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A Qualitative Investigation of Completed and Averted School Shootings: Deciphering the Characteristics that Prevent School Shootings

Jonathan Page

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A Qualitative Investigation of Completed and Averted School Shootings:
Deciphering the Characteristics that Prevent School Shootings

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Dissertation submitted to the
College of Education and Human Services
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Counseling Psychology

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Investigation of Completed and Averted School Shootings: Deciphering the Characteristics that Prevent School Shootings

Jonathan Page

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences between completed school shootings and averted school shootings in order to gain a better understanding of ways to prevent school shootings. The following research question guided this study: What are the similarities and differences between schools in which a shooting occurred and schools in which a shooting was averted? To answer this question, this study compared school shootings and averted school shootings in K-12 schools between January 2007 and December 2013, searching for general themes to analyze in order to add to the literature on averted school shootings. This study utilized a qualitative approach of content analysis, and presented the results of the analysis, with specific regard to emerging themes. The discussion and implications chapters compared the results with past research and defined the overall themes in averted shootings and completed shootings.

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DEDICATION

Nothing could have been accomplished without the undying love and support from my parents: Mrs. Kathleen Page and Mr. Dale Page. I am grateful for the sacrifices that were made and the hard work that was put into ensuring that I could get to where I am today. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, both of whom embody what it means to be “the best parents in the world.” Thank you for instilling in me a positive work ethic, a sense of integrity, and a yearning for success.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my two brothers, Dale and Andy Page. Childhood is a challenging time, but this challenge was made easier with the unwavering love and support that only brothers can offer. Without you all, I would not be who I am today, and this dissertation would never have been completed.

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Navigating the complex and exhausting world of graduate school can be a challenging process; a process that not only tests perseverance but also fosters independence and triumph. This journey was made meaningful and significant by the unconditional support that I received from the faculty at West Virginia University throughout my graduate studies. I would like to acknowledge my dissertation chair Dr. Jeffrey Daniels for his continuous support and guidance throughout the last five years. Under his guidance, I was able to accomplish so much, and the support that he showed was paramount to my success. I was lucky to be able to work with him on multiple projects, the final one culminating in this dissertation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Elementary, middle and high school shootings are a relatively rare phenomenon (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007), and the overall rate of school violence has been decreasing since 1980 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). The vulnerable nature of the victims and the horror of the events culminate in a media frenzy that not only tells the story, but elicits fear in parents, teachers, and students. The vast majority of the research has been conducted on completed school shootings, with little attention given to those shootings that were averted. Whether it is due to the lack of media coverage on averted shootings, the lack of nationwide concern, or the lack of knowledge about such events, averted shootings have not received the same coverage as completed shootings, and therefore, are not as widely known. Studying averted school shootings is important not only to gain a better understanding of the individuals who engage in this violent behavior, but to also learn about the environment and culture of the school, in order to help prevent school shootings from occurring.

Statement of Purpose

This dissertation is an attempt to address the issue of school shootings, with specific attention given to the differences between averted and completed school shootings. This study will employ a content analysis that compares and contrasts the differences between completed and averted school rampages. The purpose is to further enhance the literature on averted school shootings in K-12 schools, and the implications that this research has for informing better policies and tactics to enhance school safety. By comparing shootings that were averted with shootings that were completed, certain themes and questions will be examined and answered. Examining not only the individual characteristics of the perpetrator, but also the school, community, and home will allow researchers, policy makers, and school personnel to create an

environment that will reduce school violence and enhance school safety. The overall question that this study seeks to answer is: What are the similarities and differences between schools in which a shooting occurred and schools that averted a shooting?

This dissertation is important due to its focus on a relatively recent line of research: averted school shootings. The findings of this study can be applied to the existing literature in an effort to reduce school violence, especially lethal school violence. The very nature of the impact of lethal school violence on society begs for an increase in understanding of ways to prevent it. This dissertation will help gain a better understanding of why some school shootings were averted, which will ultimately inform ways to prevent future school shootings.

With school violence being a concern for society, it is beneficial to develop a stronger understanding of school rampages. Although schools are implementing better methods to combat school violence, enhancing the literature on averted school shootings will increase awareness to ways of preventing school shootings from occurring. This study attempts to build on previous research into averted school shootings which yielded the Safe School Communities Model (SSCM) (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). This model was developed after analyzing averted school shootings and, through common themes, outlines specific tools and skills that can be developed and harnessed by schools (such as a culture of respect and equitable discipline). The goal of the present study is to analyze more recent (2007-2013) averted and completed school shootings in order to add to the SSCM. This is why the goal of the present study is to identify the similarities and differences between schools in which a shooting occurred and schools that averted a shooting in order to continue to develop the SSCM.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this dissertation the terms “mass murder,” “school shooting,” “school rampage,” and “school massacre” will all be used interchangeably to describe a school shooting. These are the terms that are often found in the literature and mass media. For the purpose of this dissertation, school shooting will be described as a violent act in which someone, usually a student, uses a gun to kill or injure students, teachers, and/or staff. When the individual utilizes different or multiple weapons (such as bombs or knives) these will be clearly described and labeled as such. Furthermore, this dissertation will only focus on shootings that occur in K-12 schools. Although shootings in universities do occur, the completely different nature of the school environment would serve only to muddy the results and the implications of the results.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review incorporated different topics that relate to school violence and school shootings. The first topic focused on the rationale in studying school shootings and the deleterious effects on the victims of these events. The second topic focused on deviant behavior, and discusses different causes and motives of deviant behaviors. This provided an overview of the concept of deviance, which included a discussion of violence and murder. Next, the literature on school shootings, including offender motive and individual typology, is analyzed. Lastly, an in-depth analysis of averted school shootings and prevention tactics is presented, with the ultimate goal of answering the question: What are the similarities and differences between schools in which a shooting occurred and schools that averted a shooting?

Effect on Victims and Rationale for Dissertation

The impact that a school shooting has on the victims is dramatic. Because of the rarity of the events, the media coverage of these shootings is so intense that the victims or victims' loved ones are given plenty of opportunities to watch their world crash over and over. School shootings not only affect the direct victims, but they also affect other people indirectly.

Direct victims are the victims who are present during the event, and are abruptly affected by the event. Direct victims include other schoolmates, teachers, staff, and personnel who were present at the school at the time of the shooting. Direct victims could be those who were targeted by the shooter, received injuries, witnessed the shooting, or were present at the time and location of the shooting. For those who have been exposed to an event, limiting the duration of exposure is important (Norwood, Ursano & Fullerton, 2000). This may be difficult to achieve because of the intense coverage of the media and the interviews that the victims must conduct

with the police. Therefore, Welner and Page (2013) recommended removing the victims immediately and limiting their exposure to the media coverage. After their safety is achieved, it is imperative that the victims of a school rampage are offered mental health treatment in order to help them cope with the trauma that they have witnessed. Some direct victims may develop post-traumatic stress disorder as well as depression and other forms of anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some may experience survivor guilt and may blame themselves or others for the event that occurred. Survivors of a disaster typically advance through the stages that are common to loss in general: shock, denial, guilt, anger, depression, and resolution (Gunn & Buckley, 2001).

Not only are direct victims at risk of developing psychological disorders, but they also are at greater risk for other negative behaviors as well. Newman et al. (2004) found that student attendance was negatively impacted in schools where a shooting occurred. Victims are also at risk for a decrease in academic performance, some of which culminates in their dropping out of school following the incident (Daniels & Bradley, 2011).

Indirect victims are those who were not directly exposed to the rampage, but were still tied to the incident in some way. Indirect victims could be loved ones of the direct victims, students who were not present in school that day, and the offender's family. Interestingly, indirect victims can also be people who are currently in similar environments in which the attack occurred, such as other children in different schools across the country.

School violence not only has a direct impact on the physical well-being of students, but it also negatively impacts the school environment itself, which has been shown to decrease the academic success of students (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Bisset, Markham, and Aveyard

(2007) found that the school environment impacts not only the dropout rate, but also delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and violence.

Students who are victims of violence and harassment are more likely to report feeling socially isolated, depressed, frustrated and a lack of interest in academics (Wei & Williams, 2004). Furthermore, Johnson (2009) established that the consequences of school violence effect all those who are exposed, and not just the perpetrator and the victim. Johnson also found that not only does the physical environment of the school influence violence, but the social environment does as well. Such aspects of the social environment that influence school violence include: the students' involvement in school, school management policies, positive social interactions in the classroom, and students' feelings of being supported by their teachers (Sprott, 2004). With regard to the physical environment, such aspects as the students' perception of the security at school, the amount of disorder in the school, and the presence of drugs and alcohol tend to influence school violence as well.

Working with the survivors of a disaster, such as a school rampage, should have three main goals: reduce emotional distress, facilitate problem solving, and returning survivors to "normal" functioning (Welner & Page 2013). This can be achieved through the use of typical mental health treatments, such as therapy and medication. However, it is important to also offer psychosocial interventions such as identity-building activities and outlets for stress relief. These treatments and interventions should be utilized not only for the students, but also for the school staff. Oftentimes, because of the roles that teachers play in schools, their treatment and care following a rampage is neglected. Teachers feel compelled to assist their students throughout the trauma, and they consequently often neglect their own mental health. Because of this, Daniels, Bradley, and Hays (2007) encouraged schools to have a crisis treatment plan not only

for the students, but for the teachers as well. It should be free of charge, and should last as long as the professional thinks it is necessary.

Curtailing the effects of a rampage on the direct and indirect victims is a difficult process, and educating the first responders in crisis management should be a priority. The first people who respond to an act of school violence are the school staff (Newman et al., 2004), and because of this they should be trained in crisis intervention and crisis management. Welner and Page (2013) stated:

The effective crisis professional engenders a sense in the victim that all emotions are understandable and that their experiences are shared by others. Each has a story to tell, and needs to feel that the entirety of their story is important to the professional they are interacting with. (p.8)

Crisis professionals do not necessarily have to be mental health workers, but can consist of fire fighters, police, and school staff. Training in prevention likely will help curtail the negative effects that may begin to manifest in victims of trauma. Ultimately, the goal is to avoid exposure to trauma in the first place. Therefore, understanding averted school shootings and how they were averted will help prevent children and adolescents from witnessing and engaging in school rampages.

The deleterious effects of individuals exposed to this type of trauma are well documented. Exploring ways to prevent school shootings will not only reduce the physical loss of life, but will also deter the vicarious trauma and impact that school shootings have on those who are exposed to the trauma. The next section will review the causes and motives of deviant behavior in an effort to gain a better understanding of the mindset of an individual who perpetuates school violence.

Causes and Motives of Deviant Behavior

Prichard (1835) was a seminal contributor to the connection between psychological functioning and criminal behavior. He was the first to discuss the notion of the psychopathic personality and termed these individuals as suffering from moral insanity or moral imbecility (Prichard, 1835). Prichard believed that psychopathic individuals had an intact cognitive state and normal intellectual functioning, but their moral principles were so depraved that they were incapable of conducting themselves in a law-abiding fashion. Patridge (1928) advanced this theory and labeled these individuals as sociopaths, arguing that a lack of socialization into society was responsible for their criminal behavior.

As the cognitive behavioral school of thought was advancing in psychology, Yochelson and Samenow (1976) proposed that criminals and noncriminals are distinguished mainly by differences in their thinking patterns, regardless of social, environmental or personality factors. Therefore, in order to change criminal behavior, the thinking pattern of the individual must be altered instead of focusing on the social environment or personality. The motivations for criminal behavior revolve around the thought patterns of the individual; if their thinking is distorted, then their motivations may be fueled by their own deviant thoughts.

Bromberg (1961) divided those who commit homicide into two different categories: the normal and the psychopathic. The “normal murderer” is one that is motivated by psychological or emotional self-preservation, or a reaction to extreme humiliation. An example of this type of murderer is an adolescent male who finds out his girlfriend is cheating on him. The motivation for him to commit homicide is not based on any pre-planned or extrinsic reasoning; but rather it is the result of his internal humiliation and feelings of betrayal. Bromberg (1961) described this

type of murder as the “triangle murder,” whereby the stronger the unconscious feelings of inadequacy in the perpetrator, the more vicious the attack.

Additionally, Bromberg (1961) discussed psychopathic murderers, and included a wide range of offenders with various levels of disturbance. Some of these offenders included: the thrill killer, the rapist who murders, and the sex/lust killer. These murderers are generally unstable, very unpredictable, impulsive and without conscience (Bromberg, 1961). Crimes perpetrated by psychopathic murderers are rarely premeditated but instead follow an impulse to act (Bromberg, 1961). Unlike the “normal murderers” these individuals have a background rooted in deviance, psychopathic behaviors (such as torturing animals and fire starting), and have a documented history of problems with authority.

Around the same time, Guttmacher (1960) developed a theory with a classification system that is more directly based on offender motive. Although he focused on adults, the different types of murderers can be used as an illustration in relation to juveniles. Guttmacher (1960) differentiated six types of murderers, all with varying motivational factors:

1. Average murderers who are free from prominent psychopathology. This type of murderer may be likened to the reactive murderer, whose motivation to commit homicide is a direct reaction to a perceived indiscretion (catching their wife cheating, a break up with a significant other).
2. Individuals who are angry at the world because of their real or imagined mistreatment in the past. This type of murder includes school shootings and other mass homicides where individuals feel as though they were mistreated and this is their way of getting payback for this mistreatment. They are motivated by revenge.

3. Alcoholics who kill out of fear of rejection. Their motivations are entirely based on their inner inadequacies and the fear of being rejected by the person whom they respect the most.
4. Murderers who kill their prior intimate partner because they were rejected. These murderers are similar to those who are angry at the world, except their anger is motivated by revenge toward a single person for a single act of indiscretion. Luke Woodham, who killed his mother and then went to school to kill his ex-girlfriend, is an example of this type of person within a school shooting context.
5. Psychotic individuals who respond to their hallucinations or delusions. These individuals are motivated by their own inner psychosis. Although most school shooters are without extreme psychosis (Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, & Gray, 2001), some adolescent mass murderers did suffer from some form of psychosis, such as Michael Carneal of Paducah Kentucky, who was plagued with hallucinations and delusions prior to committing his school shooting.
6. Sadists who kill to achieve sexual gratification. These individuals are those who are entirely motivated by their own sexual urges. These individuals do not respect society's norms, nor are they motivated by society's values.

More recent research conducted by Revitch and Schlesinger (1989) resulted in a classification system of crime based on the motivational spectrum of the antisocial act itself. The authors directly examined the motives behind the deviant act. The spectrum comprises five different motivational factors: environmental, situational, impulsive, catathymic, and compulsive.

Environmental factors result in crimes where the individual is motivated by the influence of his or her environment (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1989). For example, Kogan and Wallach (1964) explained the concept of group dynamics in gangs wherein acts of violence are only committed within the security of a group, because responsibility is dissipated in the group. This would also apply to individuals who associate with a negative peer group. Gilbert (1947) demonstrated that the abhorrent conduct of Nazi leaders was not a result of their own personal psychopathology, but a result of social, environmental and group influences. Their motives to behave the way they did lay in self-preservation and societal influences.

Situational homicides are “murders that occur when a particular set of circumstances, present at a particular time, gives rise to powerful feelings of stress, especially in susceptible people” (Schlesinger, 2004, p. 94). The common element in all of these murders is stress stemming from either internal or external sources (Schlesinger & Revitch, 1980). Negative feelings such as depression, helplessness, inferiority, despair, fear, and anger can act as a catalyst for these murders under the right circumstances. As is often the case in school rampages, there are grievances of the individual who feels anger and inferiority, which culminates in the violent act that they commit. These crimes are typically straightforward in motive, with common motives being revenge and lost love (Schlesinger, 2004).

Impulsive crimes (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1989) are controlled by an unexpected urge that is motivated by conscious or unconscious feelings over which the person has little or no control (Freedman, Kaplan, & Sadock, 1972). These crimes are not necessarily motivationally driven, but are more of a reaction to circumstances. Oftentimes these individuals are motivated by feelings of self-deprecation, inadequacy and self-loathing, often a result of a chaotic upbringing marked with criminal engagement (Schlesinger, 2004).

The term “catathymic crisis” was coined by Wertham (1937), who conceptualized this phenomenon as affecting individuals who have underlying emotionally charged conflicts which develop into a fixed idea that they must commit the crime. The final act of violence is preceded by rumination of the act itself, and the motivation to commit the crime is derived from the individual’s fantasy. Thus, the motivation of individuals for engaging in these acts of violence is a freeing from the source of threat to their psychological stability (Schlesinger, 2004).

Compulsive homicides are the final motivational category, and fall under the endogenous end of the motivational spectrum (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1989). The motivation to commit the act is based entirely on internal psychogenic forces, and social and environmental factors do not play a role. The motivation lies in the need for individuals to alleviate feelings of anxiety and inner discomfort that arise out of their trying to resist the deviant urges (Schlesinger, 2004). These murders have a fusion that combines sex with aggression so that the violent act itself is eroticized. The motivation is entirely sexually based, with the gratification of the violent act serving as the means by which these individuals cope. TJ Lane, the individual responsible for the 2012 Chardon High School shooting in Chardon, Ohio, is an example of this type of individual. He made an obscene statement during his trial that revealed the sexual gratification he received from the memory of killing his victims.

Adding to the literature on the motives behind murder, Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas, and McCormack (1986) provided a five stage, motivational model of causation with regards to murder, which is especially applicable to individuals who commit school rampages:

1. Ineffective social environment. These individuals, because of the abusive or neglectful environment in which they are raised, fail to develop the ability to bond with other people.

2. Formative events. Because of the abuse that these individuals have experienced, they feel helpless and, as a result, develop fantasies of domination and control. These fantasies serve to help them escape from the reality of lack of control and power.
3. Patterned responses. These individuals then become socially isolated and begin to develop anti-social and hostile views of the world.
4. Actions toward others. The behavior that these individuals portray is based on achieving a feeling of domination. Cruelty to animals, cruelty to humans, and destruction of property begin to manifest and their actions become increasingly more violent. They are motivated by a sense of revenge and thirst for control that they feel entitled to because of the environment in which they were raised.
5. Feedback filter. These individuals become proud of their deviant behavior and are able to justify their actions.

The motives and causes of violent and deviant behavior are complex, yet they tend to have basic commonalities that revolve around certain themes (revenge, love, financial gain, etc.) The aforementioned research reveals certain themes and patterns that are applicable to the research on school shootings. The following sections will focus solely on school violence, averted school violence, and school violence prevention.

School Shootings Defined

Although not always the case, individuals who plan or execute school shootings often kill or plan to kill multiple victims. Due to the nature of the plan or incident, school shootings are often referred to as instances of mass murder. Mass murder, as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI.gov) are “a number of murders (four or more) occurring during the same incident, with no distinctive time period between the murders. These events typically involved a

single location, where the killer murdered a number of victims in an ongoing incident.”

Researchers have struggled with operationalizing the term “mass murder” (Bowers, Holmes, & Rhom, 2010). Fox and Levin (2003) pointed out that mass killings are under-researched, and therefore more difficult to operationalize due to five reasons:

1. Mass killings do not present a great challenge to law enforcement officials due to the fact that the perpetrator is more often than not found dead at the crime scene. Those who engage in mass murder typically have an end game that involves suicide or death by police.
2. Mass killings do not produce the same level of terror or worry as compared to serial killers or spree killers. This does not imply that the effect or fear is any less profound; rather it implies that after the incident is over, it leaves individuals shocked and upset but not in fear of their lives (as the individual is usually dead at the scene or captured).
3. A mass murderer is usually restricted geographically, as the killings are all in one area or location. This keeps the crime scene localized.
4. Studying mass murder is difficult, because of the limited access to motivational data due to the perpetrator typically ending up deceased at the scene. Although some murderers do leave notes and manifestos, the research is limited to written word instead of research into the individual.
5. Lastly, mass murders do not have the same sexual and/or sadistic characteristics as serial murders, also giving rise to why mass murder research is often overlooked (Fox & Levin, 2003).

Although there isn't a clear, concise operationalized definition of mass murder, Aitken, Oosthuizen, Emsley, and Seedat (2008) stated that there is a general consensus that mass murder is generally limited to incidents that occurred within a 24-hour period or a single event, and that there is typically a death count of at least three or four people, although some investigators will classify a double homicide as a mass murder due to the motives of the offender. For example, if an individual enters a school and shoots eight people but only two die, then this incident would still be classified as mass murder or mass rampage.

Although the research into mass murder is not as common as into other types of homicide, researchers have attempted to offer a more in-depth classification of mass murder. Many characteristics and similarities of school attackers are shared with mass murderers who have committed their acts in different settings. When addressing the issue of school shootings, it is important to look at the characteristics of the crimes. There are two different methods of doing this: deductive profiling and inductive profiling.

Deductive vs. Inductive Profiling

Deductive profiling avoids generalizations and seeks to intensely investigate the specific crime that was committed, extensively dissecting the offender's actions before, during, and after the crime (Turvey, 1998). This type of profiling is advantageous because it offers an understanding of what might have led to the crime and how the offender acted before, during, and after the event. This helps people understand the individual's particular circumstances behind committing the crime. However, the disadvantage of this method is that it does not seek to predict, and because of the lack of generalizability it is only useful after the crime has been committed.

Inductive profiling assumes that when an offender commits a particular crime, his or her motives and characteristics will be similar to someone who has committed a similar crime (Turvey, 1998). Essentially, this method looks at common themes of the past to help define the present. The advantage of this method is that it is more of a prediction of who is likely to commit such a crime. It seeks to create general motivational and characteristic themes in order to generalize who may commit such a crime. This method can be disadvantageous due to the generalized tactics that are employed, and can often lead to inaccuracies and mislabeling of non-criminal individuals (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). Another disadvantage of this method is that there is no infallible definition of a school shooter. However, there have been some general characteristics that seem to occur in many of those who have committed such a crime.

School Shooter Typology

The Columbine massacre that occurred in Littleton, Colorado was the catalyst that intensified the research on school violence and school rampages. Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas' (2000) study was one of the first that sought to examine juvenile violence and juvenile risk assessment. The authors examined nine different adolescent mass murder cases, from which they developed five domains: individual factors, family factors, school and peer factors, situational and attack-related factors, and societal and environmental factors.

The individual factors of the adolescents in their study included uncontrollable rage, blaming others, depression, threatening others, and developing a detailed plan (Verlinden, Hersen & Thomas 2000). Often, those who engage in violent crimes have intense anger toward individuals or certain groups of people, and they tend to blame these individuals for their actions (as discussed later). Although not mentioned by these authors, Eric Harris, one of the perpetrators of the Columbine shooting, exhibited yet another individual factor – feelings of

superiority; he believed he had a right to kill people who were inferior to him (Shepard, n.d.), writing in his journal, “I feel like GOD and I wish I was, having everyone being OFFICIALLY lower than me.” (4/12/98) and, “but before I leave this worthless place, I will kill whoever I deem unfit for anything at all. especially life.” (4/21/98).

Additionally, school shooters often have a detailed plan. This plan may include a hit list, a list of grievances, or even a detailed plan on how to execute the massacre. This was the case in Troy, Missouri where a school shooting was averted, when the individual’s girlfriend went to the police after he had shown her some weapons and a list of people he intended to kill (<http://fox2now.com/2012/09/19/two-schools-on-lock-down-in-troy-mo/>). The article reported: “According to his girlfriend he showed her three handguns that were loaded and an assault rifle one of the AK 47 type assault rifle,” Major Kurt Venneman said. “He had a list and there were specific names on that list at Troy High school.”

The family factors of adolescent mass murderers included a lack of parental supervision and troubled family relationships, usually revolving around divorce or separation (O’Toole, 2000; Verlinden et al., 2000). Dysfunctional families are not uncommon for people who commit crimes, and a lack of supervision combined with a lack of support can result in individuals acting out violently. However, many of the school shooters were from a reportedly functional two parent home, such as Kip Kinkel in Eugene, Oregon, and Eric Harris, which illustrates that although familial dysfunction may contribute to instances of aggression, it is not enough to predict future violence. Furthermore, some school shooters feel as though the lines of communication between their families is fractured, and therefore do not feel comfortable opening up to their parents about their grievances. Additionally, many rampage shooters have unresolved feelings of dislike for their parents, such as the case with Kip Kinkel, who murdered

two classmates and wounded 25 others after killing both of his parents. His case was described in the book *Children Who Kill: Profiles of Pre-Teen and Teenage Killers* (2011) by Carol Anne Davis, where his childhood was profiled as one of a loner who was submissive to parents who were religiously overbearing.

The school and peer factors defined by Verlinden et al. (2000) included school isolation and rejection by peers as well as identification with an antisocial group, such as the supposed “trench-coat mafia” in Columbine (which was later shown to not really exist; Cullen, 2009). O’Toole (2000) also found that a tolerance for disrespectful behavior was a common theme among the schools in which a violent crime occurred. Jeehae (2013) found that the vast majority (73%) of the shooters had a grievance against at least one of their victims. This tolerance for disrespectful behavior will be examined in more detail later on in this chapter, where characteristics of schools are further explored.

The situational and attack-related factors were the most important in regards to the act itself (Verlinden et al., 2000), and they include: a decline in functioning (such as poor school attendance or grades); and a recent loss, stress, or humiliation (often referred to as a “trigger”, these stressors can include a recent breakup with a girlfriend or an event that goes beyond the general feelings of alienation). These instances are typically labeled “stressors” and are often the catalyst that precedes the immediate action of violence. Additionally, making threats and discussing plans tended to be a common practice for school shooters (Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2000); these acts were not impulsive but, instead, well planned.

Finally, the societal and environmental factors (Verlinden et al., 2000) include: involvement in a negative environment (one that is detrimental to the appropriate functioning and self-esteem of the individual); easy access to firearms (the individuals typically do not have

to work hard to obtain the weapons); and a general fascination with weapons (often witnessed by significant people in the individual's life). Societal and environmental factors are important in school shootings. The climate of the school has a dramatic effect on the prevalence of bullying (Brown, Low, Smith, & Haggerty, 2011). Bullying has long been associated with violence as well as with emotional problems, not only displayed by the victims, but also by the bullies (Menesini, Modena, & Tani, 2009). Furthermore, with the ubiquitous presence of internet sites, text messaging, and other non-direct means of communication, the opportunity to bully and be bullied is much more pronounced.

Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) found that 75% of school shooters felt persecuted, bullied, or threatened by others. Some of the attackers had experienced this abuse for quite some time, and this bullying was a significant factor in their decision to commit their crime. Other studies have shown that those who committed these acts were bullies themselves (Larkin, 2007). With the increased presence of social media sites and other non-direct means of communication, being able to bully and being subjected to bullying involves much more than face to face encounters. No longer can one avoid being bullied by avoiding direct encounters with bullies, and because of this, exercising a climate of respect should be optimal. Eric Harris admitted that he was bullied by others and in turn started to bully them. He wrote in his journal:

Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, and how.. weak I am..

Well, I will get you all back: ultimate..revenge here. You people could have shown more respect, treated me better, asked for my knowledge or guidance more, treated me more like senior, and maybe I wouldn't have been as ready to tear your.. heads off...That's where a lot of my hate grows from. (Shepard, nd,11/12/1998)

Although largely used as a reason, bullying may not be the primary reason behind an offender committing a school shooting, but it should be looked at as a potential contributing factor. For example, the recent shooting in Washington State by Jaylen Fryberg revealed an individual who did not appear to be bullied at all. However, in schools where the individual was bullied, the school environment likely harbored a culture of disrespect, which ultimately allowed the bullying to continue.

Following school rampages and averted school shootings, the offenders often engage in justification for their actions (Verlinden et al., 2000). Even if they are not alive following the completed or attempted shooting, they sometimes leave writings, drawings, and manifestos that allow them to effectively reveal their perceived reasons. Mitchell and Dodder (1983) and Chi-me (2008) discussed neutralization theory and how it applies to juvenile delinquency. Neutralization theory was developed by Sykes and Matza (2008) and focuses on how individuals justify their deviant behaviors - in this case their rampages or attempted rampages - by offering alternative definitions of their actions. These justifications for their motivations to engage in criminal acts are divided into five major categories: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties (Chi-me, 2008; Mitchell & Dodder, 1983).

Denial of responsibility occurs when the individual denies that the motivation for the act was deviant in nature and claims that any other individual in the same situation would have acted in the same manner (Chi-me, 2008). This denial of responsibility serves as a buffer that insulates the individual from experiencing guilt.

Another example of denial of responsibility is the case of Luke Woodham, who murdered his mother and then drove to school and murdered his ex-girlfriend and her friend. He then

proceeded to shoot and injure seven other students until he was apprehended. Prior to the shooting, he sent a message stating:

I am not insane, I am angry. I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. I did this to show society, push us and we will push back. ... All throughout my life, I was ridiculed, always beaten, always hated. Can you, society, truly blame me for what I do? Yes, you will. ... It was not a cry for attention, it was not a cry for help. It was a scream in sheer agony saying that if you can't pry your eyes open, if I can't do it through pacifism, if I can't show you through the displaying of intelligence, then I will do it with a bullet. (Ames, 2007, p.4)

Similar to denial of responsibility is denial of injury, which asserts that the deviant behavior did not cause any harm, and thus the behavior was not deviant (Chi-mei, 2008). An individual engaged in denial of injury would deny that the person that was murdered negatively affected society. This individual would not deny that the injury was done to the victim (as the victim is obviously deceased) but that the death of the victim did not have a negative effect on society as a whole.

Denial of the victim is often used to explain the motivations of those who engage in vigilantism. These individuals justify their actions by claiming that those whom they harmed were deserving of the results due to their lack of morals or virtue (Mitchell & Dodder, 1983). Eric Harris's rants about his superiority over others, as well as TJ Lane's (the perpetrator of the Chardon High School shooting in Ohio) views on their victims reveal a great deal of blame. In essence, these individuals asserted that the victims deserved it, likely to distract from the severity and unjustifiable nature of the crime that was committed.

Condemnation of the condemners is often used as a motivating factor for those who engage in crimes because it alleviates culpability from the offender (Chi-mei, 2008). These individuals convince themselves that those whom they harmed could have harmed them, and this risk of being harmed justifies their actions. Those individuals who commit school rampages due to being bullied often may use this strategy to justify their actions, as shown by Eric Harris's journal entries.

Lastly, those who appeal to higher loyalties are motivated by some extrinsic factor and believe that these loyalties supersede legal boundaries. These would include individuals who commit terrorism for religious purposes, or steal from people who earned their money in a morally unjust manner (Mitchell & Dodder, 1983). This would also be akin to Eric Harris's view of ridding the world of those who were inferior—as in committing his acts of violence for a greater good.

Jeehae (2013) used inductive analysis to review the literature on school shootings and examined over 500 total school shootings. Her results revealed that there is no single typology. The shooters came from a variety of family backgrounds, had a variety of successes in school, and a variety of social relationships (from loners to popular). She did find that the majority of shooters (81%) carried out the act alone and that the two main causes of the shootings were bullying (87%) and effects of psychiatric drugs (12%). The author found that the most commonly used weapon was a pistol (60%) followed by a rifle (27%).

Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, and Gray (2001) studied 34 adolescents who had committed 27 mass murders, many on school grounds, between 1958 and 1999, and found several common themes among them. The majority of these individuals were loners, who did not have a strong support system in the family, school, or community. Many of these

individuals, although not the majority, abused alcohol or drugs. Half of the offenders were subjected to bullying or humiliation by their peers. Half of the offenders also had a history of violence, whether it was physical violence or fascination with violence. One fourth of the offenders had a psychiatric history, but only two of the offenders were actually psychotic at the time of the crime. Some of the psychological disorders that these individuals presented with were depression, anxiety, and antisocial personality traits.

Meloy et al. (2001) also found that there was typically a common precipitating event for the rampage. This event, although not the only instance of injustice toward the individual, often was the “trigger” that catapulted the individual into his violent act. This event often was a breakup with a girlfriend, a failure at school, or a loss of a loved one. Most of the offenders in their study made threats to a third party, but only half of them threatened the actual targets.

Another study looked at adolescent mass murders using a deductive profiling approach (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999). The authors examined 14 cases that involved young killers, and ultimately constructed a profile of what they termed the “classroom avenger.” They found common themes and factors among these 14 individuals, of which the main theme was a feeling of rejection and/or humiliation. The authors identified several key factors that can be important in defining the typical classroom avenger; the first included demographic and dispositional factors.

McGee and DeBernardo (1999) found that, in general, a classroom avenger was a physically healthy, blue collar or middle class Caucasian male around 16 years old. Demographically, he (as all those who were studied were male) more than likely lived in a rural community with a population of fewer than fifty thousand. This individual lived in a dysfunctional family, with friction and divorce among the parents being a common occurrence.

If the individual had an intact family (with both parents living together) the parents were often either overly permissive or overly authoritarian. The school attacker possessed a prevailing sense of hidden anger that was often misdirected at individuals at school instead of at individuals at home. However, some cases involved the individual focusing his anger on the parent(s), and then going forward with the mass murder.

McGee and DeBernardo (1999) found that the type of discipline employed by the parent(s) was typically very harsh and uncompromising. The individual often felt powerless, alone, and humiliated. They were subjected to an authoritarian parenting style, which detracts from the individual's feelings of control. Furthermore, all 14 of the children studied were familiar with guns and had a keen interest in them (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999).

McGee and DeBernardo (1999) also found no severe physical handicap in any of these individuals, although there were reports of some developmental delays in certain milestones (e.g., talking, toilet training). The intellectual functioning of these individuals was in the average to above-average range with no evidence of intellectual disability or brain disorders. There was usually an early history of problems with bonding and social interactions, often caused by neglect; as a result, these children were usually described as "unaffectionate." Classroom avengers were usually introverted loners with few close friends. The friends they did have also could be described as "outsiders." They were intolerant of others and were usually bored by the typical pastimes that children their age find interesting, such as clubs and sports (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999).

Additionally, the authors found no signs of psychotic mental disorders and hallucinations. As mentioned earlier, their cognitive style was rigid and inflexible, and their mood was usually depressed, although, as an indicator, this might be hard for other people to notice because

adolescents suffering from depression are not likely to seek out help for their emotional struggles. Although not specifically mentioned, some of these individuals would meet the criteria of conduct disorder (disrespect toward authority, violation of rules, and some acts of property destruction), although gaining access to specific diagnoses proves difficult due to the confidentiality and the age. Furthermore, these individuals are likely to be loners, and the lack of familial support would hinder the pronounced emotional turmoil that they were experiencing.

One of the more important findings by McGee and DeBernardo (1999) revealed that classroom avengers were more sensitive than average adolescents to criticism and rejection. Due to the chaotic nature of their upbringing, they personalized comments and criticisms which tended to add to their anger.

Although vengeance was the primary motive for classroom avengers, achieving notoriety was also important. They fantasized about killing and often mentioned it to the few friends they had. Some of the adolescents in their study developed a hit list that included those who had teased them (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999), while others had so much hatred for society in general that they chose any target that was available.

The murders they committed were planned and included creative elements (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999). For example, during the Jonesboro, Arkansas shooting, 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden pulled their school's fire alarm and shot at students and teachers as they exited the building, killing five and injuring ten. Such elements showed a higher level of sophistication than a seemingly "outburst" of rage, and although there may have been a precipitating factor, this incident was planned.

McGee and DeBernardo (1999) lastly focused on the contextual factors of classroom avengers. They found that these individuals were overly enmeshed and dramatically influenced

by what they read in books and saw on television. They often were not just interested in violence and guns, but they were obsessed with them. As revealed after the fact, these individuals usually kept a journal or internet blog where they posted their intentions prior to the act. Social media can therefore act as a deterrent to school rampages (as discussed later). The attack itself was usually directly preceded by a warning such as “tomorrow is the big day.” When taken into context with the other descriptors above, these threats should not have been taken lightly. Within the two weeks prior to the incident, the murderer was likely exposed to multiple psycho-social stressors such as the loss of a girlfriend or another instance of humiliation.

Finally, following the Columbine incident the United States Secret Service’s National Threat Assessment Center also conducted a study that examined school shootings (Vossokuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum & Modzeleski, 2000). They looked at 41 different shooters that were involved in 37 school incidents. Congruent with previous research, they found that the shooters all had a plan, and none of the acts were committed impulsively. They found that the vast majority of the shooters had previously used guns, had a keen interest in weapons, and had ready access to weapons. One of the most significant findings was that in all of the situations, there were some people who were concerned about the shooter’s behavior prior to the act (Vossekuil et al., 2000).

The typology and individual characteristics of individuals who commit mass murder and school shootings have been heavily explored and the current research has done a thorough job of examining this topic. The research has shed light on profiles of individuals who commit these crimes as well as environmental and biological considerations that influence their actions. However, there is a paucity of research on averted mass murder and mass shootings. Very little

research has explored the differences between completed and averted mass murders, and, therefore, there is a limited understanding of the differences between them. Understanding the differences can help lead to prevention, which will not only save lives, but also prevent children and adolescents from experiencing such a traumatic event; an event that can have extreme deleterious effects on those exposed to it.

Averted School Shootings

As mentioned previously, the literature on averted school shootings is sparse, as the majority of research has been done on those individuals who had successfully completed a school shooting. There are many factors that influence school shootings (apart from just individual factors), and it is beneficial to gain a better understanding of all these factors. Daniels and Bradley (2011) looked not only at the individual characteristics of the shooters, but examined the culture of the schools where a shooting had been averted compared to the environment where a shooting had not been averted. After examining their results, the authors found four common themes that were markedly more prevalent in schools in which a shooting took place: an inflexible culture, inequitable discipline, disrespectful behavior, and a code of silence (Daniels & Bradley, 2011; O'Toole, 2000).

O' Toole (2000) offered a definition of inflexible culture, which consists of official and unofficial patterns of behaviors and the relationships that are associated with these behaviors. When the culture of the school is inflexible, it often becomes insensitive to changes in society and may cause a sense of alienation for certain students. For example, if a school with an increasing African American population fails to offer culturally specific instruction or clubs, the African American students may feel separated and believe that they do not belong. The inflexible culture, in effect, creates a "they-and-we" view of the school; it creates outsiders.

Inequitable discipline exists when school staff members apply school rules differently to one group or another (O'Toole, 2000). Such unfair discipline practices can intensify an outsider-view. For example, if certain students believe that athletes are not punished as harshly as they are, these students may become resentful and have contempt for the school and its personnel. Whether these beliefs are true or not does not matter since perception is reality for the students.

If a school permits or is believed to permit disrespectful behavior such as bullying, racism, and overt rudeness, the students bearing the brunt of such actions may feel they have no one to turn to—especially if they are aware that the school's policies on such behavior are very lenient (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). As a consequence, their frustration may lead to aggression and school violence.

A code of silence exists when students refuse to report important information about other students: such peer loyalty can have tragic consequences for schools (O'Toole, 2000). This code of silence is often worse in schools where the privacy concerns of individuals are not met, and the trust of students in school personnel is not fostered. In contrast, in schools where a shooting occurred, Vossekuil et al. (2000) established that most shooters informed others of their intentions before they took action; incredibly, not one confidante reported the information.

The motivation for such secrecy is the fear of being labeled a “snitch” and being ostracized by other students. Daniels and Bradley (2011) postulated that the word “snitching” should be reframed to “helping.” The authors explained that snitching involves telling on someone to get them in trouble, whereas helping involves reporting one's concerns in order to help the person or others. Daniels and Bradley (2011) also stated, “in addition to changing students' perceptions of snitching, our research points out the importance of...developing a

culture of dignity and respect” (p. 54). Without this culture of respect, the code of silence will not be broken and potential events will not be reported.

In another article, Daniels, Buck, Croxall, Gruber, Kime, and Govert, (2007) examined news reports about averted school shootings and found little difference between those plots and the plots that were successfully carried out, as to be expected since the characteristics of the shooters are similar, with the exception of the interrupted plot. The authors searched for six main categories of plot details: characteristics of the Individual, intended victims, communication and recruitment, planning, weapons, and motives.

Supporting previously mentioned articles (Daniels et al. (2007), McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; and Vossekuil et al., 2002) found that the vast majority of the plotters were male, Caucasian and primarily of high school age. Some of the plotters had developed a “hit list” or a specific plan to kill a specific type of student—such as athletes (Daniels et al., 2007), while one individual planned to kill as many people as possible.

As O’Toole (2000) pointed out, school shooters are likely to have told people about their intentions. Daniels et al. (2007) supported this finding and further stated that the majority of the plotters communicated their plans to others, typically through emails, Facebook, or face-to-face conversation. With the increase of social media access, these individuals are more likely to post their grievances, thus alerting more individuals as to their intentions. However, oftentimes these threats are not taken seriously (Swezey & Thorp, 2010), and the individuals hearing these comments tended to reject their authenticity.

Some of the shooters planned in great detail using maps and blueprints of the school, developing hit lists, and planning diversionary tactics, while others did not have a plan. Daniels et al. (2007) found that other plans had focused on detonating explosives in order to maximize

casualties. Weapons included knives, guns, bombs and swords (Daniels et al., 2007). Although more challenging to acquire, guns are the top choice of potential plotters. Bombs are easy to make with detailed instructions found by a simple Google search. The easiest weapons to obtain are knives and swords.

The most frequent motive was retaliation for being bullied (Daniels et al., 2007). Other motives included anger at a particular administrator or teacher, retaliation for being rejected, and being caught cheating.

Other than the substantial differences in school culture discussed above, the actual discovery of an impending tragedy was the one area of significant difference between cases of successful and averted school rampages. Daniels et al. (2007) collected information on how the plot was discovered. Once again, six categories emerged and included: other students coming forward; alert administrators; police receiving tips; police, parents or teachers finding notes or intercepting emails; staff overhearing rumors; and specific threats being made. The vast majority of the plots in their study were foiled because other students came forward. Additionally, a number of cases were averted when the school and/or police received tips, often anonymously. These findings support those from other research showing that plotters discussed their plans and that the alertness of classmates and others, plus their willingness to come forward, was paramount.

Furthermore, Daniels et al. (2010) examined averted school rampages and found that preventative efforts such as being watchful and mindful, and treating individuals with respect contributed to the positive school culture that fostered better communication. Within this positive culture, school shootings were more likely to be averted. Daniels et al. (2010) also found that a reoccurring theme involved the importance of creating a safe and secure school

environment. The authors found that students who feel more connected with the faculty and school are more likely to seek out assistance or share concerns.

Following Columbine, some schools established zero tolerance policies in hopes of reducing school violence. Although their intentions were good, these policies have been shown to not make schools safer (APA Task Force, 2008). Mulvey and Cauffman (2001) found that promoting healthy environments is far more effective than punitive measures. Daniels and Bradley (2011) postulated that in order for school violence to be minimized, the schools themselves must take proactive steps to create a safe school environment. The authors created a model called the “Safe School Communities Model” which is organized around five major domains: expected student behaviors, skills instruction, engagement with the community, student self/other awareness, and positive adult interactions.

Expected student behaviors is an important aspect of fostering a safe environment and includes: setting limits on unacceptable behaviors, being consistent when enforcing rules and delivering consequences, setting clear guidelines that must be followed, enhancing student monitoring and movement (especially during class changes), taking all rumors seriously, and promoting leadership and physical safety (Daniels & Bradley, 2011). Consistency when enforcing rules is very important when trying to establish a culture of dignity and respect. If certain students view that athletes may be treated differently, for example, this could manifest in their resenting the administration. A positive school environment that communicates clear behavior expectations has been shown to promote respect and mutual trust (Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, 2003). Benbenishty and Astor (2005) further explained that the views that the principals and administration had toward violence on school campus were vastly different from those of the students. This illustrates a dangerous discrepancy between the staff and the students.

Therefore, it is important to establish a clear and concise rulebook that is adhered to by all faculty, and that all faculty are aware of the implications for being inconsistent with their own policies.

Daniels and Bradley (2011) discussed the importance of proper skill instruction for not only the students but the staff as well. The authors emphasized the importance of teaching students communication skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution skills, how to cooperate with others, enhancing self-control, and friendship-building skills. The authors also stressed the importance of teaching staff crisis response, quality instruction and professional development. Working with the teachers to establish quality instruction will help promote a positive school environment. The faculty and staff are critical in stimulating school safety (Kagan, 2001) and their role should be further expanded to learning crisis management and focusing on quality instruction.

Engaging the community by encouraging extracurricular activities and interacting with the community helps establish the bond between the school and the community. Benbenishty, Astor, and Estrada (2008) also supported opening a direct line of communication between schools and parents in order to conduct violence risk assessments at a local level. They encouraged schools to develop forums and focus groups to encourage parents to express their views and concerns

Lastly, Daniels and Bradley (2011) acknowledged the importance of developing positive adult interactions with the students in order to help break the code of silence that is prevalent in schools in which a rampage occurred (O'Toole 2000). The staff should behave as authority figures and positive role models and display warmth and positive interest in the students. Bandura (1965) established that children model adult behavior and because of this modeling, it is

imperative that staff should focus on being positive role models. Daniels and Bradley (2011) encouraged schools to stress student self/other awareness by understanding the actions of others and fostering social, emotional and ethical learning. This constitutes replacing the inflexible culture that O'Toole (2000) defined as a catalyst for potential school violence. It is also important to stress cultural tolerance and to form connections with all students. Teachers rarely receive specialized training in recognizing emotional and social problems in students (Fox & Harding, 2005). Their training is limited to academic problems, and because of this, they are likely ill-equipped to recognize a student who may be going through a crisis. Being trained to recognize emotional and social problems would foster a sense of belonging and respect in a school environment, and would encourage appropriate adult communication.

Summary

Although infrequent in nature, the deleterious effect that school shootings have on individuals and society is significant. From the time children start kindergarten, parents trust that their children will be safe when they drop them off at school; every time a school shooting occurs, this trust is violated. With other forms of violence, people can choose to avoid situations where the violence may occur; however, avoiding school is rarely an option. Therefore, researching how to prevent school shootings is paramount to ensuring the sanctity of schools, allaying the fears of parents, and protecting the children. As research shows, the impact of school violence is dramatic and far reaching. There is substantial research on completed school shootings, but looking at ways to avert school shootings is still relatively unexplored. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: to explore the differences between averted and completed school shootings using content analysis; and to analyze these differences for themes in order to

increase the literature on ways to prevent school violence and shootings and contribute to further developing the Safe School Communities Model.

Chapter 3

Methods

General Perspective

The overall design of this study took a mixed-methods, qualitative approach, in which a formal, objective, systematic process was used to test the following research question: what are the similarities and differences between schools in which a shooting occurred and schools that averted a shooting? I implemented a historical qualitative research design utilizing content analysis of information. This type of qualitative design describes past events, and the data is gathered from written descriptions of past events (school shootings and averted school shootings). My role in this study was to search and collect the data, code the data, and analyze the data using content analysis.

This study was approved through the West Virginia University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The procedure involved using content analysis, which is an unobtrusive technique. Accordingly, since all the data gathered was from news reports, there were no live individuals involved, so there were no concerns about human protection rights. The results gathered are used in an ethical manner in order to add to the research on school violence.

Design

The purpose of this research was to compare and contrast averted school shootings and completed school shootings. Completed shootings and averted school shootings from January 2007 until December 2013, which encompasses seven years of incidents, were examined. The non-averted and averted school shootings were coded and compared using a content analysis. Content analysis enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties, such as common themes and frequencies of certain

characteristics (Holsti, 1969). The rationale behind using content analysis is the researcher's ability to make inferences about the backgrounds of the incidents, describe and make inferences about the characteristics of the incidents, and to make inferences about the effects of the incidents (Holsti, 1969). This allowed the researcher to examine the data in regards to the purpose statement.

Researcher Bracketing

According to Fischer (2009), bracketing refers to "an investigator's identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study's data" (p. 1). Bracketing is intended to help identify the researcher's perspectives in order to examine them (Fischer, 2009). Fischer also pointed out that an advantage of identifying and describing the researcher's background is so that readers will be able to take the perspective of the researcher, potentially opening them to a new understanding. Overall, I have the responsibility of promoting objectivity in my study. In an effort to be transparent and to clarify my preferences and ideas, I include a discussion of my personal beliefs as they are related to the overall topic of interest.

I hold a Master's degree in Forensic Psychology, which brings with it a certain skillset that can augment research that deals with school violence and averted school shootings. However, this degree also brings forth some additional biases that should be noted at this time. One of the biases that could come through involves my experiences and studies of violent criminals. Although this may not affect the interpretation of certain incidents, being exposed to a large number of violent incidents could affect the viewpoints that this examiner has toward the people involved in the incident. Specifically, it could add a more negative view of the perpetrator involved. Furthermore, I have experience in violence prevention, and this experience

may bring about some subtle judgments toward those who were involved in a school shooting. This experience is likely to aid in the analyses of this study, and is seen as an advantage in exploring averted and completed shootings. Therefore, the biases that could arise from my experiences and education do not appear to be detrimental to the study at hand. However, it is to be noted that if the results are questioned, these biases should be addressed and accounted for in an appropriate manner.

Enhancing school safety and reducing overall school violence can be one of the salient factors in allowing students to excel in their academic endeavors. I was fortunate enough to attend elementary, middle, and high schools where there was limited school violence. The staff at these schools tried to promote a safe environment and curtail school violence. However, the internet and cell phone use at this time were not nearly as prevalent as they are today, and therefore bullying was limited to face to face interaction that was typically successfully mediated by school staff. Today's school environment is more complex; the increase in social media and technology allows for not only greater access to violent games and violent images, but also allows for greater access to a person's personal life. This can be detrimental if used in a negative way, but can also be beneficial due to many school shootings being averted due to the perpetrator's use of social media.

The assumptions I hold for the findings of this study are closely related to my own beliefs on a positive school environment. I do believe that schools that attempt to connect with students, and do not allow a culture of disrespect will show greater instances of averting school violence and school shootings. It is my belief that although there are some individuals who will carry out violence due to their own internal challenges, a school culture that is based on respect and communication will allow for peers to potentially recognize the violence brewing within this

individual and contact school personnel. I hold this assumption from my own perspectives as both a student and a researcher.

Ultimately, this research was inspired by my interest in reducing school violence and the detriment that not only school shootings, but overall school violence has on the school environment. More specifically, having spent the past five years researching school shootings and ways to avert them, I had a particular interest in this aspect of prevention research. I believe that my unique contribution stems from two main areas: personal and educational background. As an avid learner who is currently pursuing a Ph.D., I understand the value of education and the important role that education has in society. Not only does education enhance society's ability to continue to progress, but I also believe it enhances one's sense of self-worth and empowerment. Therefore, school violence (which includes bullying) can detract from the education environment of schools, and potentially deprive individuals from recognizing their potential. As research shows, a school culture that does not pride itself on open communication and respect for students detracts from the learning and positive emotional environment of the school. This, in turn, reduces student morale and, in the worst cases like school shootings, can ultimately rupture an individual's sense of safety and overall worldview.

Data Collection Procedures

This study involved building two linked databases: One of K-12 school shootings in the U.S. between January, 2007 and December, 2013; the other of K-12 averted school shootings in the U.S. between January, 2007 and December, 2013. Using search strings including "school shootings," "averted school shooting," "school violence," and "school safety," the researcher searched two internet sources: *LexisNexis Academic Search*, a bibliographic database that includes the full content of nearly all of the U.S. daily newspapers and many other publications

for the past 20+ years. This provided complete coverage of the reporting period since January, 2007. The second source was *Google*. Many regional and local publications are either exclusively available online or make their print version available on the internet. A carefully constructed *Google* search allowed the researcher to identify relevant news articles, by using search terms such as: “averted school shootings,” “school shootings,” and “school shooting plots.” *Google* was particularly useful because it captured news stories that may not have been covered by the major dailies or other publications referenced in *LexisNexis*. Collectively, *LexisNexis* and *Google* permitted me to identify those incidents that were reported by news media of all kinds in the U.S. since January, 2007 until December 30, 2013. The search revealed 16 completed school shootings and 19 averted school shootings. Due to the time that has passed between the events, this researcher was able to collect numerous articles on the same incident, which ultimately helped with the completeness of the data.

As the news articles were retrieved, they were screened against the following a priori criteria.

- *U.S incidents*. This provided a relatively similar cultural context and ensured that the language of the retrieved media reports was English.
- *Occurred between January, 2007 and December, 2013*.
- *Avverted rampages OR completed school shootings*.
- *Occurred at K-12 schools*. Although high profile shootings have occurred at universities and colleges, the environment and policy implications for K-12 settings is very different than at higher education institutions. Colleges and universities are open to a wide range of persons, usually have their own law enforcement agencies, generally have resident

populations with 24-7 access, and, in some states, have staff and students that can lawfully carry and conceal firearms.

- *If an averted incident, it was considered by the authorities to constitute a serious and credible threat.*
- The individual who committed the school shootings or attempted to commit the averted shooting was a current or past (within 6 months) student. This ruled out incidents such as the Sandy Hook school shooting where the perpetrator did not go to the school, or had not for some time. This protocol narrowed down the results to extricate themes that were more relevant to not only the individual but the school environment.

Once incidents that meet these criteria were identified, information from the news reports was entered into a database. The researcher independently looked for statements about each of the following variables:

- Town and state where the incident occurred
- Type of location (rural/suburban/urban) and town population
- Month, year, and day of week
- Type of school targeted (elementary, middle, high, preparatory)
- Private or public school targeted
- Number of persons involved in the shooting/plot
- Age, grade, sex, and race/ethnicity of persons involved in the shooting/plot
- The type of attack being planned or carried out, (whether the attack was target-specific, what the plot consisted of, etc.)
- Weaponry used, and how the individuals obtained it
- Length of planning

- How the plot was foiled (for averted incidents only)
- Reasons given by involved persons for the shooting/plot
- Involved persons' (if current students) academic performance
- Were involved persons teased or bullied?
- Were involved persons depressed, or did they suffer other psychological problems?
- Did the involved persons have family problems?
- Did the involved persons have prior disciplinary problems or trouble with the law?
- Were involved persons involved in violent video gaming, writings, music, or movies?
- Did the involved persons tell anyone besides conspirators about the plot or make threats?
- What consequences did the persons receive from the school and/or legal system?

Data Analysis Procedures

Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2013). Content analysis is an exploratory empirically grounded method in which the intent is predictive and inferential (Krippendorff, 2013). Content analysis is especially appropriate for this study for four main reasons (Krippendorff, 2013):

1. Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique. Therefore, some of the unintended errors that are inherent in experimental studies (such as situational bias, experimenter bias, and participant expectations) are not a concern and will not bias the results.
2. Content analysis can handle unstructured matter as data. Surveys, mail questionnaires and structured interviews offer predefined choices, but they limit the participants' unique voice from being heard. Content analysis, however, focuses on

data after the data has been generated. This preserves the conceptions of the data's sources, which structured methods (such as surveys) largely ignore.

3. Content analysis is context sensitive, which allows the researcher to process data texts that are significant, meaningful, and generalizable. Surveys, controlled experiments, and statistical analyses generate data without reference to their original contexts. In this study, the researcher used content analysis to acknowledge the textuality of the data, which allowed the inferences that were drawn to be more relevant to the readers.
4. Using content analysis the researcher can cope with larger volumes of data. In this study, the researcher looked at six years of data on averted and completed school shootings. Although not nearly as large of a data set as can be handled by content analysis, it was appropriate for this method (Krippendorff, 2013, pp. 45-47).

After the data was analyzed, the final step compared any emerging models to the Safe School Communities Model (SSCM), as illustrated in Daniels and Bradley (2011). Specifically, the number and percentage of schools that averted shootings that have certain SSCM factors were reported. Some of these factors included a culture of respect, consistent discipline, and a de-emphasis on the negatives of going to school personnel with concerns. The number and percentage of schools that experienced a shooting that have the same SSCM factors also were reported. These percentages were then compared across incident types.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, content analysis was an appropriate means to extract common themes from the reviewed data. However, to help enhance the utility of the numerical data (public or private school, rural vs. urban schools) some descriptive statistics were presented. These descriptive statistics were represented with percentages in order to better illustrate the data.

Methods for Verification

To help verify the accuracy of the findings, a triangulation approach was used (Patton, 2001). Triangulation involved obtaining data from other sources as a way of cross-checking and corroborating evidence and illuminating a theme or a theory. For this study, in order to verify the accuracy of the findings, the researcher compared the results to previously conducted studies. Additionally, this researcher gathered multiple news reports from the same story, in order to compare the facts between each story. Due to the nature of the events and the risk of erroneous reporting, more credence was given to news reports that were printed several days after the incident as compared to those that were printed on the same day as the incident. Additionally, more information was gathered from reports published on later dates, due to the investigation being further along.

Reliability concerns the replication of the study under similar circumstances. The lead researcher in this study derived consistency by coding the raw data in ways so that another person could understand the themes and arrive at similar conclusions. This was also done by using an “audit trail” in which the lead researcher kept a record of the process of the study (including not only the data, but also the synthesis and analysis of the data). This data includes excel sheets showing the comparisons (included in the appendixes) and a synopsis of the event (included in the appendixes).

Internal validity refers to the validity of causal inferences. Validation is the process of evaluating “the ‘trustworthiness’ of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations” (Mishler, 1990, p. 419). With regards to this study, the validity lies in the extent to which the researcher’s interpretations and analyses were empirically grounded (Flick, 2002). External validity refers to the generalizability of the findings of the study. This researcher included

synopses of events, a descriptive chart, and a detailed reference section to ensure that the data collected from the completed and averted school shooting incidents was adequately described and detailed to allow for replication and transferability to other settings (such as a school in a different region).

Chapter 4

Results

The information reported in this Chapter was extracted from various news accounts of both completed and averted violent incidents in kindergarten through 12th grade schools in the United States between January of 2007 and December of 2013. There are two main sections: completed school shootings and averted school shootings. Within each section there are specific areas that will be examined, such as characteristics of the perpetrator, family problems, and signs of mental illness. While a thorough search of *LexisNexis* was made, it should be remembered that since no established database exists, it is difficult to ensure that all incidents were found. Every attempt was made to be as accurate as possible.

Completed School Shootings

A thorough *LexisNexis* and *Google* search uncovered 16 completed shooting incidents that met the research criteria below:

- *U.S incidents.* This provided a relatively similar cultural context and ensured that the language of the retrieved media reports was English.
- *Occurred between January, 2007 and December, 2013.*
- *Occurred at K-12 schools.* Although high profile shootings have occurred at universities and colleges, the environment and policy implications for K-12 settings is very different than at higher education institutions. Colleges and universities are open to a wide range of persons, usually have their own law enforcement agencies, generally have resident populations with 24-7 access, and, in some states, have staff and students that can lawfully carry and conceal firearms.

- The individual who committed the school shootings was a current or past (within 6 months) student.

All 16 completed shootings occurred in public schools. Fifty-six percent (9) of the schools were in urban areas, while 25% (4) were in suburban districts and 19% (3) were in rural communities.

In considering the geographic regions of the United States in which the completed shootings occurred, the following divisions were used:

West: Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Alaska.

Midwest: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.

Northeast: New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and New Jersey.

Southeast: Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

Southwest: Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma.

Using these regional divisions, five (31%) completed shootings occurred in the West, four (25%) in the Mid-West, and seven (44%) in the Southeast. None occurred in the Northeast or Southwest. In all, there were 16 total fatalities with another 15 injuries.

Characteristics of the Perpetrator. Ninety-four percent (15) of the shooters were male and all acted alone. They were between 12 and 18 years old (average of 15.4 years old) and were in grades 7 to 12 (average grade of 10). Sixty-nine percent (11) of the shooters were Caucasian, 19% (3) were Black, 6% (1) were Asian-American and 6% (1) were Arab-American.

Eighty-eight percent (14) of the shooters were currently enrolled in school, and the two (12%) who were not in school were recently suspended.

This section will include the phrase “perceived bullying” and which is a more appropriate phrase to encapsulate the concept of bullying. There is no legal definition of bullying, and definitions vary between individuals, environments, and professionals. However, the most accepted definition of bullying is posted on the government (stopbullying.gov) webpage which defines bullying as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.” Therefore, accepting this definition and recognizing that the reported information may be influenced by reporter bias, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the reported bullying met the criteria of the accepted definition. Additionally, as mentioned in the literature review section, these individuals involved may perceive or report that that they were bullied, but may not have been by definition. Subsequently, it is also not the intention to minimize or discount the fact that many of these individuals were likely bullied, and therefore, the reported statistics about bullying should be reviewed with these caveats in mind. In these instances, it is important to report the perceptions, as the individual’s perception is their reality.

While information is not available for 38% (6) of the perpetrators, reports show that 80% (8) of the 10 individuals with known data were perceived to have been bullied by schoolmates. Twenty percent (2) were known to not have been subjected to perceive bullying. While information was not available for 50% (8) of the perpetrators, reports show that of the remaining eight, 25% (2) were perceived bullies themselves, while 75% (6) were not.

Signs of Depression or Mental Illness. While there is no information about the mental health status of 37% (6) of the school shooters, of the remaining 10 individuals, 90% (9) showed

documented signs of depression or another mental illness, and were on medication and/or seeing a therapist. For example, one individual was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder after attempting suicide. He was receiving therapy and was prescribed an anti-depressant. The mother of another individual claimed that the antidepressants her son had been taking were not working for him. Another shooter was prescribed medications to treat depression and hyperactivity but refused to take them. This person also had a history of suicidal behavior and ideation while in a mental health facility. The only female perpetrator had a history of depression and, on the evening before the attack, sliced her arms more than 90 times with a razor blade. And finally, another individual kept a journal that revealed signs of depression and feelings of inadequacy. His father had taken him to a psychiatrist who prescribed an anti-depressant just three days before the shooting. This individual wrote two suicide notes prior to the attack. Additionally, his mother had done research on autism and was worried that her child showed signs of this disorder. Only one shooter had a documented case of a psychotic disorder, schizophrenia, and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for treatment after attempting suicide, before the shooting.

Family Problems. In all, 44% (7) of the 16 individuals did not have reported information about their family situation. Of the remaining nine perpetrators, 89% (8) were physically abused or had witnessed violent interactions within the family. Four of these individuals were regularly beaten by their father and/or mother. One individual's father admitted that he bullied his child at home and that this bullying included physical, verbal and emotional abuse. Another individual was sent to live with his drug-addicted father who physically abused him. This abuse grew in intensity in the weeks prior to the son's shooting rampage. The lone female shooter was sexually molested by a family member when she was six years old and also

was severely beaten by her mother who had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Additionally, her father was serving a 25-year prison sentence for attempted murder.

While not personally abused, the other four perpetrators witnessed domestic violence, family violence, parental drug use, or life disruptions such as divorce. For example, both parents of one individual were arrested several times for domestic violence. Additionally, the father was arrested for assaulting female friends, including holding a woman under running water and bashing her head into a wall. The father had also served time in prison for assaulting a police officer.

A second individual's parents were accused of and/or arrested for domestic violence against the other. In addition, the mother had a criminal history and was addicted to methamphetamines. The father had contacted Child Protective Services at least five times to express his concerns about the son living with his mother. He was awarded custody when the mother entered a drug rehabilitation program.

The third individual in this group grew up in an unkempt and unsanitary home. His mother was convicted of child neglect and he had no contact with his biological father. His older brothers were in trouble and routinely threatened neighbors with weapons. One brother, whom he looked up to, was found guilty of numerous criminal violations ranging from burglary to felonious assault and domestic violence. The last individual in this group was dramatically affected by his parent's divorce and the ensuing chaos that the divorce caused in his life.

Legal and Disciplinary Problems. Four (25%) out of the 16 perpetrators did not have documented information about their legal or disciplinary problems. Of the remaining 12 shooters with documented information, 92% (11 out of 12) had incidents of legal and/or disciplinary problems at their current or recent school. Three had been suspended at some point or had been

recently expelled from school. One of these students—who had a criminal record, had been in jail, and had violated his probation—was suspended prior to the attack for disorderly conduct at his school. Another shooter was suspended from school for criminal trespassing, returned the following day, was escorted out by security, and returned that same day to carry out the attack. A third shooter, who had accumulated 24 disciplinary referrals from five different staff members during the school year, was expelled from another school a week before his attack for talking about using bombs.

Four of the 12 shooters (33.3%) for whom information was available had been removed from a previous school due to behavior problems. One of the shooters was recently moved to an alternative school after being charged with third-degree mischief for spray painting for a gang initiation. A second individual had been removed from a previous school for defying authority. The third shooter had a history of behavioral problems in his previous school, including throwing a chair against a wall in response to a classmate's teasing. He was in an Alternative Learning Center (ALC) placement when he went on a rampage at his original school. The last individual had been arrested twice; once for restraining his uncle while a cousin hit him; and again when he, himself, assaulted a peer. This student also had recently been sent to ALC for the rest of the semester. While waiting for the bus to go to ALC, he carried out the attack at his original school.

Four of the individuals had a well-documented history of disciplinary problems at their current school. One of these shooters had been convicted of bringing a knife to school and also had been arrested and charged with carrying a concealed gun and possession of marijuana. Additionally, he was charged with a misdemeanor for second-degree trespassing and resisting an officer. Another individual had recently been arrested for assaulting his mother. He was ordered

to attend six hours a week of counseling, perform community service and receive anger management classes.

The most atypical case was that of an individual with no documented legal or disciplinary problems. However, after he was removed as captain of his debate team by his coach, he became extremely hostile and threatening toward this teacher in the months before the attack. While the threats were addressed, limited disciplinary action was taken against the individual. The day of the attack, the shooter specifically targeted the debate coach.

Involvement with Violent Media/Writings. Although there is no information for 44% (7) of the shooters, the information on the remaining individuals indicates that eight (89%) of those nine were involved with violent media/writings, including four who specifically detailed their plans in personal journals. One of these four kept several journals in which he discussed not only his experimentations with pipe bombs and homemade fireworks, but also what guns he would buy to use in his attack. Another kept a journal that included drawings of people with lines indicating where to shoot someone to wound or kill them. This journal also included a hit list as well as a list of people not to kill. A third shooter was an avid reader of *The Communist Manifesto* and the *Anarchist Cookbook* website and described his attack plans in a journal. The fourth shooter referred to himself as the “Supreme Being” and said he would commit suicide after the killings. His journal contained blueprints for the attack, as well as references to the Anti-Christ, AC/DC and Marilyn Manson. Found in what he called his “Deadly Diary” was a drawing of himself in camouflage pants and combat boots with the words “Disturbed Mind” next to the head.

While two additional perpetrators did not specifically describe an attack plan in a journal, they did write about violence. One discussed involvement with a gang and proclaimed loyalty to

that group. The second individual kept a journal with stories that revealed his inner struggles, narcissistic beliefs and his violent worldview. One disturbing entry reportedly made on the individual's Facebook page reads in part:

. . . Lost and alone. The streets were his home. His thoughts would solely consist of "why do we exist?" His only company to confide in was the vermin in the street. He longed for only one thing, the world to bow at his feet. They too should feel his secret fear. The dismal drear. His pain had made him sincere. He was better than the rest, all those ones he detests, within their castles, so vain. Selfish and conceited. They couldn't care less about the peasants (sic) they mistreated . . . Feel death, not just mocking you. Not just stalking you but inside of you. Wriggle and writhe. Feel smaller beneath my might . . . Die, all of you (<http://fox4kc.com/2012/02/27/ohio-shooter-described-as-nice-guy-from-broken-home/>)

While just the above six perpetrators kept journals of violent writings, two others were involved with violent media. The summer before he attacked, one shooter posted online a story he had written about a bullied student killing his former tormentors as an adult. The remaining shooter did not keep a journal, but he did keep images of the columbine massacre on his phone. He also searched and played the game "Super Columbine Massacre Role Playing Game" as well as 47 other first-person shooter games.

Reasons for Attack. The reasons for the attacks sometimes were hinted at or revealed by the perpetrators' writings, threats, and/or treatment by fellow students or staff. Of the 16 shooters, 10 (63%) sought revenge for perceived mistreatments, humiliations, and/or bullying. As one perpetrator wrote in his journal, "Well that all ends. Today I will get revenge on the students and teachers for ruining my life." He went on to say that he would bring a pistol and

rifle to school “to shoot you and see how you like it when someone (sic) making fun of you . . . “Have a great death at school.” An additional four (25%) attacks were due to a dispute with another student or a member of the school staff. Two (12%) of the attackers reportedly expressed wanting feelings of power and control over others. One of those shooters claimed he was a psychopath with a superiority complex and stated, “I will do something I have wanted to do for a while—mass murder and be in a place of power where I and I alone are judge, jury and executioner.”

Advanced Knowledge of the Attack. Only four (25%) of the 16 perpetrators reportedly told others about their plans. Before the attack, for example, one shooter told a victim’s friend to say goodbye to the victim because she would never see him again. Another threatened to do harm to someone months before the actual attack, but reportedly did not confide or tell anyone his intentions prior kept his plans concealed in the months prior to the attack. Similarly, another told a fellow student that he wanted to shoot the victim a few weeks before doing so. He wrote on Facebook that, “today is the day... you will hear about it.” He made another post on Facebook just hours before the killing that stated, “Don’t use your mind, use your nine.” However, as past research has shown, it is likely that more alluded to their intentions, but were not taken seriously.

Weapons and Intended Targets. Guns were used in every case. Fourteen (88%) of the 16 attackers used handguns, while the remaining two (12%) used shotguns. In addition to a gun, one perpetrator had a knife, one had bomb material, and another had all three types of weapons. All but two individuals had obtained the weapons well in advance of their rampage.

Media reported the intended targets in 15 (94%) of the 16 incidents. Ten (67%) of the 15 perpetrators targeted specific individuals, such as those who they perceived had bullied him/her

or those with whom he/she had had a dispute of some sort. In three (20%) of 15 cases the shooter simply wanted to kill as many people as possible in the attack, no matter who it was. In two (13%) of the 15 cases, the individual targeted the victim(s) and then went on to shoot others more or less at random.

Legal /School Consequences for the Perpetrator. Six (37%) of the 16 individuals committed suicide during or shortly after the attack. For the remaining ten individuals (63%), the legal consequences were as follows: One individual received three life sentences without the possibility of parole; three received 30 years in prison; four received between 20-30 years in prison; and two received under 10 years in prison. All of them were expelled from school.

Averted School Shootings

The information reported in this section was taken from news accounts of averted incidents. As was the case with similar reports on completed school shootings, the information may not be complete for all categories below. In fact, some categories may have less information for averted school shootings because the intensity of the media coverage was less—perhaps because the stories were not as sensational as actual shootings and/or privacy issues for (living) minors limited the amount of information released.

A thorough *LexisNexis* and *Google* search found 19 cases of averted shootings that met the research criteria:

- *U.S incidents.* This provided a relatively similar cultural context and ensured that the language of the retrieved media reports was English.
- *Occurred between January, 2007 and December, 2013.*
- *Occurred at K-12 schools.*

- *As an averted incident, it was considered by the authorities to constitute a serious and credible threat.*
- The individual who attempted to commit the averted shooting was a current or past (within 6 months) student.

Eighteen (95%) of the 19 averted shootings took place in public schools, 11 (58%) of the 19 were in suburban districts, six (32%) were in urban districts, and two (10%) were in rural districts.

In considering the geographic regions of the United States in which the averted shootings occurred, the same divisions from the completed shootings were used:

West: Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Alaska

Midwest: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio

Northeast: New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and New Jersey

Southeast: Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas

Southwest: Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma

Using these divisions, four (21%) averted shooting occurred in the West, two (11%) in the Midwest, seven (37%) in the Northeast, five (26%) in the Southeast, and one (5%) in the Southwest.

Characteristics of the Perpetrator. All of the perpetrators were male and all acted alone. They ranged from 13 to 19 years old (average age of 15.8 years) and were in grades 7 to

12 (average grade of 10). Fifteen (94%) of the 16 individuals for whom ethnicity information was reported were Caucasian, and one (6%) was Native American. The enrollment status was known in 18 out of the 19 cases. Thirteen (72%) of these 18 were currently enrolled. Five (28%) had dropped out, transferred, or had been suspended.

While no information on bullying was available in seven of the 19 cases, news sources reported that 10 (83%) of the remaining 12 individuals were perceived victims of bullying, while only two (17%) individuals were reportedly not subjected to perceived bullying. Only one was reported to have been a bully himself. One perpetrator who was perceived to have been bullied wrote in his journal:

If they would've just left me alone they would be ok. How many lives must be lost before they realize that the things they say and do really (expletive) with someone's head. How many times must the "freaks", "weirdoes", and "geeks" shoot up a school or bomb a building before they start leaving us all alone and letting us express ourselves how we want without ridiculing or ostrecizing (sic) us. I've been brought to this point of not feeling sympathy for those who die because most if not all of them deserve it...Those who deserve to die will be killed. Those who don't yet know our cause will be forced to witness it.

Another wrote of himself, "Destined to teach a lesson with bloodshed. Lessons not learned in blood are soon forgotten."

Signs of Depression or Mental Illness. While there is no information about the mental health state for six (32%) of the 19 perpetrators, the remaining 13 (68%) individuals all displayed documented signs of depression or mental illness. One had attempted suicide; another had child pornography and violent images on his computer. Four were documented as having been seen

by a therapist and had been prescribed medications. In other cases, parents and teachers had noticed problems and were concerned about the individual. For example, one mother was concerned about her son's depression, isolation and obsession with weapons. In another case, a teacher had asked the perpetrator if he was going to, "do a Columbine." Another had struggled with rage and abused synthetic drugs, and had hurt himself on several occasions, reportedly because he liked the pain. Some journal entries reveal severe depression; as one wrote, "My mother hates me. ... If only she knew. ... If only they all knew. ... I'm a lost cause."

Family Problems. While we know little about the family circumstances of 13 (68%) of the individuals, there are accounts indicating that all six of the remaining perpetrators had troubled family lives ranging from physical and sexual abuse to living with alcohol and/or family drug addiction to family problems like domestic violence and/or divorce. One individual, at the age of 15, cited irreconcilable differences with his mother and moved in with his grandfather and uncle. Just months before this individual's attack, his grandfather passed away, leaving him deeply affected. Another plotter grew up with domestic violence and constant upheaval from frequent moves. Another had little to eat but fish sticks and reported that his father had attacked him, intending to kill him.

Legal and Disciplinary Problems. Information about the legal/disciplinary problems was not reported for nine of the 19 individuals. Of the remaining 10, four (40%) had no documented legal/disciplinary problems, while six (60%) did have documented disciplinary and/or legal problems ranging from simple truancy to much more serious infractions. One had previously spent time in a juvenile detention center while a second was on juvenile probation stemming from a previous nonviolent arrest. Another broke into his former school and was facing charges for burglary, theft, receiving stolen property and criminal trespass. Another

plotter was previously arrested and accused of making a false report and disrupting a function at his school.

The most serious of these offenders had been in trouble with the law from age 12. His offenses included burglarizing a car, vandalizing a neighbor's property, trespassing, truancy, possession of an unloaded gun, and resisting arrest by brandishing a metal baseball bat. After being expelled from school, he enrolled in an alternative learning center (ALC). By age 17, he was unemployed and a dropout living with his mother, smoking marijuana and trashing the house when she left for work.

Violent Media/Writings. While little was reported about the media habits of 10 (53%) of the 19 attackers, the remaining nine were all involved in violent media and/or writing. Evidence found on one individual's computer included bomb-making websites and a video game based on the Columbine massacre. Journals, blogs and notebooks of other individuals reveal more explicit, violent plans. For example, a journal titled "Book of Hate" described impaling people with swords and slashing their throats. A blog proclaimed, "I really really hate every one at school thay mare (sic) me want to do wut I did last year but really kill." Another blog page, titled, "Mess with the best, Die like the rest," featured tribute videos to the Columbine shooters.

The Facebook posts of a plotter, who compared himself to one of the Columbine shooters, included, "I'm a bust in shootin don't care wut u doin algebra or geometry I'm a teach ur (expletive) TRIGGERnometry." A three-ring notebook found in this individual's possession contained angry and racist writings, a description of the steps taken by the Columbine shooters, as well as a diagram of his own high school entrance with exit doors, hallways, and security gates clearly marked. The notebook also contained a list of items needed to secure the doors, such as chains and locks, as well as materials needed to make explosive devices such as pipes,

cannon fuses and propane bottles. This plotter wrote that “this massacre will be [expletive] Biblical...If they thought Columbine was bad then they won’t know what to think.”

Reason for Attack. There was reported information for reasons for the planned attack in 17 (89%) out of the 19 cases. Twelve (71%) of the 17 plotters reportedly stated perceived bullying as the major reason for plotting the school rampage. This can be seen clearly in some of these individuals’ writings. For example, one had a hit list with at least 20 names on it. According to the affidavit, he was going to “kill the people that had been picking on me for a long time” and then kill himself. Another plotter confessed that he was going to carry out his shooting to kill the people who had relentlessly bullied him in elementary and middle school. The remaining five (29%) plotters attacked for one of three other reasons: one plotter wanted power/fame/domination; two plotters had an impulsive reaction to an event; and two plotters had significant mental health issues.

Advanced Knowledge of the Attack. In all but one of the cases (18 out of 19) information was found about how the plot was discovered. Eight (44%) out of 18 individuals planning a school rampage told someone, such as a girlfriend, close friend, or other students, about their plot. For instance, one sent a text to his friend that read, “If I tell you one day not to go to school, make damn sure you...are not there.” Another talked about the materials needed to make a bomb, alarming other students who turned him in. One plotter was quite specific, ripping a school evacuation map off the wall during class and highlighting the office, cafeteria and certain classrooms as shooting targets.

In addition, six (33%) of the 18 would-be attackers tried to recruit a friend to help. One student reported that the perpetrator had told him, “I can’t pull this off by myself. That’s where you come in.” Another student reported that he was supposed to take hostages at the school and

shoot anyone who resisted. In both situations, the friends or the recruited individuals reported the planned rampage to the authorities, thereby averting the attack.

Social media such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube, as well as on-line blogs also helped avert four (22%) out of the 18 planned school rampages. In one case, a particularly alert School Resource Officer noticed an on-line post planning a Columbine-like mass murder at his school. The author was traced and a police-search of his home revealed active, detailed planning. Another plotter's discovered Facebook page read, "I'm a bust in shootin don't care what u doin algebra or geometry I'm a teach ur (expletive) TRIGGERnometry."

Weapons and Intended Targets. Thirteen (68%) of the 19 planned to use a gun in their school attack. In more detail, six (46%) of these 13 planned to use only a gun, while five (38%) out of 13 planned to use both a gun and bomb materials. The remaining two (15%) out of 13 wanted to use a gun, bomb, and a knife. Overall, five (26%) out of 19 were intent on building and using only bomb materials in their attack, and only one (5%) out of 19 planned to use a knife/sword only.

The intended targets were known in 17 (89%) out of 19 cases. Nine (53%) out of 17 had targeted specific individuals that they intended to kill. Six (35%) of the 17 were non-discriminate in their targeting, wanting to kill as many as possible. The remaining two (12%) out of 17 were planning on killing targeted individuals and then killing anyone who was left. As one attacker wrote, "Those [the bullies] who deserve to die, will be killed." Among items found by investigators were perpetrators' notebooks—some with titles like "TARGETS" and "Book of Hate"—listing the students, teachers, and administrators they intended to kill.

Legal/School Consequences for the Perpetrator. Information gathered showed that the legal consequences for 17 out of 19 perpetrators were known. Of those 17, nine (53%) faced jail

time and/or time in a psychiatric facility with sentences ranging from six months in a juvenile detention center, to six years in a secure psychiatric facility, to 15 years in prison. Six (35%) of the 17 faced charges in the legal justice system for offences ranging from disorderly conduct to unlawful manufacturing and/or possession of a destructive device, possession of a weapon of mass destruction, conspiracy to commit a terrorist act, conspiracy to commit murder, and attempted aggravated murder, but the consequences were not revealed. All 19 of the individuals were expelled from school.

A Table of the Differences between Completed and Averted Shootings

	COMPLETED SHOOTINGS N=16		AVERTED SHOOTINGS N=19	
Type of School				
Public	16	100%	18	95%
Private	0	0%	1	5%
Urban	9	56%	6	32%
Suburban	4	25%	11	58%
Rural	3	19%	2	10%
Weapon				
Gun ONLY	13	82%	6	32%
Gun +knife	1	6%	0	0%
Gun +bomb	1	6%	5	26%
All three	1	6%	2	11%
Knife only	0	0%	1	5%
Bomb only	0	0%	5	26%
Attendance Status				
Enrolled	14	88%	13	69%
Suspended/disciplined/removed	2	12%	4	21%
Expelled/dropped out/transferred	0	0%	1	5%
Not reported	0	0%	1	5%
Disciplinary/Legal problems				
Yes	10	25%	6	32%
No	2	13%	4	21%
Not reported	4	25%	9	47%
Family Interaction				
Personally abused	4	25%	1	5%
Witnessed abuse/drugs/ or significant life disruptions	4	25%	5	26%
No problem	1	6%	0	0%
Not reported	7	44%	13	69%
Gender				
Male	15	94%	19	100%
Female	1	6%	0	0%
Race				
Caucasian	11	69%	15	79%

African Am	3	19%	0	0%
Arab Am	1	6%	0	0%
Asian Am	1	6%	0	0%
Native Am	0	0%	1	5%
Not Reported	0	0%	3	16%
Perceived Bullied				
Yes	8	50%	10	53%
No	2	13%	2	11%
Not Reported	6	38%	7	36%
Was a Perceived Bully				
Yes	2	12%	1	5%
No	6	38%	9	48%
Not Reported	8	50%	9	47%
Depression/Mental Illness				
Signs of dep/mental illness/ on meds/seeing therapist	9	57%	13	68%
No	1	6%	0	0%
Not Reported	6	37%	6	32%
Wrote violent Journals/Stories/Played Violent Games				
Yes	8	50%	9	47%
No	1	7%	0	0%
Not Reported	7	44%	10	53%
Reason for Attack				
Revenge for perceived mistreatment, humiliation, bullying	10	63%	12	63%
Power/domination/fame	2	12%	1	5%
Reaction to recent event/dispute	4	25%	2	11%
Psyc/mental illness	0	0%	2	11%
Not Reported	0	0%	2	10%
Type of Attack				
Targeted specific people	10	63%	9	47%
Generalized	3	19%	6	32%
Both	2	12%	2	11%
Not Reported	1	6%	2	10%

Chapter 5

Discussion

The previous chapter, Results, presented the analyzed details of media accounts of completed and averted shootings. This chapter will discuss in more detail the following topics: commonalities and themes in completed and averted school shootings; a description of the “typical” shooter in a completed school shooting, and plotter in an averted school shooting; comparisons between different components of completed and averted school shootings (such as the reason, disciplinary problems, etc.); and finally, an overall discussion section will compare the findings with different themes and hypotheses, the strengths and limitations of the study, and the implications and recommendations for future research.

Commonalities and Themes in Completed School Shootings

For a number of categories, such as Reasons for the Attack and Advanced Knowledge of the Attack, little direct information was given in the news accounts. The commonalities below are extracted from the information available. In general, the violent incidences studied in this research were carried out in urban public schools. A gun, either taken without permission or stolen, was the weapon of choice. All perpetrators but one were male and two-thirds were Caucasian. These results were similar to McGee and DeBernardo (1999) who found that, in general, a classroom avenger was a physically healthy, blue collar or middle class Caucasian male around 16 years old. While most of the students were currently enrolled, 83% of the individuals for whom information was reported had school discipline problems and/or had been arrested.

No direct information about abuse was reported for half of the perpetrators; of the rest, nearly all had been abused and/or had witnessed abuse, parental drug use, or other serious life

disruptions such as parental divorce. Most were perceived to have been bullied at school, which is similar to Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) who found that 75% of school shooters felt persecuted, bullied, or threatened by others. Some of the attackers had reportedly experienced this abuse for quite some time, and this perceived bullying was a significant factor in their decision to commit their crime. Only two were bullies themselves, which was different than the findings from Jeehae (2013), who found that these perpetrators were often bullies. While information is missing for half of the individuals, the others showed signs of depression and/or mental illness; some were actually diagnosed and had been prescribed medication, which was similar to the findings from Verlinden, Hershen and Thomas (2000). Again, while no media habits were reported for half of the attackers, all of the rest wrote, blogged or posted disturbing, violent entries in journals and/or on social media. Some read about violence or played first-person shooter video games. News accounts reported that few indicated to anyone else what they planned to do.

Most of the shooters targeted specific victims, which was similar to the findings by Jeehae (2013) who found that the vast majority (73%) of the shooters had a grievance against at least one of their victims. Half of the attacks were acts of revenge while another fourth were reactions to a dispute.

A third of the shooters committed suicide during or after their rampage. The remaining were arrested and sentenced to jail terms ranging from under 10 years to life without the possibility of parole.

A Description of the Typical Shooter in a Completed Event. The completed school shootings typically were committed in urban public schools by a white male student with a gun. The typical shooter had a history of being subjected to and/or engaging in violence, having been

reportedly abused and feeling mistreated or having witnessed violence growing up. The shooter showed some signs of depression and/or mental illness and wrote about violent fantasies. The shooter told no one about plans to target specific individuals for revenge.

Commonalities and Themes in Averted School Shootings. For some categories, such as Family Problems, little pertinent information was given in the news accounts. The commonalities below were extracted from the information available.

In general, the attacks discussed in this section more often targeted a suburban public school. Both guns and explosives were to be involved equally; more specifically: only guns in a fourth of the cases, only explosives in a fourth, both guns and explosives in half.

All perpetrators were male, and all but one was Caucasian. The great majority were currently enrolled in the targeted school; many had disciplinary problems and/or had been arrested.

Over half were reported to have been bullied (or perceived to have been bullied) but only one was known to be a bully himself. At least a third had been abused and/or had witnessed abuse, parental drug use, or other serious life disruptions such as parental divorce. While no information was available for half of the individuals, the remainder showed signs of depression and/or mental illness; some had been diagnosed and prescribed medications. Similarly, while no information about media habits was available for over half of the individuals, the remainder wrote, blogged or posted disturbing, violent entries in journals and/or on social media. Some read about violence or played first-person shooter video games.

Half of the would-be attackers had specific targets they wanted to kill while the other half planned to kill as many people as possible. Revenge for perceived mistreatment, particularly bullying, was the most common reason for planning the attack, and was often exacerbated by

emotional or mental health problems, and/or a stressor such as a turbulent home life, the death of a close family member, or a break-up with a girlfriend.

All but one revealed their plans to someone else, typically by attempting to recruit help (over a third) or by telling a friend or girlfriend (about half). The remaining individuals posted plans or cryptic messages on social media such as Facebook, MySpace and blog pages or via texts. All were arrested, and half were sentenced to terms in a juvenile facility, a secure psychiatric facility, or prison. All were expelled from their school.

A Description of the Typical Plotter in an Averted Event

Typically the averted school shootings were planned for a suburban school by a Caucasian male student seeking revenge for bullying or perceived mistreatment. The plotter was as likely to plan to use explosives as guns and to wish to kill specific individuals as to kill as many as possible. The plotter revealed their plans beforehand, either by attempting to recruit help or by telling friends or a significant other.

Shooters versus Plotters

In comparing news accounts for Completed and Averted school shootings, several common factors were found as well as several dissimilar factors. These factors clustered around:

The School: Public/private, location (city, suburban, rural), code of silence

The Perpetrator: Race, gender, family life, mental health, perceived mistreatment, disciplinary problems, involvement with violent media/entertainment/writing

The Act: Intended victims, weapons used, number of perpetrators, prior announcement

The Reason: Revenge, impulse/reaction, personal loss, relationship break up

These factors are similar to many found by past researchers discussed in the Review of the Literature chapter of this dissertation. These factors were used when addressing the fundamental question this research attempted to answer, specifically: What are the similarities and differences between schools in which a shooting occurred and schools that averted a shooting? These factors, in essence, help define the hypotheses tested in the research for this dissertation.

The School. All completed and averted shootings, except one, occurred in public schools. Half of all the completed and averted incidents occurred in urban districts. However, while the remaining averted incidents took place in suburban areas, the remaining completed cases were split between suburban and rural areas. Having found so few rural cases was in direct contrast with McGee and DeBernardo's (1999) description of the typical "Classroom Avenger" as one living in a rural community.

In the completed attacks studied by Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, and Modzeleski (2000), no student who had prior knowledge of an attack came forward to stop it. This current research on completed shootings supported Vossekuil et al.; no one came forward. However, the comparison may be a little weak because in Vossekuil et al.'s study, students had prior knowledge of most of the attacks, whereas in this current study prior knowledge was reportedly known for only one completed attack. According to McGee and DeBernardo (1999), it is likely that more knew, but, according to Swezey (2010), they did not take the threat seriously. While Vossekuil et al. (2000) did not discuss why students failed to alert authorities, Daniels and Bradley (2011) and O'Toole (2000) found that shootings occurred more often in schools where a well-entrenched code of silence discouraged students from speaking out.

In contrast, in 77% of the cases of averted shootings, a friend, a girlfriend, or someone who had been approached to help with the attack came forward to alert authorities. They willingly broke the code of silence. This is similar to the findings that Daniel et al. (2007) found where the vast majority of the plots in their study were foiled because other students came forward.

The Daniels and Bradley (2011) and the O'Toole (2000) findings noted above suggest the hypothesis that shootings are less likely to occur in schools lacking an entrenched Code of Silence. The findings of this research support that hypothesis. Furthermore, the current findings add support to the benefits of creating a school environment that opens the lines of communication among students, staff and parents that Daniels advocated in his Safe School Communities Model.

The Perpetrator. As Daniels et al. (2007), McGee and DeBernardo (1999), and Vossekuil et al. (2002) found in their research, the vast majority of perpetrators in this current study were male, Caucasian, and of high school age. However, one slight divergence in the current data for averted shootings should be noted: most of the one-third non-Caucasian perpetrators were African-American. The findings from the studies noted above suggest a second hypothesis: plotters and perpetrators of violent school rampages tend to be Caucasian males of high school age. The findings of this current research support that hypothesis

McGee and DeBernardo (1999), O'Toole (2000), Verlinden (2000), and Burgess (1986) all found that school attackers typically had very troubled family lives. This current research supported those studies, by finding that many perpetrators were abused and/or had witnessed family violence, drug use and serious life disruptions such as divorce or abandonment. McGee and DeBernardo (1999) postulated that due to troubled or chaotic family environments, many

individuals may have had problems with bonding and developing effective social interactions. Such problems may have led individuals to become loners or outsiders that Meloy (2001) found in the majority of school shootings he studied. While some news accounts reviewed for this current study described the perpetrators as loners, most sources did not comment on this aspect. Many of the findings in this paragraph suggest a third hypothesis that points to a troubled family life as a risk factor for school violence. The current findings of this dissertation support this hypothesis.

Similar to results of studies by Verlinden (2000) and McGee and DeBernardo (1999), all perpetrators, for whom we have information in this current study, likely suffered from depression or other mental/emotional problems. This finding, however, contrasted with Meloy's (2001) results, who found that only a quarter of the shooters he studied suffered from such problems. The Verlinden (2000) and McGee and DeBernardo (1999) findings suggest a fourth hypothesis: perpetrators tend to suffer from depression or other mental/emotional problems. The results of this current study support this hypothesis.

Nearly all perpetrators, for whom we have information, were subjected to perceived maltreatment/bullying by their peers. These data supported the findings of Jeehae (2013) who found that 83% of the shooters studied were perceived to have been bullied. In contrast, these data indicated bullying is more prevalent than Meloy (2001) found with just half of the perpetrators he studied having been bullied. As mentioned previously, it is difficult to ascertain for certain whether or not these individuals were actually bullied or perceived to be bullied, due to varying definitions and the method of reporting. These data also indicated that perceived bullying may be more common than the 75% found by Vossekuil et al. (2002). If the Jeehae (2013) findings are used as a fifth hypothesis, the findings of this dissertation support the

hypothesis that perpetrators tend to have been subjected to bullying or perceived they were bullied. In addition, the current findings support efforts to encourage a respectful school culture that has no tolerance for bullying, as suggested by Daniels' Safe School Communities Model.

Vossekuil et al. (2000) established that in most completed attacks, the shooter told someone about his plans. Further, O'Toole (2000) found that the perpetrators likely took others into their confidence. The current research did not uncover the same result for completed shootings, since only one perpetrator confided in someone else. However, it must be noted that these shooters likely made comments and statements about their plan that were deemed as not relevant by their peers, and were discounted. In contrast, in studying averted shootings, Daniels et al. (2007) found that the majority of plotters communicated their plans to others. The current study for this dissertation found similar results. The sixth hypothesis: if plotters tell others before they act, their violent plans often can be averted, is supported by this research. And further, these findings support Daniels' Safe School Communities Model's emphasis on the importance of developing open lines of communication between staff and students.

While little was reported about the media habits of half of the attackers, nearly all of the rest reportedly were involved with violent media. These individuals watched violent movies, read violent material, played violent first-person shooter games and/or wrote violent journals, blogs and posts. The findings from this research supported McGee and DeBarnardo's (1999) description of a Classroom Avenger as one who often was obsessed with violence. It also supports Meloy's (2001) data showing that half of the shooters he studied either had a history of violence or were fascinated with violence. In addition, the findings supported Verlinden's (2000) data describing perpetrators as being fascinated with weapons. The findings of these past researchers give rise to a seventh hypothesis: violent school rampages tend to be committed by

perpetrators who are obsessed with violence and/or have a history of violence and/or have a fascination with weapons.

In general, the individuals involved in a completed shooting were more likely than those involved in an averted incident to have had documented disciplinary and/or legal problems. These problems ranged from simple truancy to resisting arrest and assault. This finding suggests an eighth hypothesis: violent school rampages tend to be committed by perpetrators who have a history of documented school disciplinary problems and/or documented problems with law enforcement.

The Attack. Guns were used in every instance of completed attacks. However, this was not the case in averted attacks where half planned to use a gun and possibly explosives and/or knives, and half planned to use explosives and possibly a gun and/or knives. These findings somewhat tracked the findings of Daniels et al. (2007) who found that plotters typically planned to use guns while some added explosives and knives.

All of the completed shooters acted alone. The findings in this study substantially support results reported by Jeehae (2013), who found that 81% of the perpetrators acted alone. In contrast about a third of the averted shooters attempted to recruit help.

Similar to Daniels et al. (2007), Verlinden (2000), and McGee and DeBernardo (1999), the current results for completed shootings found that perpetrators typically had specific people that they wanted to kill. While perpetrators of averted shootings sometimes had developed a “hit list” as well, over half wanted to kill everyone they could. This more generalized approach mirrors some of McGee and DeBernardo’s (1999) data.

The above studies suggest an ninth hypothesis, postulating that perpetrators of a school rampage tend to prefer a gun as a weapon, tend to act alone and tend to target specific people. With mixed results, the current research for this dissertation tends to support this hypothesis.

The Reason. In reviewing news accounts of both completed and averted school rampages, this research found that the most prevalent motive for the attacks was the desire for revenge for perceived mistreatment, which was most commonly bullying. This finding strongly supported those of Daniels et al. (2007). Additionally, Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) found that 75% of school shooters felt persecuted, bullied, or threatened by others. Furthermore, Jeehae (2013) found that in 87% of the cases she studied, perceived bullying was the cause.

Beyond being driven by revenge for being mistreated, some perpetrators, particularly some of those who were successful in their attack, focused on settling a dispute with the individuals they shot. This current finding supports Daniels et al. (2007). In addition, a severe personal loss was also found to be a trigger in Schlesinger (2004), Verlinden (2000) and Meloy (2001).

The underlying reasons for a violent attack cited in past research define the last hypothesis: plotters and perpetrators of violent school attacks are driven by revenge for perceived mistreatment or the need to settle a dispute. The findings from the research for this dissertation support this hypothesis. Further, the current findings underscore the importance of several recommendations for school administrators and staff found in Daniels' Safe School Communities Model: tolerate no disrespectful behavior especially bullying, develop positive adult role models who freely interact with students, and develop and promote a support system in which all students can feel comfortable airing grievances and seeking advice.

In summary, the ten hypotheses underlying the research for this dissertation are:

1. Shootings are less likely to occur in schools lacking an entrenched Code of Silence as evidenced by students' willingness to alert authorities of a planned attack.
2. Perpetrators of a violent school rampage tend to be Caucasian high school males.
3. Perpetrators likely have a troubled family life.
4. Perpetrators tend to suffer from depression or other mental/emotional problems.
5. Perpetrators tend to have been bullied or perceived that they were bullied.
6. If perpetrators tell others of their intentions, their plans often can be averted.
7. Violent school rampages tend to be committed by perpetrators who are obsessed with violence and/or have a history of violence and/or have a fascination with weapons.
8. Perpetrators tend to prefer a gun as a weapon, act alone and target specific people.
9. Perpetrators of violent school attacks tend to be driven by revenge for perceived mistreatment or the need to settle a dispute.
10. Plotters and perpetrators of violent school attacks are driven by revenge for perceived mistreatment or the need to settle a dispute

The results of the research for this dissertation support the ten hypotheses listed above.

Strengths and Limitations

This study focused on comparing averted school shootings with completed school shootings using a content analysis of news reports between January of 2007 and December of 2013. Due to the nature of the study, confounding variables were not as prominent because of the exclusion of using live participants. Another strength was the utilization of content analysis, which, as explained above, is prone to less biases than some research methods. Although an in-depth search of news articles was conducted, events that were not reported or were not identified

with the aforementioned search strings were not covered in the analysis. While additional shootings and plots took place during the time frame studied, the detailed information pertinent to this study's objectives was too sparse to make the event useful. These incidents therefore were excluded. Further events were excluded if they clearly were gang-related, the result of a robbery attempt, the result of a random drive-by shooting, a suicide, or an accident. In addition, the determination was made early on that the individuals involved should either be current or former members of that school's student population. And finally, the incident must have been an intentional rather than an accidental/unintentional shooting, such as, for example, a third grader bringing a gun to school to show it off, only to drop it and have it discharge. Therefore, the data analyzed may not completely represent the target population of averted and completed school shootings.

Another limitation was that the data collected was from news reports. News accounts are written by individuals who may have innate biases or limitations. For example, different news reports may report different things depending on their target audience, such as reporting that an individual was bullied when they did not meet the criteria for having been bullied. As a result of this, they do not adhere to strict methodologies that are utilized for empirical research, and some of the reports may include some sensationalized information in order to capture their audiences.

Future Research

Due to the limitations listed above, future research should involve collecting different sources of information to validate the news stories. For example, the news reports that are gathered should be compared with actual police reports as well as interviews with those who were involved in the incidents. However, as most of these individuals are juveniles, access to them and the reports is highly regulated and the future research that would strive to conduct this

study would be challenged with gaining access to this protected population. First-person interviews would help to increase the accuracy of the information, as it is being reported directly by the individual.

It would also be beneficial to interview the perpetrators in order to gain a better understanding of what happened and what drove them to the point of plotting or completing a school rampage. This would enhance the discussion and the presentation of the individual characteristics of the individual and would allow for greater insight into the mindset of these individuals.

Additionally, greater comparisons of the different systems involved (i.e., family, friends, neighborhood, city) would offer additional information about these incidents on a systemic level. This additional information would help to bring focus not only on the school and the individual, but also on the community as a whole, illustrating the important role that these systems may play in these incidents.

Implications

The findings of the research conducted for this dissertation have broad-based implications on several levels. At the academic, foundational level, the data expands the literature on ways to prevent school violence by investigating the circumstances, conditions and hallmarks of such attacks and those that have been averted. These data and results can serve to bring into better light the oft-ignored averted school shootings and to draw attention to the interventions that were utilized and environment that was fostered that resulted in an averted school shooting. Additionally, building a database on averted school shootings will support proactive techniques instead of reactive techniques to address a shooting that was unable to be averted.

At the policy level, the data underscore the importance and fact-based nature of Daniels and Bradley's (2011) Safe School Communities Model. By following their important recommendations, school administrators and other involved policy makers can develop and implement effective policy and procedures that will enhance the safety of schools. Some of these procedures could include increased education on warning signs and treatment of mental illness for students and staff; increased training for parents on warning signs and treatment of mental illness; and increasing communication between the school, student, and parents, to offer ways to assist the student without appearing punitive.

Increasing staff and student education on warning signs and treatment of mental illness would be beneficial for numerous reasons. First, increased knowledge of mental health issues seeks to normalize instead of stigmatize mental illness with students. Educating students on the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and other mental illness will continue to draw attention to the impact these disorders have on functioning. Furthermore, exposing students to mental health issues consistently from an early age, will allow them to better understand the impact that some of the bullying behaviors can have on their peers, and could encourage students to be more sensitive to the needs and feelings of other students.

The school counselors and school psychologists can play an important role by helping to train faculty and staff to understand and recognize the risk factors for violence discussed in this dissertation. School personnel should be encouraged to bring any at-risk student to the attention of the counselor, psychologist, or school resource officer. At the same time, the psychologist or school counselor should train school personnel on crisis response methods for use in the classroom and within the overall school environment. By being aware and proactive, the

psychologist and school personnel can work together as a team to counter the negative influences in students' lives and promote a safe school community.

Additionally, with the increase in technology and the utilization of social media, counselors and school staff are set up to better intervene in potential situations. Staff should receive trainings on social media and use of technology so that they can be more aware of the impact that technology can play on averting school shootings. Social media can be an avenue to proactively monitor students, as well as create an environment of anonymous social communication that can allow students to text, direct message, or email a potential threat without the risk of being identified. This cloak of anonymity can be an additional avenue for students to report concerning information about students that may help avert a school rampage.

At the practice level, the data have implications for school counselors and school psychologists. Since these professionals can be the first line of defense in averting a violent school rampage, their actions, on two fronts, are indispensable. First, by understanding the risk factors identified in this study, the counselors can better recognize not only the student who may be vulnerable to committing such an act, but also the student whose behavior may provoke such an attack. Identifying risk for potential school shootings is difficult, and although there are some common trends and factors, being able to fully predict an individual's risk is not yet attainable. Therefore, the focus should be on recognizing when there is a credible threat. As with suicidal and homicidal statements, it is always a judgment call as to the credibility of the threat. For example, if a student who has had disciplinary problems in the past and makes a threat with a plan, this threat should be taken more seriously. What aids in the threat assessment is the relationship with the student, the relationship with the family, and an understanding of the student's role in the school.

After realizing that someone may be at risk – as perpetrator or as instigator – the counselor can engage the student to help him or her build a more effective support system, to learn positive communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills as well as conflict resolution techniques, how better to cooperate with other students and staff, enhance his or her own self-control and build friendships.

As mentioned in chapter two, the effects of school shootings are far reaching and the trauma that effects the individuals involved can be drastic. Those individuals who are directly impacted could develop specific mental illnesses as a result of the trauma (PTSD, depression, anxiety). Additionally, as has been the case with many of the school shootings, the physical ramifications of being involved in the incident (paralysis, traumatic brain injury) can greatly impact those who are directly involved. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of school shootings can help to reduce the number of shootings. Just recently, an ABC news *20/20* program (Feb 12, 2016) conducted an interview with one of the parents' of the Columbine shooters. In this interview, although the focus was on the impact of the completed school shooting, there was a small segment on potential ways to prevent these shootings. This is encouraging because much of the news programs tend to focus on the aftermath of school shootings and not proactive results to prevent them. As the country becomes more aware of not only the detrimental impact of school shootings, but the aspects and proactive interventions that create a safe school environment, the frequency and intensity of school rampages will, hopefully, decrease.

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Appendix A

Completed School Shootings

Case 1

In Centennial, Colorado, an 18 year Caucasian 12th grade male student entered the suburban, public Arapahoe High School wearing a bandoleer of ammunition and carrying a book pack filled with three Molotov cocktails. He was armed with a shotgun and a large hunting knife. As he walked down the hallway, he randomly shot at two students sitting on a bench, fired again and hit one in the head, fatally injuring her. He went to the library looking for the debate coach who had removed him from the debate team several weeks before. He had threatened to kill the coach at that time. As the coach fled under fire, he shot at the librarian but missed. He then threw a lighted Molotov cocktail, setting books and bookcases on fire. The perpetrator shot himself in the head and died at the scene.

The shooter had severe anger management issues and was on medication. His anger was exacerbated by his parents' divorce. He was on medication, had disciplinary troubles, read the *Anarchist Cookbook* and *Communist Manifesto*. He wrote about his plans in a journal. He was careful not to reveal his plans for an attack in the months following his threats. He was not bullied, but did verbally bully other students. He acted alone.

Case 2

In Winston Salem, North Carolina, an 18 year old African American male 12th grade student shot a fellow student at Carver High School, an urban, public school. The victim had been bullying the perpetrator for months. The shooter had long-standing disciplinary and legal troubles, having been convicted of bringing a knife to his previous school. There were no reports of violent media involvement or writings. The night before the attack, he told his father who was

bullying him. There were no reports of his telling anyone about his plan to shoot the victim. There were no reported signs of depression or other psychological problems.

Case 3

In Knoxville, Tennessee, a 15 year old African American 10th grade male student at Central High School, an urban, public school, entered the school cafeteria, approached the victim, and fatally shot him in the chest. The perpetrator and victim had been in previous altercations. The shooter came from a dysfunctional family in which both parents were drug addicts. He had been in foster care. There were no reported signs of depression or other psychological problems, no reports that he told anyone about his plan. There were no reports of violent media involvement or writings. There was no information on bullying.

Case 4

In Chardon, Ohio, a 17 year old suspended/expelled Caucasian 11th grade male stood up in the Chardon High School cafeteria before classes began and began firing a gun. He shot five students, killing three. The school is a rural, public school. He had not been bullied and was not, himself, a bully. The perpetrator came from a dysfunctional family in which domestic abuse and violent assaults occurred. He had disciplinary troubles at school. He had been arrested twice for violent confrontations. There were no reported signs of depression or other psychological problems. He told no one in advance about his plans. The perpetrator engaged in violent actions and writings.

Case 5

In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a 15 year old homosexual female African American 10th grade student brought a pistol to Dillard High School, an urban, public school. When the victim refused to talk to her, the perpetrator shot and killed her. There were no reports that the shooter

had been bullied. It was reported that she, herself, was not a bully. She had mental/emotional problems; she was a cutter. She had been physically and sexually abused by family members and by her mother who had bipolar disorder. She was shunned by her family for her homosexuality. Her father was in prison for attempted murder. There were no reports that she had disciplinary or legal troubles. There were no reports that the perpetrator was involved with violent media. There were no reports that she told anyone beforehand about her plans.

Case 6

In Madison, Alabama, a 14 year old male 9th grade Arab-American student fatally shot a fellow student in the back of the head at Discovery Middle School, a suburban, public school. The perpetrator had been bullied. There were no reports that he was a bully. He had been diagnosed with a major depressive disorder, ADHD, and was suicidal. He was in therapy and on medications. He had legal problems. There were no reports that he was involved with violent media or writings. There were no reports that he told anyone beforehand about his plans.

Case 7

In Oxnard, California, a 14 year old male Caucasian 8th grader fatally shot a fellow student twice in the back of the head during class at E. O. Green Junior High School, an urban, public school. The perpetrator had been bullied and harassed, and was, himself, a bully. He had been physically abused. He experienced a violent family life with domestic abuse and drug-addicted parents. There were no reports that he was involved with violent media or writings, no reports of disciplinary or legal trouble, and no reports of signs of depression or other psychological problems- other than this former honor student had quit trying. Beforehand, he had told the victim's friend to, "Say goodbye" as an apparent threat.

Case 8

In Tacoma, Washington, an 18 year old Asian-American male 12th grade student fatally shot a fellow student in the face, then stood over the body and fired twice more. The incident occurred at Foss HS, an urban, public school. The perpetrator believed that the victim had treated him disrespectfully. The perpetrator had been bullied but reportedly he was not a bully. He had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was suicidal. He had disciplinary troubles and possibly was involved with violent media. He told no one his plans before the attack.

Case 9

In LaRose, Louisiana, a 15 year old male (no ethnicity reported) 8th grade student planned to kill four fellow students at LaRose Cut Off Middle School, a rural, public school. The perpetrator entered a classroom, brandished a gun and shot over the teachers' head but did not kill anyone. He went to another classroom, brandished the gun again but left without firing. He committed suicide. The perpetrator reportedly had no family problems or any disciplinary or legal trouble. There were no reports of bullying. He told no one beforehand about his plans. He exhibited no signs of mental or emotional illness but his journal revealed a troubled teenager. He was involved with violent music and wrote violent entries in his journal.

Case 10

In Martinsville, Indiana, a 15 year old Caucasian 9th grade suspended/expelled male student targeted a fellow student and shot him twice in the abdomen for allegedly making negative comments about him to others. The event happened at Martinsville West Middle School, a suburban, public school. The perpetrator came from a broken home and lived with an alcoholic mother. He had extensive disciplinary problems at school. He posted violent content on Facebook. Prior to the shooting, he posted cryptic messages on Facebook about violence,

showed a girlfriend the gun he was to later use in his attack, and texted her that he wanted to shoot the victim. Those with foreknowledge did not take the comments seriously and did not report them to authorities. There was no information that he had been bullied or was a bully. There was no information about signs of depression or other psychological problems.

Case 11

In Omaha, Nebraska, a 17 year old Caucasian male 12th grade student was suspended from Millard South High School, an urban, public school, for driving his car onto the football field on New Year's Day. He was escorted out of school by security, but returned at noon and fatally shot an assistant principal and wounded the principal. The shooter then shot and killed himself. He showed signs of depression since moving to a new school. There was no information given about bullying or being bullied. There was no information about any involvement with violent media. There was no information about his sharing his plans with anyone else before the attack. He had disciplinary trouble but only beginning that morning.

Case 12

In Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, a 14 year old male Caucasian 9th grade student entered Socastee High School, a suburban public school, with two pipe bombs and a gun. He shot at the School Resource Officer but missed and was apprehended. He had a list of people he planned to kill and those he wanted to avoid killing. The perpetrator had a long history of being bullied, since kindergarten, but was not a bully himself. He also had been bullied by his father. He had documented signs of depression and intense anger problems. The perpetrator had made a list of the people he wanted to kill and those he wanted to avoid killing. He had no previous disciplinary or legal trouble. He did engage in violent writing. There were no reports that he told anyone of his plans beforehand.

Case 13

In Sparks, Nevada, a 12 year old 7th grade student shot two students and killed one teacher at Sparks Middle School, an urban, public school, before committing suicide. The shooter was reported to have been brutally bullied, harassed, and humiliated. He, himself, was not a bully. He had emotional problems and anger problems. He suffered from depression and was in therapy and on medication for this problem. He had written two suicide notes before the attack. He was involved with violent media, violent media games, and violent writings. He had some disciplinary problems but no legal problems. There was no indication that he told anyone beforehand about his plans.

Case 14

In Cleveland, Ohio, a 14 year old Caucasian male 9th grade student at Successtech Academy armed with two handguns and three knives, shot two students – the first one after he had just punched the perpetrator in the face for bumping into him; the second student was just in the line of fire. Two teachers were also shot. The shooter then killed himself. The school is an urban, public school. The perpetrator had been bullied reportedly for his Gothic-styled appearance and eccentric behavior. He, himself, was not a bully. He had threatened violence the week before. He had mental health problems, was suicidal, was on medications for depression and ADHD, but was non-compliant. There was no report of involvement with violent media. There was no report that he told anyone about his plans beforehand. He had been in legal trouble. The shooter came from a dysfunctional, neglectful, abusive, violent family.

Case 15

In Taft, California, a 16 year old male 11th grade student walked into a science class with a shotgun and fired on another boy. The incident happened at Taft Union High School, a rural,

public school. The perpetrator reportedly was a loner who had been bullied and sexually assaulted by other students. He was not a bully himself. He had experienced no disciplinary or legal troubles. No information was reported about depression or other psychological problems. He did not tell anyone beforehand about his plans. The shooter had engaged in violent writing. He, for example, posted an on-line story about a student who killed his tormentors.

Case 16

In Portsmouth, Virginia, a 15 year old male 9th grade student brandished and fired a gun in a classroom in Woodrow Wilson High School, an urban, public school. He then fired twice more in the crowded cafeteria before putting the gun down and running away. There were no injuries. The perpetrator had both disciplinary and legal troubles. No information was given on whether or not he was bullied, was a bully, was involved with violent media, or whether or not he told anyone of his plans beforehand.

Appendix B

Averted School Shootings

Case 1

In Ardmore, Alabama, a 16 year old 11th grade Caucasian male drop-out from Ardmore High School, a rural, public school, plotted to kill at least three teachers- at least one by being burned alive- and eight students plus police officers. The plot was uncovered when the perpetrator tried to recruit a friend to obtain a gun for him; the friend told a parent who alerted police. The youth had five swords that he planned to use in the attack. He was bullied but was not a bully. He was involved with violent media; he kept a journal called, “Book of Hate” in which he wrote of impaling people and slashing their throats. While there were no reported signs of depression, police found child pornography on his computer. While there were no reports of family problems, the individual lived with his grandmother. There were no reports of disciplinary or legal troubles. He was charged with making a terrorist threat and possession of child pornography.

Case 2

In Baltimore, Maryland, a 16 year old 10th grade Caucasian male student in an urban public school was arrested after talking on-line with someone about “going to shoot people” at the upcoming prom. He was involved with violent media. Police found a large number of documents about the Columbine incident including photographs of Columbine perpetrators and surveillance video of their attack. The perpetrator reportedly showed signs of depression or other psychological problems. The defense attorney said he suffered from mental illness including depression. No information was given if the plotter had obtained a gun, if he had been bullied or was a bully, if he had family problems or disciplinary/legal problems, or his race.

Case 3

In Bartlesville, Oklahoma, an 18 year old 12th grade Native American male student at Bartlesville High School, a suburban public school, was arrested for plotting a school attack. He planned to lure students to the school auditorium, chain the doors shut and shoot down from the balcony. He planned to place bombs by the doors and detonate them as police approached. He had obtained a rifle. The plot was averted when a friend, whom he had tried to recruit to help, told a parent who alerted the school. The plotter was bullied. No information was given about his being a bully. He experienced serious family problems; he had an alcoholic mother, who said she was a terrible mother, and an absentee father; he had been sexually molested by an older stepbrother. He was on medications for Bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. He was suicidal. He had no legal problems but did have disciplinary troubles for school absenteeism. He had written notes detailing his anger over his mistreatment by fellow students and his desire to kill them. He sent a text to his mother saying he wanted to kill the students. There was no report of involvement with other violent media. He was sentenced to 30 months in prison, a \$5,000 fine, and a year of follow-up supervision by Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

Case 4

In Bohemia, New York, a 17 year old Caucasian 11th grade male was on long-term suspension for plotting to shoot classmates at Connetquot High School, a suburban, public school. He had been bullied and teased for living in a trailer. Although suspended, he continued to be bullied by former classmates. The final episode came when, after unsympathetic comments were made in his name on a Facebook memorial page for two students killed in an auto accident, a group of students confronted him at his house. This incident increased the hatred for his former classmates that brewed after he was sentenced to juvenile detention for his first plot.

He and his 16 year old girlfriend then planned to buy two shotguns on his 18th birthday that they would use along with explosives to kill as many former classmates and responding police officers as possible. He drew a diagram noting congregating areas that he could attack to kill as many students as possible. They planned to commit suicide after the attack.

The plot was averted when the male's assigned social worker notified officials of a possible attack. No weapons had as yet been obtained. There were no reports of family problems, of his being a bully, of his showing signs of depression or other psychological problems. There were no reports of his being involved in violent media or of his telling anyone other than his accomplice about his plans. The plotter was sentenced to 3 to 9 years in prison.

Case 5

In Dardanelle, Arkansas, a 16 year old 10th grade Caucasian male student plotted to use a gun and explosives to attack Dardanelle High School, a rural, public school. Investigation began because he posted disturbing messages on his Facebook page including threats of gun violence and a comparison of himself to Columbine's Eric Harris. A police search found a notebook with anger-driven writings and racist comments. The notebook also contained a diagram of Dardanelle High School with exit doors, hallways, and security gates marked. Also included were a description of the steps taken by the Columbine shooters and a list of items needed to secure the doors (chains, locks) and needed to construct explosive devices (pipes, canon fuses and propane bottles). The plotter was not bullied nor was he a bully. He had legal trouble. He reportedly displayed no signs of depression or other psychological problems, although he told police he had anger issues. There were no reports of family problems. He was sentenced to 60 months to 120 months for making terrorist threats and criminal possession of explosives.

Case 6

In Tampa, Florida, a 16 year old 10th grade Caucasian male drop-out plotted an attack on Freedom High School, an urban, public school. He was bullied but there were no reports that he was a bully. He had signs of depression and was in therapy but refused to take medication prescribed for him. He had a troubled family life; divorced alcoholic parents who, by his account, were addicted to drugs and were neglectful of him when he was young to the point that he lived on fish sticks for a month. He further stated that his father had tried to kill him. He had a hand-drawn map of the school cafeteria with letters indicating where bombs were to be detonated. He planned to stand near the courtyard hoping to shoot at least 60 people. He planned to then go to the school office to shoot two administrators, but not a third. While he had yet to obtain weapons, he had visited bomb-making websites and collected pipes, fertilizer and shrapnel. The plot was averted when a friend, whom the perpetrator had tried to recruit to help, became alarmed and called police. He had been in trouble with police since he was 12 years old and been expelled from school for such behavior. He dropped out and was unemployed. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Case 7

In Monroe, New York, a 15 year old Caucasian male student planned to attack Monroe-Woodbury High School, a suburban public school, on the eleventh anniversary of the Columbine shooting. He planned to use a gun, explosives and a machete. He was actively seeking a military assault-style weapon with high capacity magazine but had not yet obtained one. He did have a machete, four bottles of gas, a torch, three propane tanks and fuses. Fellow students came forward with information that averted the plot. He was bullied but was not a bully. There was no report of his showing signs of depression or other psychological problems, of his having

family problems or being involved with violent media. He was on juvenile probation after being arrested for a non-violent offense. He was committed to a psychiatric facility.

Case 8

In Dade City, Florida, a 16 year old 9th grade male student at Moore-Mickens Education Center, a suburban, public school, ripped an evacuation map off a wall during class and indicated the school office, cafeteria, and specific classrooms as targets to other students. He told them he was going to bring a gun to school and shoot everyone. The students reported the incident. No weapons had been obtained yet. The plotter previously had been arrested for disrupting a school function. He was angry about being held back a grade. There were no reports of his being bullied or being a bully, no signs of depression or other psychological problems, no family problems or identified race. He blogged on-line that he hated the students and wanted to kill them. He was expelled from school.

Case 9

In Newington, Connecticut, a 16 year old 11th grade Caucasian male student planned to attack Newington High School, a suburban, public school. He had been bullied a long time and was struggling academically. He was not a bully. He was “obsessed” with Columbine and said he understood why they did it. He and a friend videotaped themselves shooting tactical rifles at a range and exploding pipe bombs. The friend sent video to a girl who was aware the two males had talked about a planned attack. She reported them. The police found two rifles, a shotgun, 40 pipe bombs, and a list of at least 20 people they intended to target. They wanted to kill more than were killed at Columbine. After the attack, the perpetrator planned to kill himself. There were no reports of family problems or disciplinary/legal troubles. He was sentenced to three years with another five years of probation.

Case 10

In Centennial, Colorado, a 13 year old male 7th grade student intended to plant a bomb under the athletes' table in the cafeteria of Newton Middle School, an urban, public school. He was bullied but was not a bully. In a search, police found the elements necessary to make a bomb. He told a classmate who reported the plan. There were no reports of signs of depression or other psychological problems but he did have a turbulent home life that left him angry and upset. There were no reports of disciplinary or legal troubles or involvement with violent media; race was not reported. He was charged with possession of explosive or incendiary parts.

Case 11

In Grand Junction, Colorado, an 18 year old 12th grade Caucasian male student planned to do, "a Columbine" on Palisade High School, an urban, public school. He was bullied by the athletes. He attempted to recruit a fellow student to help him obtain explosives and talked to people about what it would be like to shoot-up the school. The recruit reported the plan. There were no reports that he was a bully, no reports of signs of depression or other psychological problems, no disciplinary or legal troubles. He received a four-year deferred judgment with an additional two years on probation. He was expelled from school. Three years after his arrest, he was arrested again and charged with possession of explosives or incendiary device.

Case 12

In Mishawaka, Indiana, a 16 year old Caucasian male student discussed with fellow MySpace user, "Dylan and Eric fought back for us," his desire to commit a Columbine-like attack on Penn High School, an urban, public school. An alert School Resource Officer saw the post and identified the teenager. The individual had family problems and, refusing to live with his mother, lived with his grandfather until that person's death. The teenager then lived with his

uncle. There were reports of signs of depression or other psychological problems, especially after his grandfather's death and his own break-up with his girlfriend. No weapons had been obtained. Police found a disturbing number of violence-oriented photographs of guns, knives, people with weapons, Columbine, snakes, and Penn School in the individual's room. There were no reports of his being bullied or being a bully. There were no reports of disciplinary or legal troubles. He served less than a year in juvenile detention.

Case 13

In Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, a 14 year old 9th grade Caucasian male who was being home-schooled because of bullying, planned an attack on Plymouth Whitmarsh High School, a suburban public school. He was targeting those individuals who had relentlessly bullied him in elementary and middle school. He confided in a friend who then reported the plan for a Columbine-style attack. In a search of his home, police found a 9mm semiautomatic rifle, a pistol, and a carbine, 30 airsoft guns, a dozen knives and swords, and seven bombs, four of which were live. He was involved with violent media. He frequently voiced admiration for the Columbine shooters on MySpace, a notebook detailing violent acts, an Army handbook on counterinsurgency operations, videos and a documentary of Columbine. He was not a bully and had no prior school discipline or legal problems. Reports indicated that he showed signs of depression or other psychological problems. He was obsessed with weapons. There were no reports of family problems. He was sentenced to juvenile detention and expelled from the public school system.

Case 14

In Pottstown, Pennsylvania, a 15 year old 9th grade Caucasian male student planned to shoot everyone he did not like at Pottstown Senior High School, a suburban, public school. He

planned to then kill himself. When his father reported his three guns missing and police were called to investigate, the plot was exposed. The teenager had asked a friend to hold the guns for him; this friend told his mother, she insisted they dispose of the guns but did not report the plot. The plotter was bullied a great deal but was not a bully. There was no record of disciplinary or legal trouble. There was no information on signs of depression or other psychological problems or family problems. He was sentenced to six years in a psychiatric facility and expelled from school.

Cast 15

In Roy, Utah, a 16 year old Caucasian male 10th grade student conspired with an 18 year old to detonate a bomb during assembly at Roy High School to get, "...revenge on the world." The plotter felt "invalidated." The school is a suburban, public school. The two planned to escape in a stolen plane afterward. The plotter sent a warning text to a female classmate who alerted authorities. There were no reports of the plotter being a bully or bullying, no signs of depression or other psychological problems, no report of family problems or disciplinary or legal troubles, and reports of involvement with violent media. He was sentenced to six months in a juvenile detention center and expelled from school.

Case 16

In Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, a 13 year old 8th grade Caucasian male student at the suburban, private St. Andrew School planned to force the K through 8 grade school into lock-down and shoot anyone who tried to escape. He had two airsoft pistols - one looked like a real gun - in his backpack. He attempted to recruit a friend to help with the attack; the friend reported the plot. The plotter had disciplinary and legal problems associated with a break-in at his former school; he was charged with burglary and theft. He was charged with making a terrorist threat

for the current plot and expelled from school. There were no reports of his being bullied or being a bully, no reports of signs of depression or other psychological problems, of family problems, or of his being involved in violent media or writings.

Case 17

In Troy, Missouri, a 17 year old Caucasian male student planned to kill his parents and then go to the Troy Buchannan High School, a suburban, public school, where he intended to kill four male students because of their contact with his girlfriend and then open fire on his gym class because classmates had been mean to him. He was not a bully. He had obtained a pistol and an assault rifle. There were no reports of family problems or discipline or legal trouble. There were signs of depression or other psychological problems; he could be full of rage and heavily involved with synthetic drug use; he had self-inflicted injuries because he, “liked the pain.” He read *Mein Kampf*. He was charged with making terrorist threats. Charges were dropped.

Case 18

In Weirton, West Virginia, a 19 year old 12th grade Caucasian male student was arrested after students at Weirton High School, a suburban, public school, notified police that they had received anonymous texts about a pending attack. Police traced the author, searched his home, and recovered weapons and bomb-making materials, a map of the school, and racist writings expressing desire to kill African-American students. He was a bully but was not bullied. There were no reports of signs of depression or other psychological problems or family problems. There were no reports of disciplinary or legal troubles. He was charged with conspiracy to commit a terrorist attack, conspiracy to disturb a school and disorderly conduct. Charges were dropped. He was expelled.

Case 19

In Albany, Oregon, a 17 year old 11th grade Caucasian male planned to, "...shoot and throw bombs throughout the school. Kill myself before S.W.A.T. engages me." According to classmates at West Albany High School, an urban, public school, the plotter would approach fellow students and start talking about the different materials needed to make a bomb. He was not bullied. He was not a bully. There were no reports indicating family problems or involvement with violent media. The plotter was in therapy and on medication for OCD. He was arrested and faced numerous charges including attempted aggravated murder. He was expelled from school.