the lifeworlds of the young generation. The living conditions of young people in Germany have changed in recent decades at an unprecedented rate and to a thus far unknown degree, causing changes that present adolescents themselves, but also the institution of school, with many new challenges, opportunities, and risks. The transformation of the family; ongoing mediatization; a change in educational culture associated with significantly expanded freedoms and increasing individualism and independence in combination with prolonged financial dependence on parental income, and thus a lack of independence in some respects; increased stress through social discrimination; a change in living environment, the conversion of leisure time into

C. Rohlfs (✉)
Institute for Educational Science, University of Education Heidelberg,
Heidelberg, Germany
e-mail: Rohlfs@ph-heidelberg.de

M. Harring
Institute for Educational Science, Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz,
Mainz, Germany
e-mail: harring@uni-mainz.de

something which resembles school and education; and the experience of different kinds of heterogeneity are just some highlights to partially and selectively describe the lives of young people today (Hurrelmann, 2008). Young people grow up in the most diverse worlds and bring their experiences, positive and negative (varied in any case), from there to school life. Thus the school, because of its strong impact as a social environment, becomes a focal point of students' lives and a powerful agent of socialization. This makes schools a significant object of study not only as a crime scene, but also as a facilitating or deterrent factor.

In the course of individualization tendencies and the related challenging of pre-determined values and religious and political orientations, every young person today has the chance to go their own way early on, and to develop a highly individual lifestyle (Beck, 1986). But at the same time, demands on personal skills for shaping lifestyle and safeguarding identity are also increasing. This is where there are already development risks for many young people (Rohlfs & Palentien, 2006). Longitudinal studies on political socialization (Heitmeyer, 2002–2010) show that in situations of uncertainty young people may be inclined to develop simplified and extreme values and orientations. The attitudes which arise from this have their origin in the feeling that control over one's own values could become lost. This is all the more so when isolation looms, there is uncertainty about achieving desired educational and career goals, and helplessness about shaping one's own future. Demoralization, depression, and deprivation are the consequences of the subjective perception of not being able to shape or influence one's own living conditions. When, in addition, young people in such a situation lack sufficiently developed social, emotional, and communication skills to assess and process these psychological and social stresses (Rohlfs, Harring, & Palentien, 2008), they may resort to countermeasures which, in their final and extreme form, may ultimately be expressed as violence against persons in their social surroundings. The phenomenon of the school shooting with which we are here concerned is one of the forms such violence can take. The subjectively perceived hopelessness described here is also reflected in the self-portrayals of many perpetrators (Böckler & Seeger, 2010; Larkin, 2007; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010). At the same time, empirical studies often character-ize school shooters as introverted loners with deficient social skills. These deficits can be attributed to problems in the family, the peer group, and the school. Unlike the family and the peer group, however, the school is a professional, pedagogical institution and therefore has the duty of offering adolescents a space that fosters their psycho-social development (for an overview of perpetrators' life situations, see Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2011).

Based on the international debate about prevention of and intervention in school shootings (for which see Bondü et al. in this volume, chapter 15), the concept out-lined in the present article focuses on schools at the primary preventive level and thus diverges from the frequently discussed threat assessment procedure (see Böckler et al., 2011). We will pursue the following line of argumentation:

At a primary prevention level schools need to take on responsibility, in addition to the imparting of specialist knowledge, for developing transferable skills, in par-ticular soft skills (Rohlfs et al., 2008). Developing a favorable social climate in

teaching groups and at school in the context of a democratic teaching concept is both a central prerequisite for successful teaching and also of great importance for the personal development of each individual pupil, and is also the primary requirement for understanding the causes of school shootings in schools (Böckler et al., 2011). Following the disintegration approach (Heitmeyer & Anhut, 2008) the causes are to be found primarily in a lack of recognition due to insufficient participation. In this regard, the school is of special (negative) significance (Fox & Harding, 2005) and concrete action is required at school level. The aim of a democratic society must be to allow children and young people to participate directly in all major decisions from an early stage. If they experience their direct social surroundings as an environment where their voice counts and their opinion is heard, then a participatory culture develops as a prerequisite for a democratic society. The following contribution starts by examining the specific relevance of democratic education, and then presents selected concepts from this specific field of pedagogic work that can and must be understood as a preventive action, also in relation to school shootings. However—and this is the flipside of the coin—such measures can only minimize the risk of potential school shootings, but not control them (Böckler et al., 2011, p. 261).

21.1 Competence Discourse

Competences are highly valued in the German education system, which stresses output control and educational standards. The development and measurement of competences is a matter of controversy where two different discourses can be identified. One focuses on measurable and comparable specialist skills, or hard skills, and has gained remarkably in importance, particularly since the widely publicized results of the PISA studies, which were disappointing for Germany (Baumert et al., 2001)[1]; transferable skills appear here, if at all, as side categories—and in the associated research as by-products from studies in the school context with performance-related questions (Harazd & Schürer, 2006, p. 208). Meanwhile, the other discourse concentrates much more on soft and transferable skills, in particular on the demands of the labor and education market on school-leavers and graduates: teamwork, ability to compromise, cooperation, flexibility, emotional resilience (intercultural), communication skills, to name just a few of the abilities and skills cited as crucial in a changing world of work. There are currently many deficits in the media spotlight, especially concerning trainees, such as lack of conscientiousness and willingness to take on responsibility, non-existent communication skills, punctuality, lack of motivation, inadequate teamwork, etc. But here, the soft skills discourse

---

[1] The PISA studies are international school performance studies conducted every three years in the OECD countries to measure the general and vocational skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in different education systems.

still seems to be a discussion of secondary competences and subordinate to the discourse on specialist competences. In a constantly changing society in which even specialist skills and general knowledge are subject to constant change and "soft skills" seem to be far more constant (Franke, 2008), this seems, however, to be a risky prioritization (Rohlfs, 2008).

This applies in particular to discussions, both in the public sphere and in the specialist literature, in the aftermath of school shootings in Germany and in the course of media coverage of comparable incidents in the United States. Thus, while current studies (e.g. Hoffmann, Roshdi, & Robertz, 2009) of the profiles of perpetrators who committed targeted acts of grave violence (and, in particular, rampages) at schools indicate that these almost invariably male adolescents generally either went through at least temporary phases of self-segregation and scant contact to others in their age group or were ostracized by peers (e.g. through bullying; see, for example, Larkin, 2009 and in the present volume, chapter 7), so that their violent acts typically arose as a result of feelings of inferiority (Hoffmann et al., 2009). Nevertheless, discussion of preventive measures invariably fails to pay explicit attention to soft skills. Instead, the conclusions that are drawn from the findings on school rampages both in Germany and on the international level focus on approaches to special prevention. Most of the suggestions involve recognizing certain warning signs in students' behavior and communication in the course of a crisis (2009, p. 203). In other words, possibilities for prevention are identified only where (behavioral) anomalies and deficits in overall social behavior are already manifest and require an intervention. The concept presented here begins one step earlier, postulating fundamental improvements in soft skills as the foundation of all rampage prevention at schools—even where no immediate potential danger is yet recognizable.

Besides the strong appeal of the sobering results of German schools in international comparative studies for research and public debate, one reason for these different attributions of importance may lie in the formlessness of the much discussed but often vague "soft skills talks" (Reichenbach, 2008). So, for a more sophisticated approach to the broad field of transferable skills, Rohlfs et al. (2008) distinguish between social, emotional, and communication skills. The concept of social competence refers—and this itself seems vague enough—to a socially and individually desired positive structuring of social contacts and relationships. Socially competent behavior includes cognitive dimensions, such as knowledge of rules of conduct and conventions, as well as specific behavioral components, capabilities, and interpersonal skills, and finally touches on the emotional level of interaction (Kanning, 2005; Oerter, 2002). This includes the concept of emotional competence and materializes in a learning process within which the personal ability to deal with one's own feelings and those of others becomes more and more developed (Dreher & Dreher, 1985; Friedlmeier, 1999; Havighurst, 1972). Emotional competence thus implies "being aware of one's own feelings, expressing feelings non-verbally or verbally, and controlling them independently, as well as recognizing and understanding the emotions of others" (translated from Petermann & Wiedebusch, 2003). Communicative competence is closely linked to this and means for Ganser (2005) "verbal skills, teamwork, leadership, self-expression, personal dealings within partnerships and social relationships." This closes the circle for social competence. But the focus in

this context is on conscious and competent participation in communication and interaction processes—also of an increasingly intercultural nature (Luchtenberg, 1999)—and their possible control, also through highly developed communication skills.[2]

The terms are thus closely linked, show clear overlaps and may represent subcategories of one other, depending on usage, context, and momentary importance. It is thus especially a question of perspective, of focus, whether the social, emotional, or communicative dimensions of the term soft skills are uppermost. There is consensus that transferable skills of this kind are of great importance for general life and learning in the school context, the social climate within the class and within the school, the social integration of children and young people, and, not least, for educational achievement (Blair, 2002; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1999; Raver, 2002). Numerous studies—such as those by Petermann and Wiedebusch (2003), Tillmann, Holler-Nowitzki, Holtappels, Meier, and Popp (2000), Pieper (1999), Schubarth (1996)—demonstrate that promoting transferable skills can also lead to an improvement of specialist skills. Of great relevance in this context is the attitude towards education, which can act as a mediator, i.e. it can be a mediating link between specialist and transferable skills and educational achievement (Rohlfs, 2011). But even apart from this function in the development of specialist competencies, there should be a special place for transferable skills, the promotion of a positive social climate, and education for democracy in the everyday life of the school. Last but not least, because the likely primary causes of school shootings are not to be found in a pathological psychiatric condition of the offender (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, & Gray, 2001; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004), it can be assumed that this problem is the result of disintegration (Heitmeyer & Anhut, 2008) and failed socialization processes in the context of social relationships within the family, peer group, and school. In its role as a mediator of professional skills and a space for social communication school is particularly important. But how is this reflected in the reality of German schools?

21.2   Democracy at School?

Rohlfs's empirical study on attitudes to school and formal education among 1,689 pupils from grades 7 and 9 at nine schools in a deprived area in the German state of Bremen (Rohlfs 2011) builds on the self-determination theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 1993), in which there are three inherent basic human needs or "primary psychological needs" (1991, p. 243), the satisfaction of which is a key precondition for the formation of intrinsic motivation: the need for competence or efficacy, the need for

---

[2] Interestingly, school shooters appear to exhibit developmental difficulties in all three areas of competence (social, emotional, and communicative; see, for example, Newman et al., 2004; Robertz, 2004), so that the focus chosen here is highly relevant and forms an important counterweight to measures devoted exclusively to special prevention (risk analysis procedures, etc.).
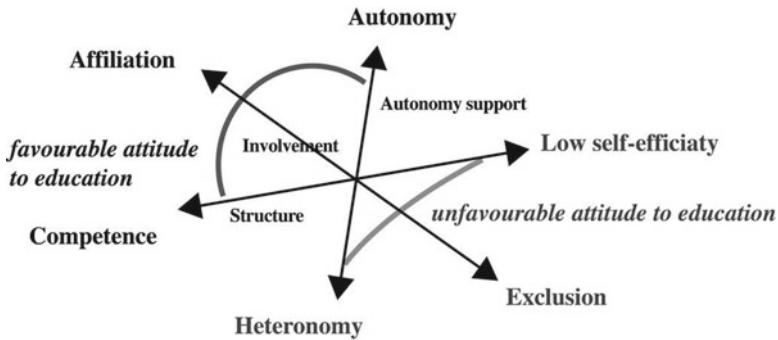
Fig. 21.1 Educational attitudes in relation to basic psychological needs. *Source*: Rohlfs (2011)
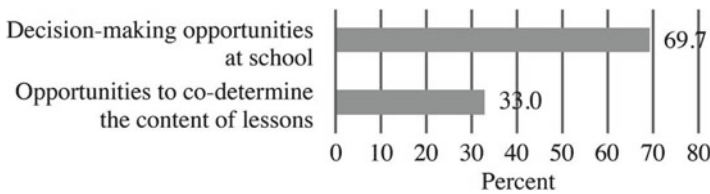
Fig. 21.2 Opportunities for participation at school and in the classroom. *Source*: Rohlfs (2011)

autonomy or self-determination, and the need for social inclusion and belonging (1993, p. 229). Rohlfs (2011) was able to show that the surveyed pupils' attitudes towards education strongly depended on the personal life of the respondent and his or her conduct in the continuum between autonomy and heteronomy, competence and self-inefficacy, and affiliation and exclusion. The stronger the individual experience of autonomy, self-efficacy, and social integration in school-related contexts, the more positive were the pupils' attitudes toward education. Thus there is an interaction between attitude and the experience of competence, autonomy, and belonging (Fig. 21.1).

The most positive attitudes correlated with the feeling of self-determination. However, the study clearly shows here that while more than two-thirds (69.7%) of the pupils surveyed were frequently involved in decision-making, only one-third (33%) had any say in the classroom—the core business of the school (Fig. 21.2).

This observation aptly describes the current democratic culture in many German schools. Although the OECD's TALIS 2007/2008 study (Teaching and Learning International Survey) found that modern teaching approaches had increasingly reached teachers in the 23 countries studied (DIPF, 2009), instructional decisions are still mainly made by the educators (Bosenius & Wedekind, 2004, p. 300).[3] So if the majority of teachers surveyed in TALIS also believe their responsibility lies in supporting pupils in the self-guided construction of knowledge, rather than directly teaching them (DIPF, 2009), and thus the paradigm shift "from teaching to learning" (Fauser, Prenzel,

---

[3] Germany did not take part in this study, but a similar study by the GEW teaching union paints a similar picture (GEW, 2009).

& Schratz, 2008) increasingly shapes professional activity in the classroom, adolescents' freedom to make decisions is indeed primarily restricted to school life, school trips, seating arrangements, classroom rules, organizing school events, etc. But in the classroom, just as in the organization of most of the afternoon free-time programs at all-day schools (Harring, 2011, pp. 333–334), pupils rarely feel involved autonomously and decisively—raising the question of the extent to which they can really feel responsible for their own learning (Bosenius & Wedekind, 2004, p. 300).

For the social climate in the learning group, the basic need for belonging and social integration mentioned by Deci and Ryan (1991, 1993) is still of crucial importance. Here, 87.1% of the students surveyed in Rohlfs' study (2011) describe their school as a place where they feel they belong, and about nine out of ten connote learning at school with being together with friends (89.1%). 82.5% say that it is easy to make friends at school and only 8.8% describe their school as a place where they feel lonely; 7.8% feel like outsiders. The proportion of the lonely and excluded is low overall, although sight should not be lost of what this hardship means for these young people who are not able to feel they belong at school. Not only for these pupils, a trustful relationship with teachers is of great importance. This is also significant because, especially in the case of American school shooters, there are empirical indications suggesting that the adolescents felt excluded, bullied, and lonely in the period before their crime (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002; an overview is also provided by Böckler & Seeger, 2010, pp. 276–277). The same is true in principle of rampage perpetrators in Germany. There is copious evidence of how severe the psycho-emotional consequences of social exclusion and disintegration in the school context can be. Sebastian Bosse, for example, who committed a rampage at a secondary school in Emsdetten in 2006 and subsequently killed himself, described such experiences at school as sources of extreme trauma and threat to identity (Böckler & Seeger, 2010, pp. 115ff.).

41.4% of respondents reported such a relationship and 45.3% indicated that their teachers had an understanding of their personal problems. Empathy between teachers and students cannot substitute for peer contact, but it could contribute to a positive classroom climate and establish an atmosphere of safety and security, which is of great relevance from a primary prevention perspective, along with the opening up of spaces for participation (Rohlfs, 2011). However, the school is, as a certificate-issuing institution, a special field of interaction and participation, and the classroom community a special type of social group; Ulich (2001) even doubts that this is a group in the social-psychological sense.

21.3   The Classroom Community as a Realm of Social Experience

For Ulich (2001), the school learning group is a particularly heterogeneous forced grouping, which, unlike peer group and dyadic friendship, is not freely chosen: "The school class arises primarily as a result of formal differentiation based on age and performance…The fact that school classes are not 'natural' groups implies the need to

come to an arrangement with others and get along with them" (Ulich, 2001, p. 50, translated). Forms of relationships and interaction in the "forced community" of the classroom are often characterized more by conflict than cooperation. Teachers clearly promote this social environment through their teaching methods. And here—according to Ulich—there is usually no real interaction between the children. They either adopt a passive role or they form groups. "Genuine two-way and interrelated behavior" (Ulich, 2001, p. 50, translated) is still the exception. And at the latest when test time comes round everyone is on their own. However, the class community as a social realm of experience is of great importance—especially at the beginning of school, when the children get the opportunity to form relationships with peers, to experience belonging, to compare themselves with others, to work together, to play and to gain new experiences with norms, values, demands, and being different.

Krappmann and Oswald examine forms of relationship and group affiliation in the classroom and distinguish between groups, social networks, and fields of interaction. |A group is contoured by a clear border, within which dynamic dyadic friendships can be formed. The members of the group know who belongs to it and who does not. A network of relationships is less clearly delineated; while its members belong together, there is no stable internal structure or unifying topic. Krappmann and Oswald observed children, who, although connected to each other, could identify neither borders nor internal structures nor specific topics. These are particularly children who were excluded from existing groups (Krappmann & Oswald, 1995, pp. 49ff.). Interestingly, Krappmann and Oswald cannot connect these types of classroom relationships and groups with specific patterns of interaction, such as helping or annoying, or with obvious mechanisms of social control. This clearly shows the unique character of the interaction field of the school: "In the school system, children are constantly in situations in which they interact, regardless of group boundaries, and in which other behavior guidelines overlap group orientation" (Krappmann & Oswald, 1995, p. 64, translated).

For interactions in the school classroom, the actual situation and reasons for actions appear to be more important than specific group affiliations. A clear exception here is belonging to a group of girls or boys; even in first grade, children start to establish the gender divide, to the point where it becomes an interaction barrier. If, at first, it can still easily be bypassed for common activities, it becomes more difficult to overcome during the course of elementary school. This is where same-sex relationships are mainly found, but there are bridges between the school worlds of girls and boys—specific patterns of interaction where they cross the boundaries. Krappmann, Oswald, Chowdhuri, and Salisch (1986) observed four patterns:

- *Mutual help*: The children help each other on matters such as passing an important examination, lending a utensil, or solving a difficult task. These interactions are sometimes used to demonstrate superiority, especially in the context of support for school work. But frequently offers of help are simply motivated by friendship.
- *Teasing*: Fooling around (spraying water, throwing erasers, chasing) increasingly serves a function of flirting, although initially quite rough and always with awareness of the associated risk. Boys gain protection by forming coalitions which support a boy who approaches a girl, and are ready to support him and be of immediate

assistance should the approach fail, in order to redefine the whole thing as a joke or tease. The ultimate goal is to protect the self-esteem of the boy who crosses the gender boundary. Accordingly, girls form coalitions to mock advances from boys, or to explain their own response as a misunderstanding should the boy go too far. The gender-homogeneous group thus provides security on the way over the border.

- *Annoying and reprimanding*: In the field of annoyances, boys of all age groups are more active than girls. Girls tend to use reprimands—often all too understandable—when they have to react to the annoyances of the boys. But there are also often calls for order, criticisms of the boys' performance, complaints about mistakes, or reproaches for breaking rules. The girls keep order, sometimes in a disparaging manner. During the course of the elementary school years, these annoyances and reprimands decrease noticeably. What remains is a quiet giggle when a boy makes a mistake in the eyes of the girl.
- *Touching*: The repertoire of physical contact between boys and girls is broad, from light brushing in passing to bitter fighting, from cuddling to pushing away, whereby the boys allow themselves far greater freedom than the girls. How children interpret a touch depends significantly on the context. If the accompanying verbal framework, for example, is friendly, the contact is also usually considered positive.

Gender-specific boundaries and their bridging clearly characterize the social climate of a learning group and contribute to the formation of identity. Examining interactions as a whole (not only between girls and boys), Krappmann and Oswald (1995) found that, contrary to expectations, mutual help at elementary school is observed only rarely and has hardly any impact on learning success. Cooperation between children in the context of partner or group work is rarely task-oriented or free of major stress. It is mostly marked by very uneven involvement by group members, which is often the cause of disputes. Cooperation is possible especially when close friends form a team. The work is then done under conditions of mutual appreciation, the views of the partner are taken seriously, errors are explained, suggestions taken into account, and uneven distribution of tasks forgiven. It is thus, again, the friendships which structure the realm of social experience and have a great effect on the classroom community (1995). However, the predominantly negative evaluation of peer interactions in the classroom should not close our eyes to the fact that, especially at primary level, concepts, methods, and forms are designed to promote real mutual relationships between the children. But how can social competences in the heterogeneous "forced community" of the school classroom be promoted? How can opportunities for participation be created when the development of democratic school quality is a core responsibility of school pedagogy?

21.4 Promotion of Social Skills

The "promotion of social skills" has a nice ring to it. But there is first a basic question whose answer is less easy. What goals are even desirable here?

In the question of desirable forms of social interaction, one comes up against a subject which is particularly characterized by uncertainty and inconsistency. Summarizing the discussion, the overarching criterion of reciprocity as a "basic model" of social interaction seems to be particularly suitable for determining desirable forms of social action. Reciprocity is expressed in social relationships as "fair exchange" in the sense of give and take: e.g. speaking and listening, helping and getting help, feeling responsible for others and accepting care, experiencing and showing openness. (Petillon, 2005, p. 173)

The ability and willingness

- to make contact with others;
- to show solidarity, act together in groups and thus develop a feeling of togetherness;
- to solve conflicts constructively;
- to develop self-identity, integrate own needs and others' expectations into self-determined role behavior;
- to develop social awareness and empathy;
- to be able to give and take criticism; and
- to develop and follow rules, and change them if necessaryare crucial to substantiating the principle of reciprocity and the construct of social competence.

There are a variety of concepts for the realization of these kinds of learning objectives at the elementary and primary levels, mainly from the 1970s, that still point the way for the promotion of social learning, but have not yet been systematically evaluated (Petillon, 2005, p. 174). The aspect of conflict resolution is often highlighted in the context of social learning. By way of example, a concept for the promotion of social skills elaborated by the National Institute for School and Media, Berlin-Brandenburg, for prevention work in schools in the state of Brandenburg is worth mentioning:

Prerequisites…for the process of acquiring social skills in the sense of continuous prevention work are:

- the participation of all school stakeholders,
- a participative relationship culture in the school,
- new spatial concepts to promote the creation of learning, meeting, and activity rooms in the sense of "learning environments" and thus take into account the plurality of learning forms and paths,
- opening up the school,
- the development of an internal curriculum of social learning with designated focal points in
  – self-competence,
  – culture of conflict,
  – participation,
  – taking responsibility.

These can be practically configured in two blocks for conflict culture and conflict training, for a school-based focus on the systematic development of a conflict culture. (LISUM, 2007)

The explicitly holistic program culminated in two components for conflict resolution—and indeed a variety of concepts for social learning could be characterized

in these terms. A number of different violence prevention programs were subsequently developed (Cloud, 2006; Olweus, 2006), and forms of mediation were implemented in schools (Behn, Kügler, & Lernbeck, 2006). In fact, the Lions Quest "Growing Up" program, which was developed in the 1970s in the United States, is currently used in over 50 countries, and was adapted for Germany in the 1980s by Hurrelmann and colleagues at the University of Bielefeld, is designed holistically. The focus of this concept is:

> carefully planned promotion of pupils' social skills. They are helped over the long term to strengthen their self-confidence and communication skills, to build and maintain contacts and positive relationships, to appropriately address conflict and risk situations in their everyday lives, and to find constructive solutions to problems which are often associated with puberty. At the same time, this programme, seeks to offer young people in the classroom orientation in building their own socially integrated value system. In this way, the Lions Quest "Growing Up" concept comes under life skills education, which, according to current research, has the greatest chance of success in the prevention of destructive and self-destructive behavior (addiction and drug dependence, violence, suicide) through the programme, parents are actively involved in the work of their children in many different ways. (Lions Quest, 2012)

Here the promotion of transferable skills is a responsibility shared by all those involved in school and formal education, and not limited solely to the practice of conflict resolution strategies. Perhaps for that very reason is a suitable instrument for primary prevention work in schools with a view to prevent violence.

There is another opportunity to support social learning at school via the concept of mentoring. Since the mid-1990s, a large number projects, mainly initiated outside school, have been established in the Germany, to bring together pupils (mentees) with mainly students (mentors) in pairs. Within the framework of intensive one-to-one care, these projects focus on the support, guidance, and care of individual children with their individual technical and transferable strengths and weaknesses (Rohlfs, 2008, 2012). Particularly for the promotion of social, emotional, and communication skills (2008), the principle of mentoring (sponsorships) has proven very useful. This is mainly because successful mentoring is based on the remarkable commitment of the mentors to their mentees.

The children experience a positive role model in many respects. They experience the enrichment of everyday life through someone who pays real attention to them, takes them seriously, cares about them, supports them, is interested in them, trusts them, and whom they can trust. For many adolescents, this experience is of particular value and a precondition for collaborative work and also the first success, a first and significant step on the path of personal development.

It should not be overlooked, however, that in this relationship the connection between mentors and mentees has a special character: that of a time-limited sponsorship. This must be made clear to all involved and always reflected upon. The educational actor must "limit" themselves and yet—or perhaps precisely because of this—enable an appropriate closeness in the relationship. For the schools, mentoring opens up additional and effective support, particularly driven by the commitment of the involved students. The positive portrayal of these opportunities and potential benefits of mentoring programs initiated outside of school should not obscure the fact

that schools are often forced to use these and similar tools out of sheer necessity in order to afford individual support—including social skills—at all, and that there is a clear need for reform in schools and teaching. Paradoxically enough—to put it very bluntly—it would be preferable if there were less need for elaborated student assistance projects of this kind. This is not to deny their quality and usefulness. On the contrary, cause for concern arises when it is the potential cost-neutrality of such projects that counts as the decisive quality criterion and when (as can be seen from the project reports) mentoring initiatives by the schools are deployed as short-term emergency programs when the scholastic achievement of a learning group is too poor or when the social climate is disrupted by individual students.

The current pupil assistance projects accomplish a balancing act between educational, school-based cognitive and psychotherapeutic support of vulnerable children in particular, with notable successes. In their characteristic way, the projects open up spaces for action, experiences, and development for pupils, students, universities, and schools, and provide a suitable framing for promoting real, reciprocal, cooperative interactions, and positive relationships between pupils—for this should always be the goal (Rohlfs, 2008, 2011).

21.5   Developing a Democratic School as an Educational Responsibility

The aim of national and international educational initiatives is to strengthen civic and democratic competencies in pupils. The term "civic mission of schools" has evolved from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The alternative "reinventing citizenship education" places particular emphasis on the associated educational of schools and seeks to implement it in the spectrum of subjects that are particularly relevant for democratic education, such as history, social studies, civic education, politics, and work-related subjects. Individual subjects aside, there are, on other hand, programs and concepts such as "Teaching, Learning, and Living Democracy in Schools," "Learning and Living Democracy," "Democracy at School," "School of Democracy," "Service Learning," and the "Promotional Program Democratic Action" (Beutel & Fauser, 2001; Council of Europe, 2003; Edelstein, 2005; Edelstein & Fauser, 2001; Eurydice European Unit, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001, 2006; Schirp, 2005). These initiatives focus on the social and moral foundations of democracy such as ability to empathize and adopt other perspectives, perception and exercise of responsibility, solidarity, fairness, and justice, and links these to a dedicated learning of community responsibilities (Samu & Rohlfs, 2009).

Here it is central that opening up spaces pupil autonomy, a classroom climate that promotes self-determination, and teachers taking the perspectives, interests, and realities of the pupils seriously creates a situation where children and young people show curiosity more often, are more independent in problem-solving, and have more positive self-esteem than in a more controlled learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 1993, p. 232). Participation seems to be key to a social climate within the learning

group and the school in which the individual pupils do not feel powerless and ineffective, but rather recognized and appreciated for their values and interests. Against this background, Rohlfs's findings (2011; presented above; Fig. 21.2) that while more than two-thirds of pupils are frequently involved in decision-making, they have little say in the classroom indicates a clear need for action. And this raises the question of whether teaching in the traditional form which is still widely used at German schools, in which decisions are reserved for teachers and meaningful content is imparted only to a limited extent from the pupils' perspective, is suitable for achieving democratic education and shaping democracy as something that can be experienced and lived. Rohlfs (2011) demonstrates that a lack of opportunities to participate in the classroom is often linked with a failure to find personal meaning in the content of lessons. For a clear majority of respondents, school is a compulsory affair which, although of great importance, appears to be of little practical use beyond the issuing of certificates. And this has implications for the social climate in the "forced community" of school.

There is already a large number of concepts for democratic teaching in schools, which open up remarkable perspectives for the design of lessons and schools and essentially delineate the contours of "democratic school quality" (Edelstein, 2009, p. 10) in the context of meaningful and self-directed learning. For the "concept of education for democracy seeks an accurate perception of the opportunities that exist in institutional educational contexts to promote knowledge, attitude, and ability to act in and for democracy" (Berkessel et al., 2011, p. 229) and thus defines a key basis for the development of a positive inner relationship both with the school and also toward oneself.

A democratic educational grounding in the school curriculum and a closely related focus on the interests of the pupils (Beutel & Fauser, 2007) can therefore be described as in many ways formative for attitudes and is one of the central educational responsibilities if the "new German educational catastrophe" triggered by the PISA study (Baumert et al., 2001) is to be taken as an opportunity for constructive school development at different levels. Rohlfs's empirical finding (2011) that the feeling of exclusion from the social group is less relevant for the development of a favorable attitude toward school than the experience of limited autonomy and lack of opportunities for participation underscores the urgency of this responsibility, which, even in the hectic post-PISA discourse, deserves enhanced awareness and can be seen as an important interdisciplinary constant.

It also seems necessary to bring schools, as social and political learning spaces, back into the focus of public debate. Democratic involvement grows when children see that they are respected as persons, and when they can have a responsible say in their lives and learning at school. The school is an everyday living environment, where power is exerted and interests are negotiated. It is therefore a fundamental requirement to respect the human rights of children and young people and to promote the willingness and ability of pupils for democratic coexistence within the framework of a non-violent culture. Schools also have to be accountable for how they implement this requirement—and not only for the promotion of specialist achievements (Brügelmann & Rohlfs, 2007).

On this point, the German body responsible for coordinating education policy nationally determined:

> The Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs has expressed its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the child's right to education stipulated therein, on which the future of the individual and of society significantly depends…The Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs agrees that the status of the child and their right to all-round development in all school grades and types of school are to be respected, and that measures to promote diversity of talent and the prevention of social exclusion need to be strengthened. The Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs agrees that age-appropriate consideration of the child's right to protection, care, and participation is essential for the school culture (KMK, 2006).

The pessimistic assessment of opportunities for participation in German schools which we outlined above should not obscure the fact that an increasing number of teachers recognizes that learning democracy is a school responsibility, that they take this responsibility seriously, and that they have already developed sustainable approaches that enable actual involvement in decision-making: from open spaces for independent work to class councils and school assemblies (for a summary for the elementary school see Burk, 2003; Drews & Wallrabenstein, 2002).

> These approaches deserve respect and appreciation and require support and dissemination. And here, with their decision from 2006, the members of the Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs have special responsibility for:

- Removing barriers to the implementation of children's rights and accordingly revising school regulations;
- Creating an environment in which schools can implement the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in daily life, particularly the abolishment of early selection and performance assessment, which disregards the different requirements of children;
- Following the 'Learning and living democracy' program of the Federal Government and the Federal States' Commission for Educational Planning and the Promotion of Research to establish networks of schools in which the different forms of self-determination and co-determination are tested at all levels of school life and in the classroom;
- Supporting reform efforts through evaluation and research projects investigating and assessing the potential and difficulties of a democratic school so that schools can be given specific support for their development (Brügelmann & Rohlfs, 2007).

21.6   Conclusion

Due to changing and culturally diverse ways of living together, a lack of emotional security, an incorrectly understood culture of recognition, lack of self-esteem, demotivation, neglect, and the dearth of social experience opportunities in the family

for a growing number of young people, the socialization base of school must perform more educational functions than in the past. Strengthening of personality and the practice of socially appropriate, non-violent behavior are key elements. Here we come full circle: Taking seriously the theoretical and empirical findings on school shootings (Daniels & Bradley, 2011; Fox & Harding, 2005) means a real rethinking—especially at school level. Schools must increase awareness of creative and constructive approaches to conflict situations, as well as imparting consensual values and enabling orientation on democratic principles. This is precisely where education for democracy is required, understood not only as a response to global and societal risks, orientation crises, and uncertainty, but seen as an active contribution to a respectful positive acquisition of the characteristics of democratic ways of life. This does not mean a harmonization of conflict or the development of conformism, but implies the promotion of critical inquiry, intercultural dialogue, and a culture of communication and debate, which represent a desirable goal and an important aspect of democratic competence (Edelstein, 2005). Pupils can only internalize democracy as a form of society and life through their own active and responsible participation in the shaping of their school and extracurricular learning and living environments, as well as through subjective and collective experience of autonomy, belonging, and recognition within the social community of which they are members (Samu & Rohlfs, 2009).

If young people learn and experience what real equality is in practice in their social environment (family, school, peer group, etc.), if they can orient themselves on social models for constructive and solution-oriented confrontation with difference and dissent, if they see this exemplified in various life contexts, and if they can experience for themselves what recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity mean in practice, then they will recognize the value of a democratic way of life. Against this background, education to democracy is a task of increasing social urgency. The state and civil society must support these educational efforts, orchestrate them with adequate resources, and strengthen their public role (Samu & Rohlfs, 2009).

> Democratically composed societies depend on the ability and willingness of their citizens to publicly debate matters related to collective coexistence and to decide on conflicting goals in accordance with general, constitutionally protected legal principles. Consequently, it is the duty of schools to empower the adolescents for democratic approaches in a climate of mutual respect and appreciation, and through education and training. Pupils should learn to make rational and ethically responsible and justifiable decisions on the basis of enlightened knowledge of political contexts. At the same time, they will develop skills that will enable them to independently participate in democratic processes. In this sense, in the debate on political education, the question is one of 'democratic competence' rather than 'maturity.' Promoting the development of 'democratic competence'—as the argument goes—depends on giving children and young people opportunities to take practical responsibility, both in school and in extracurricular educational activities (Edelstein & Fauser, 2001). In the everyday conduct of democratic practices, the complex sense of democracy reveals itself as a form of society and life beyond the political regime (Himmelmann, 2007), and thus as a cultural practice and experience of quality of life and learning. The school in particular as an organized socialization instance offers many opportunities for community participation (Berkessel et al., 2011).

Only in a school climate characterized by avoidance and rejection of punitive control, personal humiliation, powerlessness, and the sole decision-making authority of teachers can all participants succeed together in opening up space for student co-determination (which has grown in recent decades) and in designing participation as a useful, necessary, and attractive task—and thus make a decisive contribution to primary preventive work to prevent school violence and its extreme form of school shootings.

References

Baumert, J., Klieme, E., Neubrand, M., Prenzel, M., Schiefele, U., Schneider, W., et al. (Eds.). (2001). *PISA 2000: Basiskompetenzen von Schülerinnen und Schülern im internationalen Vergleich*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Behn, S., Kügler, N., & Lernbeck, H.-J. (2006). *Mediation an Schulen: Eine bundesdeutsche Evaluation*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Beck, U. (1986). Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp.

Berkessel, H., Beutel, W., Rohlfs, C., Stein, H.-W., Veith, H., & Weiß, M. (2011). Präventionsarbeit und Demokratiepädagogik—Praxisbeispiele und Forschungsansätze zum Wechselspiel von Rechtsextremismus bei Jugendlichen und demokratischer Schulentwicklung. In S. Aufenanger, F. Hamburger, R. Tippelt, & L. Ludwig (Eds.), *Bildung in der Demokratie: Beiträge zum 22. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft* (Vol. 2, pp. 229–260). Opladen: Barbara Budrich.

Beutel, W., & Fauser, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Erfahrene Demokratie: Wie Politik praktisch gelernt werden kann*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Beutel, W., & Fauser, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Demokratiepädagogik: Lernen für die Zivilgesellschaft*. Schwalbach/Ts: Wochenschau-Verlag.

Blair, C. (2002). School readiness: Integrating cognition and emotion in neurobiological conceptualization of children's functioning at school entry. *The American Psychologist, 57*, 111–127.

Böckler, N., & Seeger, T. (2010). *Schulamokläufer: Eine Analyse medialer Täter-Eigendarstellungen und deren Aneignung durch jugendliche Rezipienten*. Weinheim & Munich: Juventa.

Böckler, N., Seeger, T., & Heitmeyer, W. (2011). School shooting: A double loss of control. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, & A. Kirschner (Eds.), *Control of violence* (pp. 261–294). New York: Springer.

Bosenius, J., & Wedekind, H. (2004). „Mitpestümmen": Schülerstudie 2004 des Deutschen Kinderhilfswerks und Super RTL zur Partizipation von Viertklässlern. In e. V. Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk (Ed.), *Kinderreport Deutschland: Daten, Fakten, Hintergründe* (pp. 287–309). Munich: Kopaed.

Brügelmann, H., & Rohlfs, C. (2007). Die Grundschule als sozialer Lebens- und politischer Lernraum: Demokratisierung von Schule und Unterricht. *Neue deutsche Schule, 59*(11), 14–15.

Burk, K. (Ed.). (2003). *Beiträge zur Reform der Grundschule, Vol. 116. Kinder beteiligen— Demokratie lernen?* Frankfurt: Grundschulverband e. V.

Council of Europe. (2003). *Adapted texts on education for democratic citizenship and human rights*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Daniels, J. A., & Bradley, M. C. (2011). *Preventing lethal school violence*. New York: Springer Science + Business Media.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. A. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Perspectives on motivation: Nebraska symposium on motivation, 1990* (pp. 237–288). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1993). Die Selbstbestimmungstheorie der Motivation und ihre Bedeutung für die Pädagogik. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 27*(2), 223–238.

Deutsches Institut für internationale pädagogische Forschung (DIPF). (2009, June 16). *Moderne Unterrichtsansätze sind bei den Lehrern angekommen*. Press release. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.dipf.de/de/pdfdokumente/aktuelles/presseinformationen/moderne-unterrichtsansaetze-sind-bei-den-lehrernangekommen-dipf-untersucht-unterricht-in-23-laendern-im-rahmen-von-oecdstudie/at_download/file.

Dreher, E., & Dreher, M. (1985). Entwicklungsaufgaben im Jugendalter: Bedeutsamkeit und Bewältigungskonzepte. In D. Liepmann & A. Stiksrud (Eds.), *Entwicklungsaufgaben und Bewältigungsprobleme in der Adoleszenz* (pp. 56–70). Göttingen.

Drews, U., & Wallrabenstein, W. (Eds.). (2002). *Beiträge zur Reform der Grundschule, Vol. 114. Freiarbeit in der Grundschule: Offener Unterricht in Theorie, Praxis und Forschung*. Frankfurt am Main: Grundschulverband.

Edelstein, W. (2005). Warum Demokratie lernen, wozu Demokratie lernen, wie Demokratie lernen? Paper presented at Zwischenkonferenz der Berater/innen für Demokratiepädagogik, LISUM Brandenburg.

Edelstein, W. (2009). Demokratie als Praxis und Demokratie als Wert. In W. Edelstein, S. Frank, & A. Sliwka (Eds.), *Praxisbuch Demokratiepädagogik* (pp. 7–20). Weinheim & Basel: Beltz.

Edelstein, W., & Fauser, P. (2001). *Demokratie lernen und leben: Gutachten für ein Modellversuchsprogramm der BLK*. Geschäftsstelle der Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung, Heft 96. Bonn: BLK.

Eisenberg, N., & Fabes, R. (1999). Emotion, emotion-related regulation and quality of socioemotional functioning. In L. Balter & C. Tamis-LeMonda (Eds.), *Child psychology: A handbook of contemporary issues* (pp. 318–335). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

Eurydice European Unit. (2005). *Citizenship education at school in Europe*. Eurodice.

Fauser, P., Prenzel, M., & Schratz, M. (2008). Was für Schulen! Konzepte, Profile und Dynamik guter Schulen. In P. Fauser, M. Prenzel, & M. Schratz (Eds.), *Was für Schulen! Konzepte, Profile und Dynamik guter Schulen in Deutschland* (pp. 7–27). Seelze: Kallmeyer.

Fox, C., & Harding, D. J. (2005). School shootings as organizational deviance. *Sociology of Education, 78*, 69–97.

Franke, A. (2008). Arbeitsmarktkompetenzen im sozialen Wandel. In C. Rohlfs, M. Harring, & C. Palentien (Eds.), *Kompetenz-Bildung. Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (pp. 169–190). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Friedlmeier, W. (1999). Emotionsregulation in der Kindheit. In W. Friedlmeier & M. Holodynski (Eds.), *Emotionale Entwicklung* (pp. 197–218). Heidelberg: Spektrum.

Ganser, B. (2005). Kooperative Sozialformen im Unterricht. Ein unverzichtbarer Beitrag zur inneren Schulentwicklung. Dissertation. Erlangen, Nürnberg.

Gewerkschaft für Erziehung und Wissenschaft GEW (2009). TALIS-Studie: „Verkannte Helden des Alltags". Retrieved December 29, 2009 from http://www.gew.de/TALIS-Studie_Verkannte_Helden_des_Alltags.html.

Harazd, B., & Schürer, S. (2006). Veränderung der Schulfreude von der Grundschule zur weiterführenden Schule. In A. Schründer-Lenzen (Ed.), *Risikofaktoren kindlicher Entwicklung: Migration—Schulleistung—Emotionalität* (pp. 208–222). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Harring, M. (2011). *Das Potenzial der Freizeit: Soziales, kulturelles und ökonomisches Kapital im Kontext heterogener Freizeitwelten Jugendlicher*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Havighurst, R. J. (1972). *Developmental tasks and education*. New York: McKay.

Heitmeyer, W. (2002–2010). *Deutsche Zustände* (Vol. 1–8). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Heitmeyer, W., & Anhut, R. (2008). Disintegration, recognition, and violence: A theoretical perspective. In W. Heitmeyer & S. Legge (Eds.), *New directions for youth development* (Youth, violence, and social disintegration, Vol. 119, pp. 25–37). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Himmelmann, G. (2001). *Demokratie Lernen als Lebens-, Gesellschafts- und Herrschaftsform: Ein Lehr- und Studienbuch*. Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag.

Himmelmann, G. (2006). Expertise zum Thema „Was ist Demokratiekompetenz?" Ein Ver-gleich von Kompetenzmodellen unter Berücksichtigung internationaler Ansätze. In *Leitbild Demokratieerziehung. Vorläufer, begleitstudien und internationale Ansätze zum Demokratie-Lernen* (pp. 120–187). Schwalbach.

Himmelmann, G. (2007). Demokratische Handlungskompetenz: „Standards für Mündigkeit". In W. Beutel & P. Fauser (Eds.), *Demokratiepädagogik: Lernen für die Zivilgesellschaft* (pp. 2–70). Schwalbach/Ts: Wochenschau-Verlag.

Hoffmann, J., Roshdi, K., & Robertz, F. J. (2009). Zielgerichtete schwere Gewalt und Amok an Schulen—eine empirische Studie zur Prävention schwerer Gewalttaten. *Kriminalistik, 4*, 196–204.

Hurrelmann, K. (2008). Veränderte Bedingungen des Aufwachsens. In C. Rohlfs, M. Harring, & C. Palentien (Eds.), *Kompetenz-Bildung: Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (pp. 53–67). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Kanning, U. P. (2005). *Soziale Kompetenzen. Entstehung, Diagnose und Förderung*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.

Krappmann, L., & Oswald, H. (1995). *Alltag der Schulkinder: Beobachtungen und Analysen von Interaktionen und Sozialbeziehungen*. Weinheim/Munich: Juventa.

Krappmann, L., Oswald, H., Chowdhuri, I., & Salisch, M. V. (1986). Grenzen und Brücken: Interaktionen zwischen Mädchen und Jungen im Grundschulalter. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 38*(3), 560–580.

Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK). (2006). *Erklärung der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 3.3.2006 zur Umsetzung des Übereinkommens der Vereinten Nationen über die Rechte des Kindes: Beschluss vom 3.3.2006*. Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2006/2006_03_03-Rechte-des-Kindes-UN.pdf.

Landesinstitut für Schule und Medien Berlin-Brandenburg (LISUM). (2007). *PIT Brandenburg: Schulische Prävention im Team: Ein ganzheitliches Rahmenkonzept für die Präventionsarbeit an den Schulen des Landes Brandenburg*. Ludwigsfelde.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Larkin, R. W. (2009). The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(9), 1309–1326.

Lions Quest. (2012). Was ist Lions-Quest „Erwachsen werden"? Retrieved November 8, 2012 from http://www.lions-quest.de/lions-quest-im-ueberblick/was-ist-lions-quest.html.

Luchtenberg, S. (1999). *Interkulturelle kommunikative Kompetenz*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger. *The Forensic Examiner, 8*, 1–16.

Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A. G., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A. A., & Gray, B. T. (2001). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of adolescent mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*(6), 719–728.

Muschert, G. W., & Ragnedda, M. (2010). Media and control of violence: Communication in school shootings. In W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, A. Kirschner, & S. Malthaner (Eds.), *Control of violence: Historical and international perspectives on violence in modern societies* (pp. 345–361). New York: Springer.

Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004). *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings*. New York: Basic.

Oerter, R. (2002). Kindheit. In R. Oerter & L. Montada (Eds.), *Entwicklungspsychologie: Ein Lehrbuch*. Weinheim: Beltz.

Olweus, D. (2006). *Gewalt in der Schule: Was Lehrer und Eltern wissen sollten- und tun können* (4th ed.). Bern: Hans Huber.

Petermann, F., & Wiedebusch, S. (2003). *Emotionale Kompetenz bei Kindern*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.

Petillon, H. (2005). Grundschulkinder und ihre sozialen Beziehungen. In W. Einsiedler, M. Götz, & H. Hacker (Eds.), *Handbuch Grundschulpädagogik und Grundschuldidaktik* (2nd ed., pp. 166–175). Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.

Pieper, E. (1999). *Eine für alle? Eine empirische Studie zur differenziellen Wirkung einer Kompetenzförderung bei Kindern mit unterschiedlichem sozioökonomischen Status* (Doctoral dissertation, Bielefeld University).

Raver, C. (2002). Emotions matter: Making the case for the role of young children's emotional development for early school readiness. *Social Policy Report, 16*, 3–18.

Reichenbach, R. (2008). Soft skills: Destruktive Potentiale des Kompetenzdenkens. In C. Rohlfs, M. Harring, & C. Palentien (Eds.), *Kompetenz-Bildung: Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (pp. 35–52). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Robertz, F. J. (2004). *School Shootings: Über die Relevanz der Phantasie für die Begehung von Mehrfachtötungen durch Jugendliche*. Frankfurt am Main: Polizeiwissenschaft.

Rohlfs, C. (2008). Kompetenzentwicklung: Zur Förderung sozialer, emotionaler und kommunikativer Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen durch Mentoring. In C. Rohlfs, M. Harring, & C. Palentien (Eds.), *Kompetenz-Bildung: Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (pp. 289–306). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Rohlfs, C. (2011). *Bildungseinstellungen: Schule und formale Bildung aus der Perspektive von Schülerinnen und Schülern*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Rohlfs, C. (2012). Kompetenzentwicklung durch Mentoring an Schulen: Die Förderung von Soft Skills. *Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung, 7*(2), 183–196.

Rohlfs, C., Harring, M., & Palentien, C. (Eds.). (2008). *Kompetenz-Bildung: Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Rohlfs, C., & Palentien, C. (2006). Demokratie im Klassenzimmer—ein Plädoyer für mehr Mitbestimmung in der Schule. In J. Blank, W. Edelstein, C. Palentien, C. Rohlfs, & V. Steinl (Eds.), *Schule verändern: Gedanken zu Schülervertretungsarbeit in Deutschland* (pp. 12–19). Berlin: Bildungswerk für Schülervertretungsarbeit in Deutschland e.V.

Samu, Z., & Rohlfs, C. (2009). Demokratiepädagogik in der universitären Lehrerbildung. In W. Beutel, U. Käppel, T. Thieme, & I. Wachtmeister (Eds.), *Demokratiepädagogik in Thüringen—Grundlagen, Schulentwicklung, Praxis, Service* (pp. 79–83). Bad Berka: Thüringer Institut für Lehrerbildung, Lehrplanentwicklung und Medien (ThILLM).

Schubarth, W. (Ed.). (1996). *Gewalt an Schulen: Ausmaß, Bedingungen und Prävention. Quantitative und qualitative Untersuchungen in den alten und neuen Ländern*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Tillmann, K.-J., Holler-Nowitzki, B., Holtappels, H. G., Meier, U., & Popp, U. (2000). *Schülergewalt als Schulproblem: Verursachende Bedingungen, Erscheinungsformen und pädagogische Handlungsperspektiven*. Weinheim/Munich: Juventa.

Ulich, K. (2001). *Einführung in die Sozialpsychologie der Schule*. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*, 3–56.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: US Secret Service and US Department of Education.

Wolke, A. (2006). *Gewaltprävention an Schulen: Evaluation kriminalpräventiver Angebote der Polizei: Eine empirische Untersuchung an weiterführenden Kölner Schulen und deren Umfeld*. Cologne: Lit Verlag.

Chapter 22
School Shootings, Crises of Masculinities, and the Reconstruction of Education: Some Critical Perspectives

Douglas Kellner

After a series of school shootings ranging from the Columbine High tragedy to the Virginia Tech massacre and a cycle of subsequent school shootings throughout the globe, we still need to better understand the multiple causes of these shootings and address the need for a diverse range of responses. In this article, I argue that while the motivations for the shootings may vary, they have in common crises in masculinities in which young men use guns and violence to create ultramasculine identities in producing a media spectacle that generates fame and celebrity for the shooters.

School shootings and domestic terrorism have proliferated on a global level in the 2000s, with rampage shootings in recent years in Finland, Germany, Greece, Brazil, Norway, and other countries as well as the United States. Although there may be national differences, in all cases, the shootings feature young men in crisis who explode with rage, using guns and violence to resolve their crises and to create a media spectacle and celebrity through their deadly actions. Media coverage of the phenomenon rarely, if ever, roots rampage killing in male rage and crises of masculinities, and fails to see how the violence is a pathological form of resolving male crises, in which men use the media to gain celebrity and to overcome feelings of powerlessness and alienation. The media and academic discussions also largely tend to ignore the connection between hypermasculinity and guns, and thus fail to see how rampage shootings are a form of guys and guns amok.

By "crises in masculinities," I refer to a dominant societal connection between masculinity and being a tough guy, assuming what Jackson Katz (2006) describes as a "tough guise," a mask or façade of violent assertiveness, covering over vulnerabilities. The crisis erupts in outbreaks of violence and societal murder, as men act out rage, which can take extremely violent forms such as political assassinations, serial and mass murders, and school and workplace shootings.

D. Kellner (✉)
Graduate School of Education and Information Studies,
University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA
e-mail: kellner@ucla.edu

Crises in masculinities are grounded in deteriorating socio-economic possibilities for men and are aggravated by the current economic crisis in global capitalism. They are also produced in part by a media which repeatedly shows violence as a way of solving problems. Explosions of male rage and rampage shootings are also connected to the escalation of war and militarism in the United States from the long nightmare of Vietnam through the military interventions of the Bush–Cheney administration in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as to accelerating social violence in the media and society at large.

To be sure, there is a tradition of social scientists and activists who have explored the connections between crime, violence, and masculinity. In *Masculinities and Crime* (1993) and other writings, James Messerschmidt explores the link between masculine socialization and the overwhelming prevalence of male perpetration of crime—including violent crime. Emphasizing the social construction of gender, class, race, and crime, Messerschmidt stresses how these factors are interrelated, and that men learn violent behavior both as a means of "doing masculinity," and to assert dominance over women and other men, in behavior that socially reproduces the structures of capitalism and patriarchy.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) critically interrogate the concept of "hegemonic masculinity," whereby dominant models of an assertive—and sometimes violent—masculinity are constructed which reinforce gendered hierarchies among men and men's power over women. Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity in a culture at a specific period; in the US, over the past century hegemonic masculinity has been associated with military heroism, corporate power, sports achievement, action adventure movie stars, and being tough, aggressive, and macho. These ideals are reproduced in corporate, political, military, sports, and gun culture, as well as Hollywood films, video games, men's magazines, and other forms of media culture, and in sites like the frat house, locker room, boardroom, male-dominated workplaces, bars, and hangouts where men aggregate.

In *The Macho Paradox* (2006), Jackson Katz explores how this conception of violent masculinity helps produce violence against women. Calling upon men to question such behavior and to seek alternative masculinities, Katz challenges men to confront violence against women and to struggle against it. All of these scholars share a critical relation to dominant conceptions of a hegemonic hyper- and violent masculinity, and all search for alternative modes of masculinity, a project that I share.

In this chapter, I argue that school shooters, and other indiscriminate gun killers, share male rage, attempt to resolve a crisis of masculinity through violent behavior, exhibit a fetishism of guns or weapons, and resolve their crises through violence orchestrated as a media spectacle. Yet there are many causes to the rise of school violence and events such as the Columbine and Virginia Tech school shootings (Kellner, 2008), so I do not want to advocate a reductive causal approach. Complex historical events such as the Iraq invasion (Kellner, 2005) or the Virginia Tech and Columbine shootings, require a multiperspectivist vision and interpretation of key factors that constitute the constellation from which events can be interpreted, explained, and better understood. Thus addressing the causes of problems like societal violence and school shootings involves a range of apparently disparate things such as critique of male socialization and construction of ultramasculine male identities, the prevalence of gun culture and militarism, and a media culture that promotes violence and retribution, while circulating and sensationalizing media spectacle and a culture of celebrity. Such a constellation helps to

construct the identities, values, and behavior that incite individuals to use violence to resolve their crises of masculinity through creation of an ultramasculine identity and media spectacle through gun violence.

Accordingly, the solutions that I suggest to the problems of school violence and shootings range from more robust and rational gun laws, to better school and workplace security with stronger mental health institutions and better communication between legal, medical, and school administrations, as well as to the reconstruction of masculinity and the reconstruction of education for democracy (Kellner, 2008). In addition, we must search for better ways of addressing crime and violence than prisons and capital punishment, draconian measures aimed increasingly today at youth and people of color. Today our schools are like prisons, while in a better society schools would become centers of learning and self-developing, while prisons could also be centers of learning, rehabilitation, and job-training rather than punitive and dangerous schools for crime and violence (Davis & Mendietta, 2005).

In this chapter, I will suggest some proposals to deal with the escalating problem of school violence and school shootings and will argue for the importance of critical theory and radical pedagogy that proposes new modes of conflict resolution and ways of dealing with the bullying and violence that emerge in schools. While classic Frankfurt School research tended to decenter gender, today critical theory needs to discern crises in masculinities producing growing societal violence and aggression. In focusing on growing violence in society, I am taking up a theme in Herbert Marcuse, but from the perspective of gender and crises in masculinities. Yet in discussing the reconstruction of masculinities and education, I will draw on ideas from Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, Freire and critical pedagogy, Ivan Illich, and John Dewey.

22.1   Guns, the Culture of Violence, and Hypermasculinity in the United States

Grasping of the magnitude of societal violence and school shootings requires a critical theory of society focusing on problems of the present age. Escalating gun violence in schools and other sectors of society today in the United States is a national scandal and a serious social problem. The United States has been suffering from epidemic levels of gun violence. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, firearm violence claims over 30,000 lives a year, and for every person who dies from a gunshot wound, two others are wounded, meaning that every year more than 100,000 Americans become victims of gun violence.[1] Gun ownership

---

[1]See National Center for Injury Prevention & Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Web-Based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Injury Mortality Reports, 1999–2009, for National, Regional, and States* (Sept. 2011) at http://www.lcav.org/statistics-polling/gun_violence_statistics.asp (accessed April 4, 2012). A useful website collects statistics on gun violence, including murders, suicides, domestic violence, gun accidents, and gun victims according to age, race, and other factors at http://www.lcav.org/statistics-polling/gun_violence_statistics.asp (accessed April 4, 2012).

is rampant in the United States. According to an article published after the April Oikos University school shooting in Oakland:

> The United States has 90 guns for every 100 citizens, making it the most heavily armed society in the world (*Reuters*).
>
> US citizens own 270 million of the world's 875 million known firearms, according to the Small Arms Survey 2007 by the Geneva-based Graduate Institute of International Studies.
>
> About 4.5 million of the 8 million new guns manufactured worldwide each year are purchased in the United States, the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] report said. ("US Shooting Suspect," 2012).

The massacre at Virginia Tech in 2007 was the 25th school shooting on an American campus since the Columbine school shootings in 1999. That figure represents more than half the number of shootings at schools across in the world in the same time span.[2] Deadly school shootings at a wide range of schools have claimed over 400 student and faculty lives since Columbine. As publicists for a new edition of Lieberman's *The Shooting Game* indicates (2006): "In March and April of 2006, 16 deadly Columbine-style plots were hatched by over 25 students arrested across the USA from the heartland up to North Pole, Alaska. As the fall semester began, there were more deadly shootings in Montreal, Colorado, Wisconsin and even a tiny Amish school in Pennsylvania."[3]

As I write in summer 2012, there have already been several well-publicized school shootings in the United States this year. On February 10, 2012, in Walpole, New Hampshire, a 14-year-old student shot himself in front of 70 fellow students; on February 27 at Chardon High School in Ohio, a former classmate opened fire, killing three students and injuring six, with the shooter telling police after his arrest that he had randomly picked students as victims; on March 6, 2012, in Jacksonville, Florida, Shane Schumerth, a 28-year-old teacher at the Episcopal High School, returned to the campus after being fired, and shot and killed the headmistress, Dale Regan, with an assault rifle; and on April 2, in Oakland, California, One Goh, a 43-year-old Korean-American former student shot down seven people and wounded several other at Oikos University, a Christian school attended by mostly Koreans and Korean-Americans.[4]

My studies of school shootings in the past decades suggest that many school shooters have orchestrated shootings as media spectacles to dramatize personal grievances or to lash out against supposed tormentors, gaining their short bursts of celebrity and fame. In the case of the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007, it was clear that the alienated student and frustrated writer Seung-hui Cho carried out "The Virginia Tech Massacre" in which he was star, director, and producer. His multimedia dossier revealed that he was imitating images from films and carrying out a

---

[2] See "A Time Line of Recent Worldwide School Shootings" at http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0777958.html (accessed June 24, 2012).

[3] The quote can be found at http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1901337. The_Shooting_Game (accessed April 5, 2012).

[4] "A Time Line," op cit.

vengeance drama in the tradition of the Columbine School shooters, who he cited as "martyrs."

The following year in the February 14, 2008 shootings at Northern Illinois University, former student Steven Kazmierczak leapt from behind the curtain onto a stage in a large lecture hall. Armed with an arsenal of weapons and dressed in black, he began randomly shooting students in a geology class, killing five before shooting himself. While his motivations were never made clear, it is striking that he was obviously creating a highly theatrical spectacle of violence in the tradition of the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings.

My notion of media spectacle builds on French theorist Guy Debord's conception of the society of spectacle, but diverges significantly from it. For Debord, spectacle "unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena" (Debord 1970, p. 10). Debord's conception, first developed in the 1960s, continues to circulate through the Internet and other academic and subcultural sites today. It describes a media and consumer society, organized around the production and consumption of images, commodities, and staged events.

For Debord, "spectacle" constituted the overarching concept to describe the media and consumer society, including the packaging, promotion, and display of commodities and the production and effects of all media. Using the term "media spectacle," I am largely focusing on various forms of technologically constructed media productions that are produced and disseminated through the mass media, ranging from radio and television to the Internet and the latest wireless gadgets. Every medium, from music to television, from news to advertising, has multiple forms of spectacle, involving in the realm of music things such as the classical music spectacle, the opera spectacle, the rock spectacle, and over the last decades the hip hop spectacle. The forms and circulation of the spectacle evolve over time and multiply with new technological developments.

By my account, there are many levels and categories of media spectacle (Kellner, 2003a). Some media spectacles, like Dayan and Katz's media events (1992), are recurrent phenomena of media culture that celebrate dominant values and institutions, as well as its modes of conflict resolution. They include media extravaganzas like the Oscars and Emmys, or sports events like the Super Bowl or World Cup, which celebrate basic values of competition and winning. Politics is increasingly mediated by media spectacle. Political conflicts, campaigns, and those attention-grabbing occurrences that we call "news" have all been subjected to the logic of spectacle and tabloidization in the era of the media sensationalism, infotainment, political scandal and contestation, seemingly unending cultural war, and the phenomenon of War on Terror which characterized the post-9/11 epoch (Kellner, 2003b).

Spectacles of terror, like the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon, differ significantly from spectacles that celebrate or reproduce the existing society, as in Guy Debord's "society of the spectacle," or the "media events" analyzed by Dayan and Katz (1992), which describe how political systems exploit televised live, ceremonial, and preplanned events. Spectacles of terror are highly disruptive events carried out by oppositional groups or individuals who are pursuing politics or war

by other means. Like the media and consumer spectacles described by Debord, spectacles of terror reduce individuals to passive objects, manipulated by existing institutions and figures. However, the spectacles of terror produce fear which terrorists hope will demoralize the objects of their attack, but which are often manipulated by conservative groups, like the Bush–Cheney administration, to push through rightwing agendas, cut back on civil liberties, and militarize the society.

I argue that domestic terrorists like Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City bombings, the Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Virginia Tech Massacre, and other school shooting perpetrators share in common that they created media spectacles to act out their grievances and in doing so achieved celebrity status (Kellner, 2008). This no doubt promoted copycat shootings, now on a global level. Indeed, school shootings can be seen as a form of terrorism, although there are often significant differences. Certain forms of terrorism have specific political objectives while school shootings are more grounded in individual grievances or crises. Both, however, use violence to obtain goals and aim at media spectacle to get publicity for their actions, and in some cases celebrity. Both are obviously forms of terror and use violence to generate fear and destruction. In addition, in most cases, terrorism and school shootings are carried out by men, with many school shooters and domestic terrorists using guns and violence to resolve their crises of masculinity by creating media spectacles (Kellner, 2008).

My cultural studies approach to guns and school shootings interprets events like school shootings in their socio-historical context and uses a critical theory of society to help situate, interpret, and trace the effects of certain texts, artifacts, or events.[5] Critical theory is historical theory, contextualizing its object in its historical matrix, and so I felt the need to ground my studies of contemporary guns and school shootings in the context of the history of guns in the United States and controversies over guns and their regulation. In 2000, Michael A. Bellesiles published *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* with the prestigious Alfred Knopf publishers. It was garnished with an impressive array of reviews and won the Bancroft Award as the best historical study of the year. The book, however, was highly controversial and provoked a firestorm of critique. Right-wing gun advocates and their academic minions ferociously attacked Bellesiles's scholarship. It turns out he made mistakes, among other things, in his sample and interpretation of probate records that resulted in him underestimating the number of guns privately held in colonial America. In the ensuing scandal and ferocious attacks, Bellesiles was stripped of the Bancroft prize and eventually lost his job at Emory University.[6]

Bellesiles's history describes the origins of a national gun culture and the ways that the gun became central to American life and concepts of masculinity. He seems to have underestimated the extent of early colonial and post-Revolution gun culture, but

---

[5] On my approach to cultural studies and critical theory, see Kellner a Durham (2012) and Hammer and Kellner (2009).

[6] For a balanced and informed account of the Bellesiles controversy, see Wiener (2004). For Winkler's account of the promotion and limitations of Bellesiles's scholarship, see Winkler (2011, pp. 22–31).

convincingly depicts the explosion of gun culture at the time of the Civil War, with the mass production and marketing of guns in the post-Civil War period. He also convincingly reproduces the debates over guns at the time of the Constitutional Convention when Federalists fought for a centralized federal government with a controlled standing army, while anti-Federalists supported state militias (Bellesiles, 2000, p. 208f.). As Bellesiles argues: "The Constitutional Convention hammered out a document full of compromise and barely obtained concessions. On one point at least there was no disagreement: Congress should arm the militia" (2000, p. 213). Bellesiles sets out the debates about whether the militia should remain under the direct control of the states or federal government, whether to have a standing army, and what gun rights should be included. The result was the Second Amendment to the Bill of Rights: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (2000, p. 217).

The context of the Second Amendment suggests an original intent to bestow the right to bear arms within the confines of a militia, itself to be regulated by the federal government (i.e., as in the phrase "well regulated" militia). Some have argued that until the last few decades, the Second Amendment was largely read as supporting gun rights within militias, but not in terms of individual rights to bear firearms. But recently, accordingly to legal scholars and commentators, the Second Amendment has been interpreted by law professors, the courts, and the public to provide individual gun ownership rights to citizens, though controversies over the meaning of the Second Amendment continue until this day (Liptak, 2007).[7]

Clinton E. Cramer's 2006 *Armed America: The Story of How and Why Guns Became as American as Apple Pie* presents itself as a rejoinder to Bellesiles's account. Critics had already savaged Bellesiles's use of probate material to argue that he misinterpreted data and used incomplete samples that made gun ownership appear artificially low. Cramer (2006) attempted to establish the conventional view that America was awash with guns from the colonial period to the present. He also contested Bellesiles's account of foreign travelers to the United States in the early decades of the nineteenth century having failed to provide published descriptions of guns and violence in the United States. In chapter after chapter in the third section of his book, Cramer goes through the same and other accounts to show, quite to the contrary, that foreign visitors often remarked on American guns and violence as distinctive features of the country (2000, pp. 194–236).

Perhaps against his will, Cramer confirms that gun ownership and violence is a much more serious problem in US history than most historians and liberals would

---

[7] Liptak notes: "There used to be an almost complete scholarly and judicial consensus that the Second Amendment protects only a collective right of the states to maintain militias. That consensus no longer exists—thanks largely to the work over the last 20 years of several leading liberal law professors, who have come to embrace the view that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to own guns." Liptak suggests that opinions over the last two decades by liberal law professors helped produce a March 2007 decision whereby a federal appeals court struck down a gun control law on Second Amendment grounds. Adam Winkler (2011), who I discuss below, documents how the militia argument for interpreting the Second Amendment and gun rights has been replaced by interpreting the Second Amendment in terms of private gun ownership.

recognize. Bellesiles seemed to want to posit a Golden Age after the American Revolution when guns were not such an important part of American life. His narrative of American life from the postrevolutionary period to the 1840s stresses civilizing developments in American towns such as schools, libraries, bookstores, and cultural institutions, claiming that white-on-white violence was rare in this era of the Republic and that gun violence was minimal (2000, pp. 315f., 366f.). Cramer and other critics contest these claims, and US life probably had both the features of Bellesiles's more idealizing account and of more conventional accounts of the roughness and violence of frontier life.

I fear that initially Bellesiles and his impressive array of reviewers wanted to believe that gun culture was not so deeply entrenched in American history and that an earlier period could be held up as an ideal to emulate, whereas the problem of guns and violence may be more deeply rooted and intractable than liberals want to acknowledge. Both Bellesiles and Cramer emphasize the tremendous violence of the Indian wars that continued into the nineteenth century, the ferocity of the Civil War, and the eventual triumph of gun culture in the United States. Both also point out how the federal government from the beginning regulated gun ownership and use, preventing at different times gun ownership by blacks, indentured servants, Indians, and other stigmatized groups. Together the books present a national history of gun culture that has bequeathed serious problems to the present age.

Building on these studies, Adam Winkler argues in *Gun Fight* (2011) that Americans have had the right to bear arms since the beginning of the Republic, but that there is also a long tradition of gun control. Recognizing that the Second Amendment, with its talk of militias, is "maddeningly ambiguous," Winkler argues that a balance between gun control and gun rights marked US history until the current era when gun rights groups came to dominate the discourse. Winkler points out that the NRA strongly supported gun control until the 1970s, and that even the Ku Klux Klan started off as a gun control group—wanting to keep guns out of the hands of newly freed African American slaves.

Winkler opens by claiming that both "gun grabbers" and "gun nuts" pursue extremist objectives, either wanting to abolish gun ownership completely, or resisting even minimal gun control.[8] Winkler follows a 2011 Supreme Court ruling on *District of Columbia v. Heller* that expands the constitutional interpretation of the Second Amendment to move from a right to bear arms within militias to private gun ownership rights, and documents the fierce battles still going on, between gun rights

---

[8] Interestingly, Barbara Kopple's HBO documentary *Gun Fight* (2011), with the same title and year of release as Winkler's book, has quite a different take on the debate between gun control and gun rights forces in the United States. While Winkler presents the two camps as extremist and diametrically opposed, Kopple's film shows gun control forces who are extremely reasonable, including major figures in the Brady Center gun control camp. In the film *Gun Fight*, they insist that they are simply advocating the closure of gun show loopholes that allow individuals to buy guns from private dealers without any background check, registration, or paper trail. By contrast, Winkler presents the Brady group as extreme "gun grabbers" whose goal is banning and seizing all guns (p. 35), a position at odds with their portrayal in Kopple's film. It thus appears that Winkler's attempt to brand gun control advocates as unabashedly absolutist in a desire to ban guns completely is problematic.

and gun control proponents, recognizing that the gun rights forces backed by the NRA have the upper hand.

Obviously, properly understanding of the role of guns and gun culture in the epidemic of school shootings means taking seriously the need for gun control and for reform of laws concerning access to fire arms. Yet, since school shootings have multiple causes, multiple solutions are needed that ultimately involve a restructuring of school and society, including new concepts of masculinity, better mental health facilities and treatment in schools and society, better gun control, and a school curriculum that involves peaceful conflict resolution, courses in non-violence and peace studies, and teaching compassion and empathy, while attempting to overcome or diminish societal alienation.

Clearly, more rational policies about access to guns must be one of the solutions to the problem. It is heartening that groups appalled by the Virginia Tech shootings have been campaigning to close gun show loopholes where people can purchase firearms without adequate background checks (as did a girlfriend of one of the underage Columbine shooters). But ABC's *20/20* news magazine on April 10, 2009 broadcast a segment where young men bought scores of weapons on the floor of the gun show, or even in the parking lot, without showing any identity or having any check-up; so in many states this gun show loophole is glaring. Likewise, a *60 Minutes* report on April 12, 2009 showed the startling increase in gun sales and NRA membership after Obama's election in 2008, as if gun enthusiasts feared that the government was suddenly going to pull their rifles from their "cold dead hands."[9]

Barbara Kopples's 2011 HBO documentary *Gun Fight* also demonstrates how easy it is to purchase guns from private owners without background checks at gun shows, or using "straw purchasers" with a friend who can easily pass a background check to buy guns for those excluded because of age, mental health issues, or a criminal background, as did a friend of the Columbine shooters who bought guns for them at a gun show (Cullen, 2009, pp. 90, 122).

We also need to examine the role of the Internet as a source of ammunition and firearms, where anyone can assume a virtual identity and purchase lethal weapons and ammo; it is perhaps not coincidental that the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University shooters both bought weapons used in their shootings from the same online business ("Gun Dealer Sold," 2008).[10] On the political front, however, neither Democrats nor Republicans want to address the issue of gun control, which has

---

[9] On the April 12 *60 Minutes* report, see http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/04/09/60minutes/main4931769.shtml (accessed April 15, 2012). See also "Gun Sales: Will The 'Loophole' Close?" *CBS News*, July 26, 2009, retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18560_162-4931769.html (accessed April 15, 2012).

[10] Interestingly, Eric Thompson's company, TGSCOM Inc., which sold Cho and Kazmierczak weapons through his Web site www.thegunsource.com offered customers weapons at cost for two weeks to help citizens get the weapons they needed for their own self defense, see "Owner of Web-based Firearms Company that Sold to Virginia Tech and NIU Shooters to Forgo Profits to Help Prevent Future Loss of Life," April 25, 2008, *TGSCOM Inc.* at http://www.thegunsource.com/Article.aspx?aKey=Guns_at_Cost (accessed on April 16, 2012).

been a dead issue throughout the Obama administration and is unlikely to be addressed during the 2012 election year.[11]

Indeed, the problem of escalating gun violence and random shootings is a larger issue than gun control alone. With discernable and accelerating alienation, frustration, anger, and even rage in the schools, universities, workplaces, public spaces, and communities of contemporary US society, there is clearly a need for better mental health facilities and monitoring of troubled individuals. Yet, we also need the monitoring of institutions such as schools and the provision of mental health facilities to ensure that people are getting adequate treatment and we are not breeding a generation of killers, with guys and guns amok.

Schools and universities, for example, have been scrambling to ensure that they have counseling and monitoring programs in place to deal with troubled students, as well as safety plans for dealing with violence and crises. Schools should be assessed concerning how well they are caring for their students and providing a secure learning environment. After the Columbine shootings, there were strong demands for more student safety in schools, but often this led to increased surveillance, metal detectors, and harassment of students that in many cases increased student alienation and may increase the possibility of violence, requiring serious assessment of how well violence prevention programs have or have not worked in schools (Muschert, 2007).

To be sure, in an era of war and growing poverty, there is likely to be increased societal violence so that we will no doubt face problems of random and targeted shootings in the years to come. It is important, however, to address the issues of crises of masculinities, social alienation, and eruptions of societal violence and not use simplistic categories like mental health (i.e. "he's just crazy") to explain the issue, since mental illness is a complex phenomenon that has a variety of causes and expressions. It is also important not to blame scapegoats like the Internet, media, prescription drugs, or any one factor that may well contribute to the problem of rampage shooting, but is not the underlying cause. Rather we need to recognize the seriousness of the problems of school and rampage shootings and come up with an array of responses that will produce a more productive and humane society.

---

[11]On the failure of Obama and other leaders of the Democratic Party to address gun control during the 2008 presidential election, see Derrick Z. Jackson, "Missing on Gun Control," *The Boston Globe*, February 19, 2008, retrieved from http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2008/02/19/missing_on_gun_control/ (accessed April 4, 2012). Adam Winkler recently claimed: "Few presidents have shown as little interest in gun control as Barack Obama … It's as if 'avoid gun control at all costs' has become a plank in the Democratic Party platform." Cited in Mitchell Landsberg, "NRA is restless despite clout: The group is so worried about Obama that it is willing to ignore Romney's past." *The Los Angeles Times,* April 13, 2012, p. AA7.

22.2   Beyond the Culture of Male Violence and Rage

In the rest of the chapter, I argue that dealing with problems of school and societal violence will require reconstruction of male identities and critique of masculinist socialization and identities, as well as changing gun laws and stricter gun control. Unfortunately, the media and some gun cultures, gang culture, sports, and military culture produce ultramacho men as an ideal, producing societal problems from violence against women to gang murder (Katz, 2006). As Jackson Katz urges, young men have to renounce these ideals and behavior and construct alternative notions of masculinity. He concludes that reconstructing masculinity and overcoming aggressive and violent macho behavior and values provides:

> a vision of manhood that does not depend on putting down others in order to lift itself up. When a man stands up for social justice, non-violence, and basic human rights—for women as much as for men—he is acting in the best traditions of our civilization. That makes him not only a better man, but a better human being (2006, p. 270).

Major sources of violence in US society include cultures of violence caused by poverty; masculinist military, sports, and gun culture; ultramasculine behavior in the corporate and political world; high school bullying and fighting; general societal violence reproduced by media and in the family and everyday life, and in prisons, which are schools for violence. In any of these cases, an ultraviolent masculinity can explode and produce societal violence, and until we have new conceptions of what it means to be a man that include intelligence, independence, sensitivity, and the renunciation of bullying and violence, societal violence will no doubt increase.

Lee Hirsch's film *Bully* (2011) has called attention to the phenomenon of bullying in schools by showing intense bullying taking place on school buses, playgrounds, classrooms, and neighborhoods. Focusing on five victims of bullying from various regions in the United States, two of whom committed suicide, Hirsch's film puts on display shocking physical mistreatment of high school students by their peers. In an allegorical mode, the wildly popular film *The Hunger Game* (2012) also presents a stark view of a dystopic world in which only the strongest survive and violence is valorized as the key to survival, although this time the hero is a young woman.

Sports culture is another major part of the construction of American masculinity that can take violent forms. Most of the high school shootings of the 1990s involved young teenage boys who had been tormented by jocks, and went on to take revenge by asserting a hyperviolent masculinity in a shooting rampage. Larkin (2007, p. 205f.) provides a detailed analysis of "Football and Toxic High School Environments," focusing on Columbine. He describes how sports played a primary role in the school environment, how jocks were celebrities, and how they systematically abused outsiders and marginal youth like Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

The "pattern of sports domination of high schools," Larkin suggests, "is apparently the norm in America" (p. 206). Larkin notes how football "has become incorporated into a hyper-masculinized subculture that emphasizes physical aggression, domination, sexism, and the celebration of victory." He notes that "More than in any

other sport, defeat in football is associated with being physically dominated and humiliated" (p. 208). Further, it is associated with militarism, as George Carlin notes in his comedy routine:

> In football the object is for the quarterback, also known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use the shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing this aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy's defensive line.
>
> In baseball the object is to go home! And to be safe! (Carlin, cited in Larkin, 2007, p. 208).

Larkin argues that football culture has "corrupted many high schools," including Columbine where "the culture of hypermasculinity reigned supreme" (p. 209). Hence, Larkin concludes:

> If we wish to reduce violence in high schools, we have to de-emphasize the power of sports and change the culture of hypermasculinity. Football players cannot be lords of the hallways, bullying their peers with impunity, sometimes encouraged by coaches with adolescent mentalities (p. 210).

Hypermasculinity in sports is often a cauldron of homophobia and many of the school shooters were taunted about their sexuality and responded ultimately with a berserk affirmation of compensatory violence. Yet hypermasculinity is found throughout sports, military, gun, gang, and other male subcultures, as well as the corporate and political world, often starting in the family with male socialization by the father, and is reproduced and validated constantly in films, television programs, and other forms of media culture.

Obviously, media culture is full of violence and of the case studies in Chapter 3 in *Guys and Guns Amok* of violent masculinity, Timothy McVeigh, the two Columbine shooters, and many other school shooters allegedly deeply influenced by violent media culture. Yet, while media images of violence and specific books, films, TV shows, or artifacts of media culture may provide scripts for violent masculinity that young men act out, it is the broader culture of militarism, gun culture, extreme sports, ultraviolent video and computer games, subcultures of bullying and violence, and the rewarding of ultramasculinity in the corporate and political worlds that are major factors in constructing hegemonic violent masculinities. Media culture itself obviously contributes to this macho ideal of masculinity, but it is, however, a contested terrain between different conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and between liberal, conservative, and more radical representations and discourses (Kellner, 1995, 2010).

After dramatic school shootings and incidents of youth violence, there are usually attempts to scapegoat media culture. After the Virginia Tech shootings, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) issued a report in late April, 2007 on "violent television programming and its impact on children" that called for not only expanding governmental oversight on broadcast television, but also extending content regulation to cable and satellite channels for the first time and banning some shows from time-slots where children might be watching. FCC Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein, who is in favor of the measures, did not hesitate to evoke the Virginia Tech shootings:

> Particularly in light of the spasm of unconscionable violence at Virginia Tech, but just as importantly in light of the excessive violent crime that daily affects our nation, there is a basis for appropriate federal action to curb violence in the media (Gillespie, 2007).

In a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed piece, Nick Gillespie, editor of *Reason*, noted that the report itself indicated that there was no causal relation between watching TV violence and committing violent acts. Further, Gillespie argued that given the steady drop in incidents of juvenile violence over the last 12 years, reaching a low not seen since at least the 1970s, it was inappropriate to demonize media culture for acts of societal violence. Yet, in my view, the proliferation of media culture and spectacle requires renewed calls for critical media literacy so that people can intelligently analyze and interpret the media and see how they are vehicles for representations of race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and violence.

In the wake of the Columbine shootings, fierce criticism and scapegoating of media and youth culture erupted. Oddly, there was less finger-pointing at these targets after the Virginia Tech Massacre—perhaps because the Korean and Asian films upon which Cho modeled his photos and videos were largely unknown in the United States, and perhaps because conservatives preferred to target jihadists or liberals as nefarious influences on Cho (Kellner, 2008, Chap. 1). I want to avoid, however, both extremes: neither demonizing media and youth culture nor asserting that it is mere entertainment without serious social influence. There is no question but that the media nurture fantasies and influence behavior, sometimes sick and vile ones, and to survive in our culture requires that we are able to critically analyze and dissect media culture and not let it gain power over us. Critical media literacy empowers individuals over media so that they can establish critical and analytical distance from media messages and images. This provides protection from media manipulation and avoids letting the most destructive images of media gain power over one. It also enables more critical, healthy, and active relations with our culture. Media culture will not disappear and it is simply a question of how we will deal with it and if we can develop an adequate pedagogy of critical media literacy to empower our youth.

Unfortunately, there are few media literacy courses offered in schools in the United States from kindergarten through high school. Many other countries such as Canada, Australia, and England have such programs (see Kellner & Share, 2007). In the next section, I will suggest that to design schools for the new millennium that meet the challenges posed by student alienation and violence and that provide skills which students need for a high-tech economy requires a democratic reconstruction of education.

I argue that to address the problems of societal violence raised in these studies requires a reconstruction of education and society, and what Herbert Marcuse referred to as "a revolution in values" (Marcuse, 2001) and a "new sensibility."[12] The revolution in values involves breaking with values of competition, aggression, greed, and self-interest and cultivating values of equality, peace, harmony, and community. Such a revolution of values "would also make for a new morality, for new relations between

---

[12] On the new sensibility, see my introduction to Marcuse's collected papers on *Art and Liberation* (2006).

the sexes and generations, for a new relation between man and nature" (2001, p. 198). Harbingers of the revolution in values, Marcuse argued, are found in "a widespread rebellion against the domineering values, of virility, heroism and force, invoking the images of society which may bring about the end of violence" (ibid.).

The "new sensibility" in turn would cultivate needs for beauty, love, connections with nature and other people, and more democratic and egalitarian social relations. Marcuse believes that without a change in the sensibility, there can be no real social change, and that education, art, and the humanities can help cultivate the conditions for a new sensibility. Underlying the theory of the new sensibility is a concept of the active role of the senses in the constitution of experience that rejects the Kantian and other philosophical devaluations of the senses as passive, merely receptive. For Marcuse, our senses are shaped and molded by society, yet constitute in turn our primary experience of the world and provide both imagination and reason with its material. He believes that the senses are currently socially constrained and mutilated and argues that only an emancipation of the senses and a new sensibility can produce liberating social change.

Ultimately, addressing the problem of societal violence requires a democratic reconstruction of education and society, new pedagogical practices, new social relations, values, and new forms of learning. In the following section, I want to sketch out aspects of a democratic reconstruction grounded in key ideas of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Herbert Marcuse.

22.3   New Literacies, Democratization, and the Reconstruction of Education

To begin, we need to recognize a systemic crisis of education in the United States in which there is a disconnect between youth's lives and what they are taught in school. Already in 1964, Marshall McLuhan (1964) recognized the discrepancy between kids raised on a fast-paced and multimodal media culture and the linear, book- and test-oriented education of the time, where kids sit in a classroom all day. Since then there has been a proliferation of new media and technologies, education has been retreating to ever more conservative and pedantic goals, most egregiously during the Bush–Cheney era and its phony "No Child Left Behind" program which is really a front for "teaching for testing." In this policy, strongly resisted by many states and local school districts, incredible amounts of time are wasted preparing students for tests, while teachers and schools are basically rated according to their test results.[13]

Reconstructing education will involve an expansion of print literacy to a multiplicity of literacies. An expanded multimedia literacy and pedagogy should teach

---

[13] This misplaced pedagogy of teaching for testing did not just originate with the Bush administration, but has long been a feature of pedagogically challenged schools; see Janet Ewell, "Test-Takers, Not Students," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 2007, p. A19. For some compelling criticism of the Bush Administration's "No Child Left Behind" policies, see "Correcting Schools," *The Nation*, May 21, 2007, pp. 11–21 and Ratvich (2011).

how to read and critically dissect newspapers, film, TV, radio, popular music, the Internet, and other media of news, information, and culture to enable students to become active and engaged democratic citizens. While the 1960s cultural studies by the Birmingham school in England included a focus on critically reading newspapers, TV news and information programs, and the images of politics, much cultural studies of the past decades have focused on media entertainment, consumption, and audience response to specific media programs (Kellner, 1995). This enterprise is valuable and important, but it should not replace or marginalize taking on the system of media news and information as well. A comprehensive cultural studies will interrogate news and entertainment, journalism and information sourcing, and should include media studies as well as textual studies and audience reception studies as part of a reconstruction of education in which critical media literacy is taught from kindergarten through college (Kellner, 1995, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2007).

Critical media literacy needs to engage the "politics of representation" that subjects images and discourses of race, gender, sexuality, class, and other features to scrutiny and analysis, involving critique of violent masculinities, sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and other hurtful forms of representation. A critical media literacy also positively valorizes more progressive representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality, and notes how many cultural texts are ambiguous and contradictory in their representations.

The Internet and multimedia computer technologies and cultural forms are dramatically transforming the circulation of information, images, and various modes of culture, and the younger generation needs to gain multifaceted technological skills to survive in the high-tech information society. In this situation, students should learn both how to use media and computer culture to do research and gather information, as well as to perceive it as a cultural terrain which contains texts, spectacles, games, and interactive media which require a form of critical computer literacy. Youth subcultural forms range from "zines" or websites that feature an ever-expanding range of video, music, and multimedia texts to sites of political information and organization (Jones, 2002; Kahn & Kellner, 2005).[14]

Moreover, since the 1999 Seattle anti-corporate globalization demonstrations, youth have been using the Internet to inform and debate each other, organize oppositional movements, and generate alternative forms of politics and culture (Best & Kellner, 2001; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). After using the Internet to successfully organize a wide range of anti-corporate globalization demonstrations in Seattle, Washington, Prague, Toronto, and elsewhere, young people played an active role in organizing massive demonstrations against the Bush–Cheney administration invasion of Iraq, creating the basis for a oppositional anti-war and peace movement as the Bush–Cheney administration threatened an era of perpetual war in the new millennium. Obviously,

---

[14] Good sites that exhibit youth voices, participation, and politics include http://www.moveon.org; http://www.raisethefist.com; http://www.tao.com; and the youth blog site at http://www.Bloghop.com/topics.htm?numblogs=14566&cacheid=1044419966.3569 (accessed May 14, 2007). Since the advent of Facebook and social networking, youth sites and productions on YouTube, Twitter, and other new media forms have expanded exponentially.

it is youth that fights and dies in wars that often primarily serve the interests of corrupt economic and political elites. Today's youth is becoming aware that its survival is at stake and that thus it is necessary to become informed and organized on the crucial issues of war, peace, and the future of democracy and the global economy.

Likewise, groups are organizing to save endangered species, to fight genetically engineered food, to debate cloning and stem cell research, to advance animal rights, to join struggles over environmental causes such as climate change, global warming, and sustainability, and to work for creating a healthier diet and alternative medical systems. The Internet is a virtual treasury of alternative information and cultural forms with young people playing key roles in developing the technology and oppositional culture and using it for creative pedagogical and political purposes. Alternative sites of information and discussion on every conceivable topic can be found on the Internet, including important topics such as human rights or environmental education that are often neglected in public schools.

In 2011, youth used new media and social networking in the Arab uprisings which led to the overthrow of governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, with turmoil continuing through the Middle East. The same year there were dramatic demonstrations throughout Europe that used new media during the European debt crisis and Occupy Wall Street morphed into Occupy Everywhere movements throughout the world as youth carried out the most sustained political uprisings since the student revolts and anti-war and other movements of 1968 (Kellner, 2012).

Consequently, at present, technoliteracies involve not merely technical skills and knowledge, but also the ability to scan information, to interact with a variety of cultural forms and groups, and to intervene in a creative manner within the emergent social and political culture. Whereas youth is for the most part excluded from the dominant media culture, new multimedia culture and social networking is a discursive and political location in which youth can intervene, producing their own websites and personal pages, engaging in discussion groups, linking with others who share their interests, generating multimedia for cultural dissemination and a diversity of cultural and political projects. New media and social networking enable individuals to actively participate in the production of culture, ranging from discussion of public issues to creation of their own cultural forms, enabling those who had been previously excluded from cultural production and mainstream politics to participate in the creation of culture and socio-political activism.

Educated and empowered youth may be able to overcome the alienation and disempowerment evident in the school shooters and domestic terrorists discussed in this study. A postmodern pedagogy requires critical forms of print, media, computer, and multiple forms of technoliteracy, all of which are of crucial importance in the technoculture of the present and fast-approaching future (Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Kellner & Share, 2007), and may help enable youth to play a constructive role in the production of the future. Indeed, contemporary culture is marked by a proliferation of image machines that generate a panorama of print, sound, environmental, and diverse aesthetic artifacts within which we wander, trying to make our way through this forest of symbols. In addition, we need to begin learning how to read these images, these fascinating and seductive cultural

forms whose massive impact on our lives we have only begun to understand. Surely, education should attend to the multimedia culture and teach how to read images and narratives as part of media/computer/technoculture literacy, as well as to use new media and technologies to provide voice, educate, mobilize for social change, and construct a democratic future.[15]

Such an effort would be linked to a revitalized critical pedagogy that attempts to empower individuals so that they can analyze and criticize the emerging technoculture, as well as participate in producing its cultural and political forums and sites. More than ever, we need philosophical reflection on the ends and purposes of educational technology, and on what we are doing and trying to achieve with it in our educational practices and institutions. In this situation, it may be instructive to return to John Dewey and see the connections between education, technology, and democracy, the need for the reconstruction of education and society, and the value of experimental pedagogy in seeking solutions to the problems of education in the present day. A progressive reconstruction of education will urge that it be done in the interests of democratization, ensuring access to information and communication technologies for all, thereby helping to overcome the so-called digital divide and divisions between haves and have-nots, so that education is placed in the service of democracy and social justice (Dewey, 1916/1997; Freire, 1972, 1978). Such a reconstruction of education should also be made in light of Ivan Illich's critiques of the limitations and challenges of education in postindustrial societies (1970, 1971, 1973). Yet, we should be more aware than Dewey, Freire, and Illich of the obduracy of the divisions of class, gender, and race, and so work consciously for multicultural democracy and education. This task suggests that we valorize difference and cultural specificity, as well as equality and shared universal Deweyean values such as freedom, equality, individualism, and participation.

A major challenge for education today is thus to promote computer and media literacy to empower students and citizens to use a wide range of technologies to enhance their lives and create a better culture and society. In particular, this involves developing Internet projects that articulate with important cultural and political struggles in the contemporary world, developing pedagogies where students work together transmitting their technical knowledge to other students and their teachers, and teachers and students work together in developing relevant educational material, projects, and pedagogies in the experimental Deweyean and Freirean mode.

Teachers and students, then, need to develop new pedagogies and modes of learning for new information and multimedia environments. This should involve democratization and reconstruction of education as envisaged by Dewey, Freire, Illich, and Marcuse, in which education is seen as a dialogical, democraticizing, and experimental practice. New information technologies functioning along the lines of

---

[15] There is neither space nor context in this article to express the downsides of new media, social networking, and the growing power of technology in this society. For serious reservations concerning these phenomena, see Morozov (2011). To counter negative effects that new technologies and social media may produce, I am arguing the need for a critical pedagogy that delineates how to use new technologies constructively to enhance education and democracy and warns against its limitations and problematic aspects.

Illich's conceptions of "webs of learning" and "tools for conviviality" (1971, 1973) encourage the sort of experimental and collaborative projects proposed by Dewey, and can also involve the more dialogical and non-authoritarian relations between students and teachers that Freire envisaged. In this respect, the re-visioning of education involves a recognition that teachers can learn from students and that often students are ahead of their teachers in a variety of technological literacies and technical abilities. Many of us have learned much of what we know of computers and new media and technologies from our students. We should also recognize the extent to which young people helped to invent the Internet and have grown up in a culture in which they may have readily cultivated technological skills from an early age.[16] Peer-to-peer communication among young people is thus often a highly sophisticated matter and democratic pedagogies should build upon and enhance these resources and practices.

One of the challenges of contemporary education is to overcome the separation between students' experiences, subjectivities, and interests rooted in the new multimedia technoculture, and classroom situations grounded in print culture and traditional learning methods and disciplines (Luke & Luke, 2002). The disconnect can be addressed, however, by more actively and collaboratively bringing students into interactive classrooms, or learning situations, in which they are able to transmit their skills and knowledge to fellow students and teachers alike. Such a democratic and interactive reconstruction of education thus provides the resources for a democratic social reconstruction, as well as cultivating the new skills and literacies needed for the global media economy. So far, arguments for restructuring education mostly come from the hi-tech and corporate sectors that are primarily interested in new media and literacies for the workforce and capitalist profit. However, reconstruction can serve the interests of democratization as well as the elite corporate few. Following Dewey, we should accordingly militate for education that aims at producing democratic citizens, even as it provides skills for the workplace, and for social and cultural life.

Further, schools can teach non-violent conflict resolution and media literacy courses that are critical of the ultraviolent images of masculinity circulating in the mainstream media, and that offer alternative images. Young men and women, in turn, need to construct healthier conceptions of masculinity and femininity and see the destructive effects of violence. There have been educational interventions that address hypermasculinity, violence against women, homophobia, and which provide alternatives to a hegemonic violent masculinity. For example, since 1993 author and activist Jackson Katz and his colleagues have been implementing the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program, which trains high school, college, and professional athletes and other student leaders to speak out and oppose violence against women, gay-bashing, and other forms of domestic and sexual

---

[16] For instance, Mosaic, Netscape, and the first browsers were invented by young computer users, as were many of the first websites, list-serves, chat rooms, and so on. A hacker culture emerged that was initially conceptualized as a reconfiguring and improving of computer systems, related to design, system, and use, before the term became synonymous with theft and mischief, such as setting loose worms and viruses. On youth and Internet subcultures, see Kahn and Kellner (2003).

violence. Featuring interactive workshops and training sessions in single-sex and mixed-gender settings, as well as public lectures, MVP has been expanded throughout North America to deal with men's violence in many arenas, from the corporation to politics, police and intelligence agencies, and other institutional arenas where men's violence is a problem.[17]

This is not to say that masculinity per se, or the traits associated with it, are all bad. There are times when being strong, independent, self-reliant, and even aggressive can serve positive goals and resist oppression and injustice. A post-gendered human being would share traits now associated with women and men, so that women could exhibit the traits listed above and men could be more loving, caring, emotional, and vulnerable, appropriating positive traits associated with women. Gender itself should be deconstructed, and while we should fight gender oppression and inequality, there are reasons to question gender itself in a more emancipated and democratic world in which individuals create their own personalities and live out of the potential found traditionally in men and women.

22.4   Toward a New Radical Pedagogy

The radical pedagogy that I envisage guiding a democratic reconstruction of the present age will combine the work of Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School with that of a wide range of critical educators. Marcuse and the Frankfurt School provide both a framework to criticize education within the context of a one-dimensional society, and offer alternative pedagogical perspectives and a "re-schooling of society" (see the studies in Kellner, Cho, Lewis, & Pierce, 2009).

Similar to Marcuse, both Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich saw that a glaring problem with contemporary educational institutions was that they have become fixed in monomodal instruction, with homogenized lesson plans, curricula, and pedagogy, and that they neglect to address challenging political, cultural, and ecological problems. The development of convivial tools and radically democratic pedagogies can enable teachers and students to break with these models and engage in a form of Deweyean experimental education. The reconstruction of education can help to create subjects who are better able to negotiate the complexities of emergent modes of everyday life, labor, and culture, as contemporary life becomes ever more multi-faceted and dangerous. Supportive, dialogical, and interactive social relations in critical learning situations can promote cooperation, democracy, and positive social values, as well as fulfilling needs for communication, esteem, and politicized learn-

---

[17] Information, publications, films, and other materials on the Mentors in Violence Program can be found at http://www.jacksonkatz.com/ (accessed April 4, 2012). There is also a book, *Violence Goes to College: The Authoritative Guide to Prevention and Intervention* (Nicoletti, Spencer-Thomas, & Bollinger, 2001) assembled by a group that holds annual conferences on university violence in a multiplicity of forms and develops violence prevention strategies. Available online at http://books.google.com/books/about/Violence_Goes_to_College.html?id=T_ClourcxRwC (accessed on April 4, 2012).

ing. Whereas modern mass education has tended to see life in a linear fashion based on print models and has developed pedagogies which have divided experience into discrete moments and behavioral bits, critical pedagogies produce skills that enable individuals to better navigate and synthesize the multiple realms and challenges of contemporary life. Deweyean education focused on problem solving, goal-seeking projects, and the courage to be experimental, while Freire developed critical problem-posing pedagogies of the oppressed aiming at social justice and progressive social transformation, while Illich offered oppositional conceptions of education and alternatives to oppressive institutions. It is exactly this sort of critical spirit and vision, which calls for the reconstruction of education along with society, that can help produce more radicalized pedagogies, tools for social and ecological justice, and utopian possibilities for a better world.

A democratic reconstruction of education will involve producing democratic citizens and empowering the next generation for democracy. Moreover, as Freire reminds us (1972, 1998), critical pedagogy comprises the skills of both reading the word and reading the world. Hence, multiple literacies include not only media and computer literacies, but also a diverse range of social and cultural literacies, ranging from ecoliteracy (e.g., understanding the body and environment), to economic and financial literacy to a variety of other competencies that enable us to live well in our social worlds. Education, at its best, provides the symbolic and cultural capital that empowers people to survive and prosper in an increasingly complex and changing world and the resources to produce a more cooperative, democratic, egalitarian, and just society.[18]

Overcoming alienation of students and youth is of course a utopian dream, but in the light of growing societal violence, domestic terrorism, and school shootings, such a reconstruction of education and society is necessary to help produce a life worthy of human beings.

References

Bellesiles, M. A. (2000). *Arming America: The origins of a national gun culture*. New York: Knopf.

Best, S., & Kellner, D. (2001). *The postmodern adventure: Science, technology, and cultural studies at the third millennium*. New York: Guilford.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity. Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829–859.

Cramer, C. E. (2006). *Armed America: The story of how and why guns became as American as apple pie*. Nashville: Nelson Current.

Cullen, D. (2009). *Columbine*. New York: Twelve.

Davis, A., & Mendietta, E. (2005). *Abolition democracy: Beyond empire, prisons, and torture*. New York: Seven Stories.

---

[18] For my further perspectives on developing a critical theory of education and reconstructing education, see Kellner (2004, 2006).

Dayan, D., & Katz, E. (1992). *Media events: The live broadcasting of history*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Debord, G. (1970). *The society of the spectacle*. Detroit, MI: Black and Red.

Dewey, J. (1997). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press (Original work published 1916).

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Freire, P. (1998). *A Paulo Freire reader*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Gillespie, N. (2007, May 2). The FCC's not mommy and daddy. *The Los Angeles Times*, p. A23.

Gun dealer sold to both Va. Tech, NIU shooters. (2008, February 16). *USA Today*. Retrieved April 16, 2012 from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-02-16-gundealer-niu-vatech-shooters_N.htm.

Hammer, R., & Kellner, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches*. New York: Peter Lang.

Illich, I. (1970). *Deschooling society*. New York: Marion Boyars.

Illich, I. (1971). *Celebration of awareness*. London: Marion Boyars.

Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for conviviality*. New York: Harper & Row.

Jones, S. (2002). *The internet goes to college: How students are living in the future with today's technology*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2003). Internet subcultures and oppositional politics. In D. Muggleton (Ed.), *The post-subcultures reader* (pp. 299–314). Oxford: Berg.

Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2005). Oppositional politics and the internet: A critical/reconstructive approach. *Cultural Politics, 1*(1), 75–100.

Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2006). Reconstructing technoliteracy: A multiple literacies approach. In J. R. Dakers (Ed.), *Defining technological literacy* (pp. 253–274). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Katz, J. (2006). *The macho paradox*. Naperville: Sourcebook.

Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture*. London: Routledge.

Kellner, D. (2003a). *From September 11 to terror war: The dangers of the Bush legacy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kellner, D. (2003b). *Media spectacle*. London: Routledge.

Kellner, D. (2004). Technological transformation, multiple literacies, and the re-visioning of education. *E-Learning, 1*(1), 9–37.

Kellner, D. (2005). *Media spectacle and the crisis of democracy*. Boulder: Paradigm.

Kellner, D. (2006). Toward a critical theory of education. In I. Gur-Ze'ev (Ed.), *Critical theory and critical pedagogy today: Toward a new critical language in education* (pp. 49–69). Haifa: Studies in Education, University of Haifa.

Kellner, D. (2008). *Guys and guns amok: Domestic terrorism and school shootings from the Oklahoma City bombings to the Virginia Tech massacre*. Boulder: Paradigm.

Kellner, D. (2010). *Cinema wars: Hollywood film and politics in the Bush/Cheney era*. Chichester: Blackwell.

Kellner, D. (2012). *Media spectacle and insurrection, 2011: From the Arab uprisings to occupy everywhere!* London: Continuum.

Kellner, D., Cho, K. D., Lewis, T. E., & Pierce, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Marcuse's challenge to education*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kellner, D., & Durham, M. G. (Eds.). (2012). *Media and cultural studies: KeyWorks* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In D. Macedo & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp. 3–23). New York: Peter Lang.

Larkin, R. W. (2007). *Comprehending Columbine*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lieberman, J. (2006). *The shooting game: The making of school shooters*. Santa Ana: Seven Locks.

Luke, A., & Luke, C. (2002). Adolescence lost/childhood regained: On early intervention and the emergence of the techno-subject. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 1*(1), 91–120.

Liptak, A. (2007, May 7). A liberal case for the individual right to own guns helps sway the federal judiciary. *The New York Times*, p. A18.

Marcuse, H. (1970). *Five lectures*. Boston: Beacon.

Marcuse, H. (2001). Collected papers of Herbert Marcuse. In D. Kellner (Ed.), *Toward a critical theory of society* (Vol. 2). London: Routledge.

Marcuse, H. (2004). Collected papers of Herbert Marcuse. In K. Douglas (Ed.), *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*. London: Routledge (ed. with introduction by Douglas Kellner).

Marcuse, H. (2006). Collected papers of Herbert Marcuse. In D. Kellner (Ed.), *Art and liberation* (Vol. 4). London: Routledge.

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York: Signet.

Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass, 1*(1), 60–80.

Nicoletti, J., Spencer-Thomas, S., & Bollinger, C. (2001). *Violence goes to college: The authoritative guide to prevention and intervention*. Springfield, IL: CT Books.

Ravitch, D. (2011). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic (rev. ed).

US shooting suspect was teased. (2012, April 6). *PressTV*. Retrieved April 17, 2012 from http://www.presstv.ir/usdetail/234881.html.

Wiener, J. (2004) *Historians in Trouble*. New York: New Press.

Winkler, A. (2011). *Gunfight: The battle over the right to bear arms in America*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Appendix

Table Appendix-1 Rampage School Shootings between 1925 and 2011

No.[a]	Date	Name(s)	Gender	Age	Place	Crime scene	Deaths/ casualties[b]	Weapon(s)	Suicide
01	May 6, 1925	Unknown	Male Male	(−) (−)	Wilno, Poland	Joachim Lelewel Gymnasium	5*/10	Firearms, explosives	Yes
02	May 4, 1956	Billy R. Prevatte	Male	15	Prince George's County, USA	Maryland Park Junior High School	1/2	Firearm	No
03	March 16, 1959	Stanley Williamson	Male	19	Edmonton, Canada	Ross Sheppard High School	1/5	Firearm	No
04	June 11, 1964	Walter Seifert	Male	42	Cologne, Germany	Volkhoven Primary School	11*/22	Lance, flamethrower	Yes
05	August 1, 1966	Charles J. Whitman	Male	25	Austin, USA	University of Texas	16*/31	Firearms	No
06	May 22, 1968	Ernest L. Grissom	Male	15	Miami, USA	Drew Junior High School	0/2	Firearm	No
07	December 30, 1974	Anthony Barbaro	Male	17	Olean, USA	Olean High School	3/11	Firearms, bombs	No
08	May 28, 1975	Michael Slobodian	Male	16	Brampton, Canada	Brampton Centennial Secondary School	3*/13	Firearm	Yes
09	October 27, 1975	Robert Poulin	Male	18	Ottawa, Canada	St. Pius X Catholic High School	2*/5	Firearm	Yes
10	February 19, 1976	Neil J. Liebeskind	Male	18	Los Angeles, USA	Unknown	1/8*	Firearm	No
11	February 22, 1978	Roger E. Needham	Male	15	Lansing, USA	Everett High School	1/1	Firearm	No
12	January 29, 1979	Brenda Spencer	Female	16	San Diego, USA	Grover Cleveland Elementary School	2/9	Firearm	No
13	March 19, 1982	Patrick Lizotte	Male	18	Las Vegas, USA	Valley High School	1/2	Firearm	No

14	April 5, 1982	Kelvin Love	Male	25	Hot Springs, USA	Garland Community College	2/0	Firearm	No
15	January 20, 1983	David F. Lawler	Male	14	St. Louis County, USA	Parkway South Middle School	2*/1	Firearms	Yes
16	January 21, 1985	James A. Kearbey	Male	14	Goddard, USA	Goddard Junior High School	1/3	Firearms	No
17	December 10, 1985	Floyd Warmsley	Male	13	Portland, USA	Portland Junior High School	1/2	Firearm	No
18	August 12, 1986	Van A. Hull	Male	29	New York City, USA	New York City Technical College	1/4	Firearm	No
19	December 4, 1986	Kristofer Hans	Male	14	Lewiston, USA	Unknown	1/3	Firearm	No
20	March 2, 1987	Nathan D. Faris	Male	12	DeKalb, MO, USA	DeKalb High School	2*/0	Firearm	Yes
21	February 11, 1988	Jason Harless	Male	16	Pinellas Park, USA	Pinellas Park High School	1/3*	Firearm	No
22	September 26, 1988	James W. Wilson, Jr.	Male	19	Greenwood, USA	Oakland Elementary School	2/9	Firearm	No
23	December 14, 1988	Nicholas Elliott	Male	15	Virginia Beach, USA	Atlantic Shores Christian School	1/1	Firearm	No
24	November 1, 1991	Gang Lu	Male	28	Iowa City, USA	University of Iowa	6*/1	Firearm	Yes

Table Appendix-1 (continued)

No.[a]	Date	Name(s)	Gender	Age	Place	Crime scene	Deaths/ casualties[b]	Weapon(s)	Suicide
25	May 1, 1992	Eric C. Houston	Male	20	Olivehurst, USA	Lindhurst High School	2/12	Firearms	No
26	May 14, 1992	John McMahan	Male	14	Napa, USA	Unknown	0/2	Firearm	No
27	September 11, 1992	Randy E. Matthews	Male	17	Amarillo, USA	Pablo Duro High School	0/7	Firearm	No
28	December 14, 1992	Wayne Lo	Male	18	Gt. Barrington, USA	Simon's Rock College	2/4	Firearm	No
29	January 18, 1993	Gary S. Pennington	Male	17	Grayson, USA	East Carter High School	2/0	Firearm	No
30	July 8, 1993	Mark Duong	Male	28	Ogden, USA	Weber State University	1*/3	Firearm	No
31	April 5, 1994	Flemming Nielsen	Male	35	Aarhus, Denmark	Aarhus University	3*/2	Firearm	Yes
32	June 17, 1994	Garnett Bell	Male	46	Holywood, North. Ireland	Sullivan Upper School	0/6	Flamethrower	No
33	September 19, 1994	Unknown	Male	18	Soweto, South Africa	Unknown	0/7	Firearm	No
34	October 20, 1994	Ta Phung Cuong	Male	27	Toronto, Canada	Brockton High School	0/2	Firearm	No
35	October 12, 1995	Toby R. Sincino	Male	16	Blackville, USA	Blackville–Hilda High School	2*/1	Firearm	Yes
36	November 15, 1995	Jamie Rouse	Male	17	Lynnville, USA	Richland High School	2/1	Firearm	No
37	February 2, 1996	Barry Loukaitis	Male	14	Moses Lake, USA	Frontier Junior High School	3/1	Firearms	No
38	February 8, 1996	Douglas Bradley	Male	16	Palo Alto, USA	Mid-Peninsula Education Center	1*/3	Firearm	Yes

	Date	Name	Sex	Age	Location	School	Casualties	Weapon	
39	August 15, 1996	Fredrick M. Davidson	Male	36	San Diego, USA	San Diego State University	3/0	Firearm	No
40	September 17, 1996	Jillian Robbins	Female	19	State College, USA	Penn State University	1/1	Firearm	No
41	September 25, 1996	David Dubose, Jr.	Male	16	Scottsdale, USA	DeKalb Alternative School	1/0	Firearm	No
42	February 19, 1997	Evan Ramsey	Male	16	Bethel, USA	Bethel Regional High School	2/2	Firearm	No
43	March 8, 1997	Sergei Lepnev	Male	(−)	Kamyshin, Russia	Russian Military School	6/2	Firearm	No
44	October 1, 1997	Luke Woodham	Male	16	Pearl, USA	Pearl High School	2/7	Firearm	No
45	December 1, 1997	Michael Carneal	Male	14	West Paducah, USA	Heath High School	3/5	Firearm	No
46	December 15, 1997	Joseph C. Todd	Male	14	Stamps, USA	Stamps High School	0/2	Firearm	No
47	March 24, 1998	M. Johnson A. Golden	Male Male	13 11	Jonesboro, USA	Westside Middle School	5/10	Firearms	No
48	April 24, 1998	Andrew Wurst	Male	14	Edinboro, USA	James W. Parker Middle School	1/2	Firearm	No
49	May 21, 1998	Kipland P. Kinkel	Male	15	Springfield, USA	Thurston High School	2/21	Firearms	No
50	June 15, 1998	Quinshawn Booker	Male	14	Richmond, USA	Armstrong High School	0/2	Firearm	No
51	April 16, 1999	Shawn Cooper	Male	16	Notus, USA	Notus Junior-Senior High School	0/0	Firearm	No
52	April 20, 1999	Eric Harris Dylan Klebold	Male Male	18 17	Littleton, USA	Columbine High School	15*/23	Firearms, bombs	Yes

(continued)

Table Appendix-1 (continued)

No.[a]	Date	Name(s)	Gender	Age	Place	Crime scene	Deaths/casualties[b]	Weapon(s)	Suicide
53	April 28, 1999	Todd C. Smith	Male	14	Taber, Canada	W.R. Myers High School	1/1	Firearm	No
54	May 19, 1999	Unknown	Male	(–)	Tameer, Saudi Arabia	King Khalid High School	0/0	Firearm	No
55	May 20, 1999	Thomas Solomon, Jr.	Male	15	Conyers, USA	Heritage High School	0/6	Firearm	No
56	December 6, 1999	Seth Trickey	Male	13	Fort Gibson, USA	Fort Gibson Middle School	0/4	Firearm	No
57	December 7, 1999	Ali D.	Male	17	Veghel, Netherlands	De Leijgraaf High School	0/5	Firearm	No
58	March 10, 2000	Darrell Ingram	Male	19	Savannah, USA	Beach High School	2/1	Firearm	No
59	April 20, 2000	Unknown	Male	15	Ottawa, Canada	Cairine Wilson High School	0/5	Knife	No
60	February 22, 2001	Unknown	Male	14	Portland, USA	Unknown	0/3	Knife	No
61	March 5, 2001	Charles A. Williams	Male	15	Santee, USA	Santana High School	2/13	Firearm	No
62	March 6, 2001	Unknown	Male	13	Limeira, Brazil	Unknown	1/2	Firearm	No
63	March 22, 2001	Jason Hoffman	Male	18	El Cajon, USA	Granite Hills High School	0/5*	Firearms	No
64	April 20, 2001	Unknown	Male	14	Monroe, USA	Sherrouse Alternative School	0/0	Firearm	No
65	October 25, 2001	Unknown	Male	19	Sundsvall, Sweden	Vaestermalms High School	1/1	Knife	No
66	January 16, 2002	Peter Odighizuwa	Male	43	Grundy, USA	Appalachian School of Law	3/3	Firearm	No

67	February 19, 2002	Adam Labus	Male	22	Freising, Germany	Freising Vocational School [+ L.'s former workplace]	3*/3	Firearm, bombs	Yes
68	April 26, 2002	Robert Steinhäuser	Male	19	Erfurt, Germany	Johann Gutenberg Gymnasium	17*/7	Firearms	Yes
69	April 29, 2002	Dragoslav Petkovic	Male	17	Vlasenica, Bosnia	Vlascenica High School	2*/1	Firearm	Yes
70	October 21, 2002	Huan Yun Xiang	Male	36	Melbourne, Australia	Monash University	2/5	Firearms	No
71	October 28, 2002	Robert Flores, Jr.	Male	41	Tuscon, USA	University of Arizona	4*/0	Firearms	Yes
72	November 15, 2002	Anthony Cipriano	Male	18	Scurry, USA	Scurry-Rosser High School	0/0	Attempted arson	No
73	January 27, 2003	Edmar A. *Freitas*	Male	18	Taiúva, Brazil	Coronel B. Ortiz School	1*/8	Firearm	Yes
74	May 9, 2003	Biswanath Halder	Male	62	Cleveland, USA	Case Western Reserve University	1/2	Firearm	No
75	June 6, 2003	Anatcha Boonkwan	Male	17	Pak Phanang, Thailand	Pakanang School	2/4	Firearm	No
76	July 2, 2003	Florian K.	Male	16	Coburg, Germany	Coburg II Middle School	1*/1	Firearms	Yes
77	February 9, 2004	John W. Romano	Male	16	East Greenbush, USA	Columbia High School	0/1	Firearm	No
78	September 28, 2004	Rafael Solich	Male	15	Patagones, Argentina	Islas Malvinas Secondary School	3/6	Firearm	No

(continued)

Table Appendix-1 (continued)

No.[a]	Date	Name(s)	Gender	Age	Place	Crime scene	Deaths/casualties[b]	Weapon(s)	Suicide
79	November 24, 2004	James Lewerke	Male	15	Valparaiso, USA	Valparaiso High School	0/7	Machete	No
80	February 14, 2005	Unknown	Male	17	Neyagawa, Japan	Chuo Elementary School	1/2	Knife	No
81	February 14, 2005	Unknown	Male	16	Arlington, USA	Lamar High School	0/2	Sword	No
82	March 21, 2005	Jeffrey J. Weise	Male	16	Red Lake, USA	Red Lake Senior High School	10*/12	Firearms	Yes
83	June 10, 2005	Unknown	Male	18	Hikari, Japan	Hikari High School	0/58	Bombs	No
84	November 8, 2005	Kenneth Bartley, Jr.	Male	15	Jacksboro, USA	Campbell County High School	1/2	Firearm	No
85	March 14, 2006	James S. Newman	Male	14	Reno, USA	Pine Middle School	0/2	Firearm	No
86	August 30, 2006	Alvaro R. Castillo	Male	19	Hillsborough, USA	Orange High School	0/2	Firearms, smoke-bomb	No
87	September 13, 2006	Kimveer S. Gill	Male	25	Montreal, Canada	Dawson College	2*/19	Firearm	Yes
88	September 29, 2006	Eric Hainstock	Male	15	Cazenovia, USA	Weston High School	1/0	Firearms	No
89	October 9, 2006	Thomas White	Male	13	Joplin, USA	Memorial Middle School	0/0	Firearms	No
90	November 20, 2006	Sebastian Bosse	Male	18	Emsdetten, Germany	Geschwister Scholl School	1*/37	Firearms, bombs, etc.	Yes
91	April 10, 2007	Chad A. Escobedo	Male	15	Gresham, USA	Springwater Trail High School	0/10	Firearm	No
92	April 16, 2007	Seung-Hui Cho	Male	23	Blacksburg, USA	Virginia Tech University	33*/25	Firearms	Yes
93	May 15, 2007	Wu Jianguo	Male	17	Maoming, China	Dianbai County No. 3 Middle School	2/4	Knife	No

94	October 10, 2007	Asa H. Coon	Male	14	Cleveland, USA	Success Tech Academy	1*/5	Firearm	Yes
95	November 7, 2007	Pekka-Eric Auvinen	Male	18	Jokela, Finland	Jokela Upper Secondary School	9*/12	Firearm	Yes
96	December 9, 2007	Matthew J. Murray	Male	24	Arvada, USA	Missionary Training School [+ New Life Church]	5*/5	Firearm	Yes
97	January 8, 2008	Ian Chimenko	Male	13	Lower Alsace, USA	Antietam Middle-Senior High School	0/3	Knife	No
98	February 8, 2008	Latina Williams	Female	23	Baton Rouge, USA	Louisiana Technical College	3*/0	Firearm	Yes
99	February 14, 2008	Stephen P. Kazmierczak	Male	27	DeKalb, IL, USA	Northern Illinois University	6*/18	Firearms	Yes
100	February 25, 2008	Chen Wenzhen	Male	(–)	Leizhou, China	Leizhou No. 2 Middle School	3*/4	Knife	Yes
101	April 28, 2008	Philippe (–)	Male	15	Meyzieu, France	Olivier de Serres Middle School	0/4*	Knife	No
102	April 28, 2008	Wesley R. Johnson	Male	30	Washington, DC, USA	Excel Institute (Vocational Training School)	0/2	Firearms	No
103	August 17, 2008	Morné Harmse	Male	18	Krugersdorp, South Africa	Nic Diederichs Technical High School	1/3	Sword	No

(continued)

Table Appendix-1 (continued)

No.[a]	Date	Name(s)	Gender	Age	Place	Crime scene	Deaths/casualties[b]	Weapon(s)	Suicide
104	August 18, 2008	Unknown	Male	17	Eldorado Park, South Africa	Eldorado Park High School	0/0	Firearm	No
105	September 23, 2008	Matti J. Saari	Male	22	Kauhajoki, Finland	Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences	11*/1	Firearm	Yes
106	March 11, 2009	Tim Kretschmer	Male	17	Winnenden, Germany	Albertville School	16*/11	Firearm	Yes
107	April 10, 2009	Dimitris Patmanidis	Male	19	Agios Ioannis Rentis, Greece	OAED Vocational College	1*/3	Firearms, knife	Yes
108	April 26, 2009	Odane G. Maye	Male	18	Hampton, USA	Hampton University	0/3*	Firearms	No
109	August 24, 2009	Alex R. Youshock	Male	17	San Mateo, USA	Hillsdale High School	0/0	Explosives, sword, etc.	No
110	September 17, 2009	Georg R.	Male	18	Ansbach, Germany	Karolinen Gymnasium	0/11	Axe, knife, etc.	No
111	November 26, 2009	Unknown	Male	23	Pécs, Hungary	University of Pécs	1/3	Firearm	No
112	January 13, 2010	Unknown	Male	26	Perpignan, France	University of Perpignan	1/3	Knife	No
113	February 18, 2010	Unknown	Male	23	Ludwigshafen, Germany	Technics II Vocational School	1/0	Knife, alarm gun	No
114	February 23, 2010	Bruco S. E. Eastwood	Male	32	Littleton, USA	Deer Creek Middle School	0/2	Firearm	No
115	April 28, 2010	Keith Elliott	Male	(−)	Portsmouth, USA	Woodrow Wilson High School	0/0	Firearm	No

116	September 28, 2010	Colton Tooley	Male	19	Austin, USA	University of Texas	1*/0	Firearm	Yes
117	January 5, 2011	Robert Butler, Jr.	Male	17	Omaha, USA	Millard South High School	2*/2	Firearm	Yes
118	January 14, 2011	Unknown	Male	(–)	Vinnytsia, Ukraine	Unknown	0/3	Pneumatic gun	No
119	April 7, 2011	Wellington M. de Oliveira	Male	23	Realango, Brazil	Tasso da Silveira Municipal School	13*/12	Firearms	Yes
120	September 16, 2011	Unknown	Female	14	Arroyo, Puerto Rico	José D. Choudens Intermedia School	0/37	Hypodermic needle	No

[a]Sources are often contradictory. The list is unlikely to be exhaustive and we would welcome additions and corrections

[b]Asterisk (*) denotes figures that include the perpetator(s) among the dead or injured

Index