

• School Shooters:

Who They Are and How to Identify Them

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School Safety:
Prepare, Don't Panic

Impact of a Large-Scale Shooting

- Massive media coverage
- Increased anxiety
- Skewed perception of danger

Misleading Statistics

- Be careful about what you read
- Different researchers count school shootings very differently
- Media seize on alarming data

Question

- Statistically speaking, as you go about your day, where are you most in danger?
- Answer:
 - Your vehicle

Comparisons

- 1,300x more people die in traffic accidents
- More students killed in school parking lot traffic accidents than school shootings
- School homicides account for about 1/10 of 1% (.001) of homicides in USA
- You are nearly ten times more likely to be hit by lightning than to die in a school shooting.

Schools Are Safe

- School is the safest place our children can be.
- And we can make it even safer.

Language Warning:
Profanity and Violence

Lessons for Today

- Different types of shooters commit different types of attacks for different reasons
 - There is no one profile of a school shooter.
 - There is no one cause of a school shooting.
 - There is no one type of school shooting.

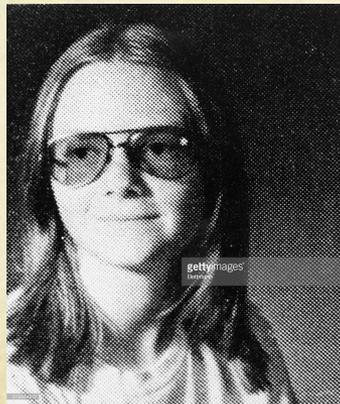
Lessons for Today

- To maximize prevention we must recognize
 - the diversity of school shooters
 - what drives their attacks
 - the warning signs of potential violence

The Stereotype

- School shooters are
 - teenaged
 - white males
 - who are loners
 - and get picked on so badly
 - that they kill the bullies who abused them.

Beyond the Stereotype



Murder = Power

Psychology

Three categories

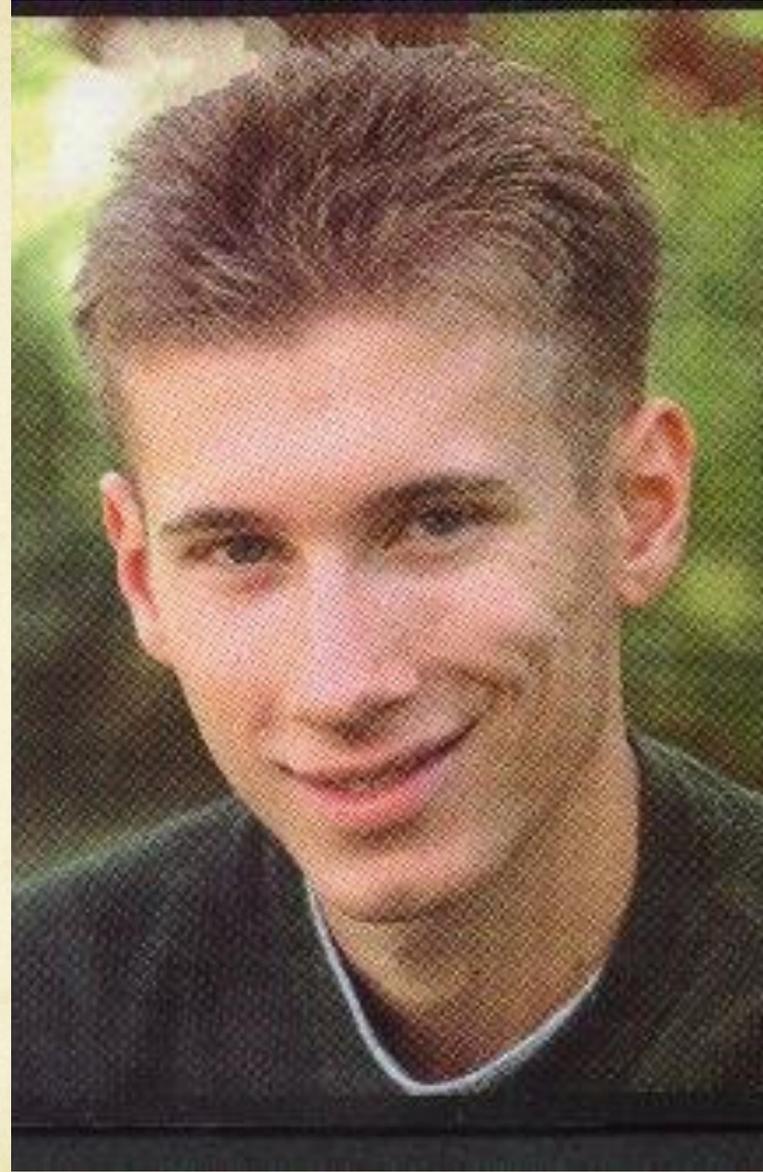


Psychopathic Shooters

- Extreme narcissism
- Reject morality
- Lack of empathy, guilt, remorse
- Sadistic
- Impression management
- Feel like the victim: nothing is their fault
- Entitled and easily enraged

Eric Harris

Columbine H.S.
Littleton, Colorado
April 20, 1999
Age 18
Killed: 8
Wounded: 13
Psychopathic



Eric Harris: Extreme Narcissism

- “Ich bin Gott” (German: “I am God”)
- “I feel like God and I wish I was, having everyone being OFFICIALLY lower than me.”
- “My belief is that if I say something, it goes. I am the law, if you don’t like it, you die.”

Eric Harris: Rejection of Morality

- “‘Morals’ is just another word.”
- “I really don’t give a good god damn about what you think is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong.’”
- “There’s no such thing as True Good or True evil.”

Eric Harris: Lack of Empathy

- “Kill all retards. . . People spend millions of dollars on saving the lives of retards, and why. I don’t buy that shit like ‘oh, he’s my son, though!’ so the fuck what, he ain’t normal, kill him. Put him out of his misery. He is only a waste of time and money.”

Eric Harris: Sadistic

- “I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to their heart, and yank the fucking blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a wolf, show them who is god. Strangle them, squish their head, bite their temples in the skull, rip off their jaw, rip off their collar bones, break their arms in half and twist them around, the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahhh...so much to do and so little chances.”

Eric Harris: Impression Management

- “If [I] have to cheat and lie to everyone then that’s fine. . . I have confidence in my ability to deceive people.”
- “I could convince them that I'm going to climb Mount Everest, or I have a twin brother growing out of my back. I can make you believe anything.”

Eric Harris: Impression Management

- Apology letter to owner of van he robbed:
 - “I strongly feel I owe you an apology and explanation. . . I am truly sorry for what I have done.”
- Teacher’s reaction to Eric’s essay about his arrest:
 - “It’s not one action that makes a person. I would trust you in a heartbeat.”

Eric Harris: Journal entry

- “Isn’t America supposed to be the land of the free? How come, if I’m free, I can’t deprive a stupid fucking dumbshit from his possessions if he leaves them sitting in the front seat of his fucking van out in plain sight and in the middle of fucking nowhere on a Frifuckingday night. . . Fucker should be shot.”

Eric Harris: Impression Management

- Parent of a friend
 - “The ultimate little gentleman.”
- Teacher comments
 - “Positive attitude and good cooperation.”
 - “Strong interest and participation.”
 - “Eric is doing awesome!”
- Probation officer (early termination, 2/3/99)
 - “Really nice young man. Seems responsible and remorseful. . . Prognosis: Good. Eric is a very bright young man who is likely to succeed in life.”

Psychotic Shooters

- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Disorganized speech, writing, behavior
- Impaired social/emotional functioning
 - Profound alienation
 - Envied more successful peers

Kip Kinkel

Thurston High School

Springfield, Oregon

May 20-21, 1998

Age 15

Killed: 4

Wounded: 25

Psychotic



Kip Kinkel: Psychotic

- Hallucinations
 - Heard 3 voices starting at age 12
- Paranoid delusions
 - Prepared for invasion by China
 - Thought government might have put computer chip in his brain

Kip Kinkel: Anguish and Rage

- “I don’t know who I am. . . I hate myself for what I’ve become. . . I am repulsive. . . My eyes hurt. They hurt so bad. They feel like they are trying to crawl out of my head. Why aren’t I normal?”
- “I am so full of rage that I feel I could snap at any moment. . . I sound so pitiful. People would laugh at this if they read it. I hate being laughed at. But they won’t laugh after they’re scraping parts of their parents, sisters, brothers, and friends from the wall of my hate. . . Please. Someone, help me. . . Oh God, I am so close to killing people. So close.”

Kip Kinkel: Psychotic

- “I have just killed my parents! . . . I’m so sorry. I am a horrible son. I wish I had been aborted. I destroy everything I touch. . . My head just doesn’t work right. God damn these VOICES inside my head. I want to die. I want to be gone. But I have to kill people. I don’t know why. I am so sorry! Why did God do this to me?”

Traumatized Shooters

- Unstable, chaotic, fragmented families
- Parental substance abuse
- Parental criminal behavior
- Physical, sexual, emotional abuse
- Frequent relocations
- Changing caregivers

Jeffrey Weise

Red Lake H.S.

Red Lake, Minnesota

March 21, 2005

Age 16

Killed: 9

Wounded: 7

Traumatized



Jeffrey Weise: Traumatized

- “My mom used to abuse me a lot when I was little. She would hit me with anything she could get her hands on, she used to drink excessively, too. She would tell me I was a mistake, and she would say so many things that it’s hard to deal with them or think of them without crying.”

Jeffrey Weise: Traumatized

- “Most people have never dealt with people who have faced the kind of pain that makes you physically sick at times, makes you so depressed you can’t function, makes you so sad and overwhelmed with grief that eating a bullet or sticking your head in a noose seems welcoming.”

Jeffrey Weise: Traumatized

- “I had went through a lot of things in my life that had driven me to a darker path than most choose to take. I split the flesh on my wrist with a box opener, painting the floor of my bedroom with blood I shouldn't have spilt. After sitting there for what seemed like hours...I had the revelation that this was not the path.”

Jeffrey Weise: Traumatized

- “So fucking naïve man, so fucking naïve. Always expecting change when I know nothing ever changes. I’ve seen mothers choose their man over their own flesh and blood. I’ve seen others choose alcohol over friendship. I sacrifice no more for others, part of me has fucking died and I hate this shit. I’m living every man’s nightmare and that single fact is kicking my ass. I really must be fucking worthless. This place never changes, it never will. Fuck it all.”

Jeffrey Weise: Traumatized

- “16 years of accumulated rage suppressed by nothing more than brief glimpses of hope, which have all but faded to black. I can feel the urges within slipping through the cracks, the leash I can no longer hold.”

Multi-determined Violence

- Most people who are psychopathic, psychotic, or traumatized never kill anyone
- Many factors come together to cause rampage attacks

Biology

Damaged Masculinity

Damaged Identity/Masculinity

- Biological challenges
 - Sickly children, developmental delays, birth defects, fear of sterility, unusually short
 - Smallest, weakest, most disempowered people may be most likely to use guns for power

Eric Harris: Body-Related Issues

- Chest deformity: surgery at ages 12 and 13
- Teased for having a big head on a skinny body
- “I have always hated how I looked. . . That’s where a lot of my hate grows from. The fact that I have practically no self-esteem, especially concerning girls and looks and such.”
- “how fucking weak I am”
- “the weird looking Eric KID”

Eric Harris Drawing



Eric Harris:

The Need for Power/Masculinity

- “Maybe I just need to get laid. Maybe that’ll just change some shit around.”
- “I would love to be the ultimate judge and say if a person lives or dies — be godlike.”
- “We...have...GUNS! . . . I feel more confident, stronger, more God-like.”

Sadism = Self-Elevation

- “He is sadistic because he feels impotent, unalive, and powerless. He tries to compensate for this lack by having power over others, transforming the worm he feels himself to be into a god.”
 - Erich Fromm
- Eric Harris: “weird-looking Eric KID” → god-hood

Further Reading

- “A Bio-Psycho-Social Model of School Shooters”
 - <https://schoolshooters.info/articles/general-research>
- “Patterns Among School Shooters: Body-Related Issues and the Military”
 - <https://schoolshooters.info/information/general-research>

Social

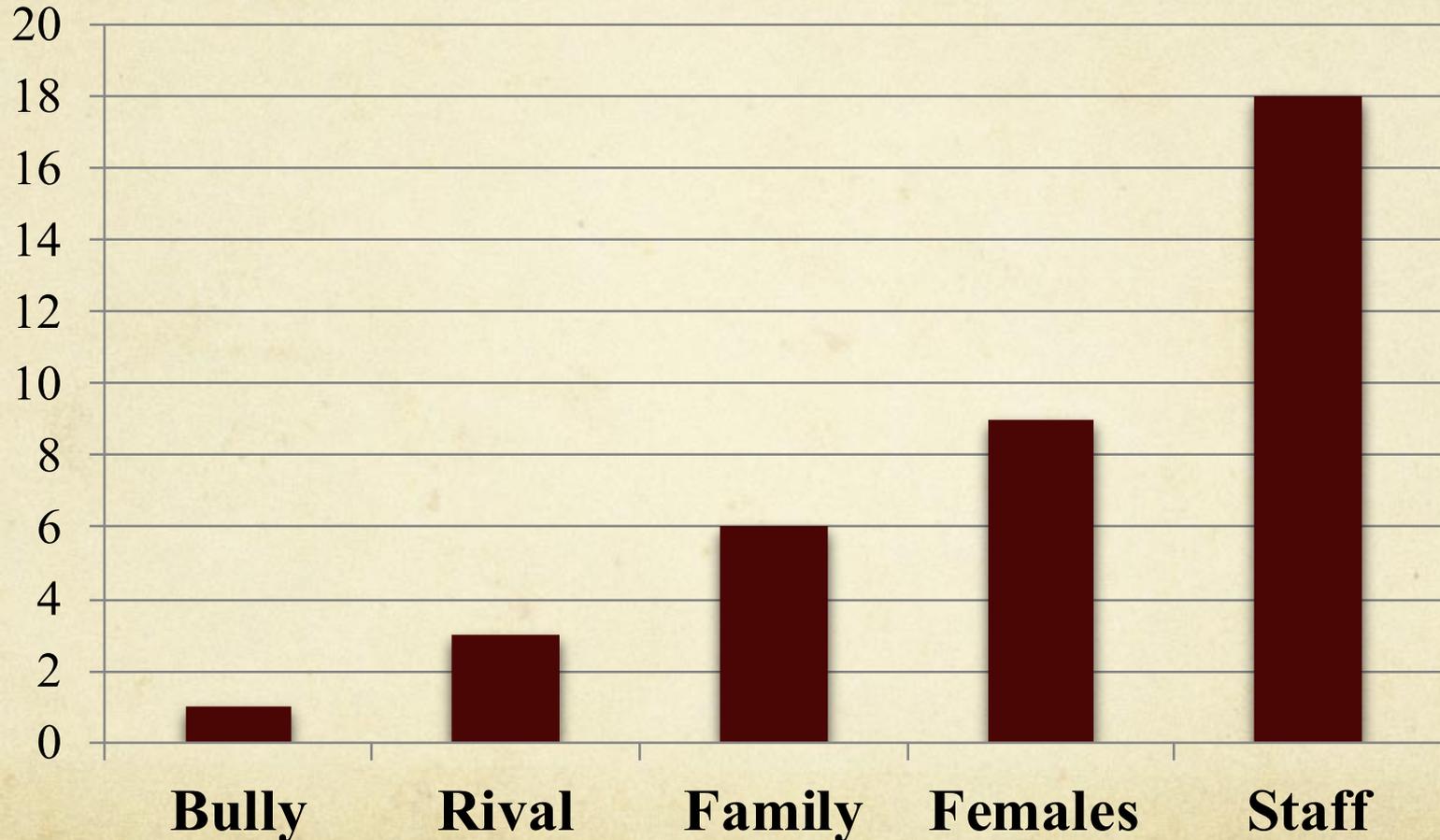
Setbacks, Failures, Frustrations •

Precipitating Events

- Educational issues
 - Academic failures/disciplinary problems
- Romantic failures
- Legal trouble
- Conflicts with peers
- Loss of potential future
- Thwarted military aspirations

of Shooters Who Targeted Victims

(out of 48 shooters)



Targeted Victims: People with Power

- Authority figures
 - Parents
 - Teachers
 - Administrators
- Peers who made the perpetrators feel small
 - Girls
 - Rivals

Police as Targets

- Eric Harris
 - “cops! Stupid law enforcing people!!!”
 - The ONE person you hate the most: “are cops one person?”
 - “there’s a cop – let’s get that cop”
- Brenda Spencer
 - Fantasized and planned about killing police
 - “She wanted to ‘blow a police officer’s head off.’”
 - “I nailed me a good pig. . . I have to go. I want to shoot some more. I wanna get me another pig.”

External Influences

- Role models and ideologies
 - Hitler, Manson, serial killers, mass murderers, school shooters (Columbine)
 - Nazism, satanism, misogyny, white supremacy
 - Fictional role models
 - Books, movies, videogames
- Peer encouragement
- Fame-seeking

Violence as Self-Enhancement

- Chris Harper-Mercer re: Vester Flanagan
 - “So many people like him are all alone and unknown, yet when they spill a little blood, the whole world knows who they are. A man who was known by no one, is now known by everyone. His face splashed across every screen, his name across the lips of every person on the planet, all in the course of one day. Seems the more people you kill, the more you’re in the limelight.”
 - August 31, 2015

Combined Influences

Combination of who they are and what happens to them

○ Biological

- Body-related issues/damaged masculinity

○ Social

- Setbacks, failures, rejections, stresses

○ Psychological

- Psychopathic
- Psychotic
- Traumatized

○ External influences

- Role models
- Ideologies
- Peer encouragement
- Fame-seeking

Threat Assessment

Responding to Warning Signs

Prevention vs. Response

- **Emergency response:** to minimize damage from an attack
 - Goes into effect after an armed attacker arrives at the school
- **Threat assessment:** to prevent attacks by identifying potential threats
 - Intervention so that you don't have an armed attacker showing up at the school

Threat Assessment

- Purpose:
 - to differentiate real threats from false alarms and guide intervention and follow-up
- Do not limit inquiry to the student
 - May need to include
 - Faculty, staff, administrators
 - Peers
 - Family
 - Computer

Where Warning Signs Appear

- Orally: conversation, videos
- Writings: journal, online, social media, school assignments, letters
- Computer searches
- Bedrooms

Responsiveness vs. Knee-Jerk Reactions

- Maintaining safety awareness is different than panic and taking action without thinking through the situation
 - 8-year-old client
 - 13-year-old client

Punishment is Not Prevention

- Suspension/expulsion do not eliminate the danger
 - May increase anger or sense of rejection, failure, hopelessness
 - Out of school may mean out of sight of supervision
 - Students could be obtaining weapons, etc.
- Does not resolve the concern
 - Suspended/expelled students have committed school shootings

Warning Signs

- Warning signs are **comments** and **behaviors** that indicate someone is planning an attack
 - Leakage
 - Attack-related behaviors

Leakage

- Bragging about upcoming attack
- Warning people to stay away
- Trying to recruit peer to help with attack
- Admiring/imitating other shooters
- Posting writings, photos, videos that suggest/indicate impending violence
- Threats

Leakage: Threats

- Direct threat *to* intended victim
 - “When I come back with a rifle, you’re going to be the one I shoot.”
- Indirect threat *about* an intended victim
 - “The principal won’t live to see Homecoming.”
- Implied threat
 - “You better watch your back if you’re going to flunk me.”
 - “You know who I am and what is going to happen.”

Attack-Related Behavior

- Diagramming the school
- Writing a hit-list
- Planning attack
- Obtaining weapons/materials
- Rehearsing: practicing with guns/bombs
- Selecting intended victims

Evidence of Imminence

- “Sometimes I feel like just getting a gun from somewhere and going on a rampage.”
- “I stole my Dad’s shotgun and Friday at noon I’m getting revenge in the cafeteria.”
- **More details → more imminent risk**
 - Time, place, method, access to means

Grandiose Fantasies

- “It’ll be like the LA riots, the Oklahoma bombing, WWII, Vietnam...all mixed together.”
- “We will hijack a hell of a lot of bombs and crash a plane into NYC.”
- “I have a goal to destroy as much as possible. . . I want to burn the world.”
- “I say “KILL MANKIND” no one should survive.”

“First we will go to the house of --- and --- in the morning before school starts. . . We go in, we silently kill each inhabitant and then pin down --- and ---. Then take our sweet time pissing on them, spitting on them, and just torturing the hell out of them. Once we are done there we set time bombs to burn the houses down. . . then get totally prepared and during A-lunch we go in and park in our spots. With sunglasses on we start carrying in all of our bags of terrorism and anarchism shit into our table. Being very casual and silent about it. It’s all for a science/band/English project or something. Then, we sit down, play some pump-up music, light a \$50 stogie, and get ready to start throwing out the first wave of crickets [small bombs]. Then we light them and throw them as far as we can. . . Then I open fire. . . Then if we can we go upstairs and go to each classroom and pick off fuckers at our will.”

Grandiose Fantasies

- “All women must be quarantined like the plague they are, so that they can be used in a manner that actually benefits a civilized society. In order to carry this out, there must exist a new and powerful type of government, under the control of one divine ruler, such as myself ... The first strike against women will be to quarantine all of them in concentration camps. At these camps, the vast majority of the female population will be deliberately starved to death.”

“The first people I would have to kill are my two housemates, to secure the entire apartment for myself as my personal torture and killing chamber. . . After doing a lot of extensive research within the last year, I found out that the sorority with the most beautiful girls is Alpha Phi Sorority. I know exactly where their house is, and I’ve sat outside it in my car to stalk them many times. . . I will sneak into their house at around 9:00 p.m. on the Day of Retribution, just before all of the partying starts, and slaughter every single one of them with my guns and knives. If I have time, I will set their whole house on fire. . . After I have killed all of the sorority girls at the Alpha Phi House, I will quickly get into the SUV before the police arrive, assuming they would arrive within 3 minutes. I will then make my way to Del Playa, splattering as many of my enemies as I can with the SUV, and shooting anyone I don’t splatter.”

Leakage to Peers: Explicit

Warning Signs: Example #1

- warned kids “something big is going to happen on Monday” and told them to stay away from the morning prayer group; told at least one that it would involve “blood and guts”
- told peer that Monday would be the “day of reckoning” and warned him to stay away
- “We should go into the principal’s office and shoot them”
- Said it would be “cool to walk down the hall and kill people; this peer had seen him with gun in school several times
- peer heard him fantasize about taking over the school; saw him bring gun to school a few weeks before attack

Warning Signs: Example #2

- 13-year-old
 - told peer, “some people are going to die”
 - “he said he was gonna kill a lot of people”
 - “all my girlfriends who ever broke up with me, I am gonna kill them”
 - “he said he was going to ‘cut school tomorrow and bring a gun to school, and we’d find out if we’d live or die.’”
 - told girl that if she went outside the next day during fifth period, she would die
 - He said “he was going on a killing spree”
 - said he was going to “get back at some people from last year” and “kill them and stuff”

Warning Signs: Example #2

- 11-year-old:
 - He told a girl that he and his friend were going to pull the fire alarm, set up a sniper position in a field, and shoot people as they exited the building. Two days after this, however, he said he wasn't going to go through with it.
 - Later, he stood on a table in the cafeteria during lunch and said, "You're all going to die."

Warning Signs in Assignments

Student Writings

- Guidelines are neat
- Life is messy
- What you see is often the tip of the iceberg
- When do you look for what might be hidden?

Case Example #1

- Multiple writings (fiction/nonfiction) about
 - Military
 - Weapons
 - Firearm laws
 - School shootings
- Research paper on Nazis
- Grandfather served in WWII; father served in military; grew up on military bases

Case Example #1

- List 25 things that make you different
 - my bullet hanging from my rearview mirror
 - my knowledge of fireworks
 - my knowledge of conventional/amateur explosives
 - my anger management problems
 - the large collection of bullet shells I have

Case Example #1

- Pick the most important item and write about it
 - “*Doom* is so burned into my head my thoughts usually have something to do with the game.”
 - “What I can’t do in real life, I try to do in *Doom*.”

Case Example #1

- “When I had to give away all my weapons to my parents. It was after I got into serious trouble with the law.”
- “What’s 35% of 100? I think that this is absolutely ridiculous, people who can’t answer questions like that should be shot. . . It’s a pity natural selection doesn’t apply to humans.”

Case Example #1

- Pick a song that best expresses who you are
 - Stray Bullet: “I believe that this song describes my actions and thoughts the best. I have often been described by my friends and even family as a ‘stray bullet.’”
- Imagine yourself as inanimate object
 - He chose a shotgun shell: wrote about his significant other being a shotgun and his wish being “to kill”
- In psychology class, discussed dreams of shooting people

Case Example #1

- “I want to take that sax and toss it into a vat of molten steel along with its owner or maybe charge into their gay little night club blasting away with an AR-15 and kill everyone of those punkass happy jazzy fuck sticks.”

Case Example #1

- Video Production Class
 - He and a friend make film about two boys who hire themselves out as hitmen
 - Film themselves gunning down students
 - Written part of project:
 - “The business is basically to kill people who anger our clients.”

Case Example #1

- 2nd Student
- Report on Charles Manson
 - “The question of whether or not he is insane is a question of opinion; which cannot have a ‘true’ right answer.”
 - Manson and his family can “logically explain his actions.”

Case Example #1

- 2nd student: short story of man murdering students
- “He stopped, and gave me a look I will never forget. If I could face an emotion of god, it would have looked like the man. I not only saw in his face, but also felt emanating from him power, complacency, closure, and godliness. The man smiled, and in that instant, thru no endeavor of my own, I understood his actions.”

Case Example #1

- Killer in short story was described as:
 - 6'4" tall
 - Left-handed
 - Wore black trench coat
- The student was:
 - 6'4" tall
 - Left-handed
 - Wore black trench coat

What Others Knew

- They committed neighborhood vandalism
- They set off home-made bombs
- They took bomb to work
- His parents found bomb at home
- His webpages had details about making bombs
- His webpages with explicit homicidal rants, even mentioning specific person to kill

What Others Knew

- Talked about killing people, blowing up school
- Said he needed lot of propane tanks for Hitler's birthday
- Said in class that unfit people deserved to be killed
- Tried to get friends to buy him guns; got guns illegally; sawed off barrels (felony)

What Others Knew

- Planned to make video of him and friend shooting people in school cafeteria
- Life revolved around guns; all he ever talked about
- Joked about senior prank of riding dirt bikes through school and shooting it up
- Online chat: “I would love to be the ultimate judge and say if a person lives or dies...and say “you don’t deserve to live, you are worthless, die.”
- Wrote in peer’s yearbook: “natural selection needs a boost, like me with a shotgun”

Case Example #2

- “Romeo and Juliet” assignment: write from point of view of one of the characters:
- Student chose Tybalt
- “But you know me, I loathe all of them. . . I am no longer blind in my hatred, I can see with my hate. . . Blood will flow until they are all dead. . . [after killing Mercutio] This was the first moment in my life where I had taken the life of another. I loved it, it dispelled all the anger and animosity I was feeling.”

Case Example #2

- Teacher reports that he gave an oral report on how to build bombs from household materials
- Really seemed to know what he was talking about

Case Example #2

- “No, I don't believe in love at first sight because love is an evil plot to make people buy alcohol and firearms. . . That is why you go to a pawn shop and buy an AR-15 because you are going to execute every last mother fucking one of you. . . I plan to live in a big black hole. My firearms and [illegible] will be the only things to fight my isolation. I would also like to point out Love is a horrible thing. It makes things kill and hate.”

Warning Signs at School

- Talked about making bombs, being next Unabomber
- Liked Jonesboro shooting:
 - “cool,” “someone should do that around here”
- Said he might commit school shooting
- Said he might bomb the school during a pep rally
- Tried to recruit a peer to join the attack
- Peers sold him guns three times

Failure to Follow Procedures

- “We’d crafted preventive measures. We’d created a safety wall, but the rules we set up were ignored when the moment of truth arrived. They were not followed because, quite simply, he was Kinkel. Instead of considering the fact of the gun, they considered the family of the boy who was caught with it.”
 - Assistant Principal

Barriers to Reporting

- Denial: General
 - It can't happen in our town/school.
- Denial: Specific
 - He would never do it.
 - He's too young/small.
 - He's from a good family.
 - I know the parents.

Barriers to Reporting

- Fear
 - Don't want to make him angry
 - Don't want to get him in trouble
 - Of over-reacting, of not having sufficient information

Barriers to Reporting

- Faulty reasoning
 - He said he didn't mean it/wasn't going to do it.
 - He's weird, he always says strange things.
 - He's been saying that for months and hasn't done anything.
 - If he were going to do it, he wouldn't announce it.

Barriers for Staff

- “We don’t want to stigmatize him.”
- “We don’t want the parents to sue us.”
- “We referred him to a psychologist—it’s out of our hands.”
- “We’re not allowed to break confidentiality.”
(FERPA)

The Karl Pierson Attack

- September, 2013: homicidal threat against teacher
 - School knew of threat and investigated
 - Threat assessment result: low risk
- December, 2013: Pierson committed shooting

Lessons Learned: Karl Pierson Attack

- Do not limit inquiry to potential perpetrator
- Do not do a “once and done” assessment
 - Risk level is dynamic and can change quickly
- Make sure people are trained
- Streamline policies/procedures for ease of use
 - Flow charts, checklists, etc.
- Must educate students about reporting
- Don't under-communicate

FERPA vs. Safety

- FERPA “allows schools to take key steps to maintain school safety.”
- “If a teacher overhears a student making threatening remarks to other students, *FERPA* does not protect that information.”
- “In an emergency, FERPA permits school officials to disclose without consent.”
 - “Balancing Student Privacy and School Safety: A Guide to the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* for Elementary and Secondary Schools,” U.S. Dept. of Education

Educating Students

- Teach them about warning signs
- Discuss snitching vs. safety concerns
- Explore ramifications of reporting or not
- Provide easy, anonymous reporting

Domains to Investigate

- Leakage and attack-related behavior
- Recent or impending losses, failures, rejections, blows to identity, conflicts
- Capability of killing
 - Psychopathic, psychotic, traumatized
 - Desperate, enraged, believe others deserve to die
- Evidence of imminence

Software Solutions

- Bark
 - <https://www.bark.us/>
 - Has free monitoring program for schools
- Awareity
 - <https://awareity.com/>
 - Tracking system for safety concerns
 - Can coordinate school districts with community stakeholders
 - Has TIPS button for easy reporting

Bibliography

- *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence*
 - Dewey Cornell and Peter Sheras
- *Concepts and Case Studies in Threat Management*
 - Frederick S. Calhoun and Stephen W. Weston
- *International Handbook of Threat Assessment*
 - Edited by J. Reid Meloy and Jens Hoffman
- *Harm to Others: The Assessment and Treatment of Dangerousness*
 - Brian Van Brunt

Communication

- You are not in this alone.
- If concerned, trust your reaction.
- Consult/communicate.
 - Internally
 - Externally (police)
- Work with a team.

Final Test

- Is there one cause of school shootings?
- Is there one profile of a school shooter?
- Who are the most common targets of school shooters?
- What are the three psychological types of perpetrators?
- What prevents attacks: threat assessment or lockdown?
- What is leakage?
- Does FERPA prohibit you from reporting threats?
- Should inquiry be limited to the student in question?
- Is a “once and done” assessment sufficient?
- Does suspension/expulsion solve the problem?