Chapter 7
Legitimated Adolescent Violence: Lessons from Columbine

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> *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."*

> (Gibbs and Roche 1999)

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, harassment, 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 targeted, 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

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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 partici-
pated 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 dis-
rupt 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 authori-
ties, 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.

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