

Chapter 8

Jeffrey Weise and the Shooting at Red Lake Minnesota High School: A Behavioral Perspective

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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?”

The information contained in this chapter is the work of Mary Ellen O'Toole, and does not represent the opinions of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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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 (Nichoff, 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 students¹ 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.

¹Teen 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.

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